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Eran Tzidkiyahu

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**ECOLE DOCTORALE DE SCIENCES PO**  
**Programme doctoral Science Politique**  
**Centre de recherches internationales**

**Doctorat en science politique**

**From the Margins to the Center: Religious-Nationalism in the  
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

*A Comparative Approach*

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*Thesis supervised by Professor Alain Dieckhoff and  
Professor Yitzhak Reiter*

defended on December 13, 2021

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## Glossary

**API:** Arab Peace Initiative (2002)

**GE:** Gush Emunim (Block of the Faithful)

**GS:** Gaza Strip

**HE:** The Holy Esplanade

**IMII:** The Islamic Movement in Israel (inside the Green Line)

**IUG:** the Islamic University – Gaza

**JNC:** the Jewish National Council (Va'ad Le'umi)

**NRP:** the National Religious Party (MAFDAL)

**PIJ:** Palestinian Islamic Jihad

**PLC:** Palestinian Legislative Council

**PNM:** Palestinian National Movement

**PRN:** Palestinian Religious Nationalism

**RN/NR:** Religious Nationalism

**RZ:** Religious Zionism (and conjugations)

**SMC:** Supreme Muslim Council

**SRN:** Strong Religious Nationalism

**The Jewish *Yishuv*:** The Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate

**TM:** Temple Mount

**WB:** West Bank

**WIC-J:** the World Islamic Congress in Jerusalem



## Preface

I was born into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in a small Jewish neighborhood in East Jerusalem surrounded by Palestinian villages, and I was always drawn to them, as if they had some kind of magic on me. The soundtrack of my childhood was mosques and synagogues. Religious-nationalism was all around me, even though I grew up secular. I worked with Palestinians as a child and learned their language. However, I was only fully exposed to the extent of the Israeli Palestinian coexistence and clash for the first time when I was recruited to the Israeli army at the age of eighteen and spent the next three years of my life serving an obligatory service in the territories as a combat soldier. Released during the Second Intifada, I continued working in security. I wanted to know more about the reality I was part of but knew I cannot properly understand it until I lay down my weapons and try to engage the different aspects of the reality that surrounded me. Almost accidentally I ended up at university, and since I knew Arabic and had an interest in the conflict, I studied the History of the Middle East. It was in academia that I was first exposed to critical thinking. I was shocked to realize that the truths I grew up on were all partial stories, a segment of a much wider and more complex reality. This understanding intrigued me, and I set out to better understand the Israeli and Palestinian sphere, a journey that is still ongoing. I understand today that I should aspire, as much as I can, to place both stories under equal examination and scrutiny, to try, as impossible as it may be, to examine reality not as an Israeli Jew, but as an objective observer – an ideal that as much as it is unreachable, one should never stop aspiring to achieve.

Despite the depth I owe to the University, the best school I had was in the streets of Jerusalem and in its holy sites, in the cities, towns and villages of the West Bank and mainly, with the people who make them. Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. For them religious-nationalism is a simple fact of life.





## Acknowledgments

I started working on this dissertation two years after I immigrated to France, leaving Jerusalem behind. Between the start and the finishing line of this project, I learned French, studied in French as a visiting student in Sciences-Po, immigrated twice, fathered three children, and reinvented myself professionally. We landed back in Jerusalem in the middle of Israel's 2014 war on Gaza and the completion of this project was further delayed by a raging pandemic and yet another Israeli war on Gaza and an unprecedented wave of internal ethnic, intercommunal violence fueled by national-religious sentiments. As expected, writing this dissertation took much longer than expected. I could never have done it without the support and patience of my advisors Alain Dieckhoff and Yitzhak Reiter and the flexibility of Sciences-Po's Ecole doctorale. I wish to thank them warmly.

The people who helped me throughout my work are too numerous to mention. I nevertheless want to thank the Israel National Library, the Polonsky Library of the Van Leer Institute, as well as the Central Zionist Archive. I want to thank all the friends and colleagues who helped me in more ways than I can remember: Assaf David, Caroline Gross-Baruch, Nir Hasson, Tamer Said, Effie Shoham, Matti Steinberg, Oded Steinberg, Marik Stern, Aviv Tatarsky, Ofer Zalzburg. Special thanks are due to Yael Assor and Ronit Sela for their help in organizing my thoughts. I also warmly thank Marie and Francois-Xavier Perin for their hospitality in Paris.

If there is one person in this world who is happier than me to see this project coming to an end, it is my beloved wife, Chloe Perin. It is her presence and that of our children Isaac, Nathan, and Leo, which gave me the strength and the motivation to follow through.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Nadia Klein, who believed in my intellectual capacities and cultivated them when the education system took another view of the matter.



## Introduction

This dissertation examines in a comparative approach the shift made by Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim national-religious movements since the 1990s, from the political and social margins to center-stage. Bound together in an ongoing conflict, the two movements are negatives of one another. Influenced by the same historical events, shaken by similar circumstances, Israeli and Palestinian national-religious movements both moved on to assert political and social hegemony in their respective societies. It was the Israeli-Palestinian peace process that started in the early 1990s, and the attempts to reach reconciliation through a territorial and ideological compromise, that generated a strong national-religious objection. Both movements acted against the emerging territorial compromise, perceived by them as an existential threat. Both Religious-Zionism (RZ) and Hamas mobilized their institutional capacities to enlarge their political power and claim social hegemony. Both movements, each in accordance to its particular circumstances, also used different manifestations of violence and terror to achieve their political goals.

Despite the obvious and striking differences between them (which will be described in this dissertation), during the 1990s both religious-Zionism and Hamas (by far the largest Palestinian Islamic national-religious movement), carved a similar path from the margins to center stage. This work wishes to examine this shift, from its historic and ideological roots, through its institutional and political manifestations and an ideological and thematic analysis of its contemporary discourse.

### Current events

On June 13, 2021, Naftali Bennett became the first religious-Zionist Prime Minister of Israel. At about the same time, according to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas became the most popular political movement in the Palestinian Territories.<sup>1</sup> Israeli and

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<sup>1</sup> According to the PSR in June 2021, following the postponement of the Palestinian elections and the violent events that erupted during Ramadan and throughout April-May 2021, a majority of Palestinians say that Hamas, not Fatah under the leadership of PA president Mahmoud Abbas, deserves to represent and lead the Palestinian people. See Press Release: Public Opinion Poll No (80) from June 15, 2021: <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/843>.

Palestinian religious-nationalisms, so it seems, are now closer than ever before to political hegemony.

Shortly beforehand, in the spring of 2021, as this dissertation reached its final stages, a wave of national-religious and ethnic Israeli-Palestinian violence erupted.<sup>2</sup> National-religious organizations, institutions, ideologies and symbols stood at the epicenter of the events. The confrontations started at the beginning of Ramadan in Damascus Gate (Jerusalem's main Palestinian and Islamic entrance to the Old City) and the al-Aqsa Mosque, and rapidly spread to the entire country. An unprecedented wave of intercommunal violence erupted between Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens throughout the country. The two main actors of this violent eruption, besides the state of Israel and its security apparatus, were Hamas and religious-Zionism. On Jerusalem Day, the Israeli annual celebration of the unification of Jerusalem celebrated on May 10, 2021, Hamas' military wing launched rockets from Gaza towards Jerusalem, dispersing religious-Zionism's flag march – the key event of the Israeli celebrations.<sup>3</sup> This marked the opening of a twelve-day military operation which included Israeli airstrikes on Gaza and Hamas missiles fired at Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The violent clashes of Spring 2021 and their political outcome seem to ratify the thesis presented in this dissertation. With such claims one needs to be careful from falling into fallacy or circular reasoning. Nevertheless, we are not begging the question here, but rather analyzing the live tissue of the contemporary Israeli and

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<sup>2</sup> Vice News reportage from May 19, 2021, "Inside the Battle for Jerusalem" provides glimpse into the beginning of the events, highlighting their national-religious context: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiSRCPiklhl>.

<sup>3</sup> Ruptly news agency published a YouTube video of from the parade at the moment the missile alert system was activated in Jerusalem. In the short video one can see the religious-Zionism multitude waving Israeli flags alongside the walls of Jerusalem's old city, confused, dispersed and fleeing for shelter (May 10, 2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ib1Eihu-0I8>.

<sup>4</sup> The operation was named "Guardian of the Walls" (*Shomer HaHomot* שומר החומות) in Hebrew and "the Sword of Jerusalem Battle" (*sayf al-Quds* معركة سيف القدس) in Arabic. Both names refer, of course, to Jerusalem. About 11 were killed in Israel and close to 300 were killed on the Palestinian side during the events. For a Palestinian national-religious assessment of the prospects of the operation (affiliated with Hamas's point of view) see report by Walid 'Abd al-Hay published by al-Zaytouna Center in Beirut on May 2021 under the title "Situation Assessment: The Prospects of the "Sword of Jerusalem" Battle". Reading articles on the operation in the RZ newspaper Makor Rishon reveals that both Israeli and Palestinian NR approaches to the events agree that Hamas made a strategic achievement, albeit its inherent military and tactical weakness to Israel. This narrative, so it seems, serves both Hamas and RZ.

Palestinian reality. Thus, no wonder that many components of the latest events echo the different chapters of this work, written since 2014.

First, the events erupted in a holy place during a sacred time, directly connected to Jerusalem and the consolidation around the al-Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount (Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade). This phenomenon is studied in the first part of the dissertation. Both Palestinian and Zionist national movements are based on the interpretation of a religious ethos: the second Chapter of this work anchors the current events in a historical context and an ideological framework – sacred time and space as well as clashing national symbolisms translate tension to violence and carry political ramifications. Second, the political and institutional framework of both Israeli and Palestinian religious-nationalism plays a role as it strives towards hegemony, as exemplified in the second part of this dissertation (chapters 3 on Hamas and 4 on Religious-Zionism). Hamas, politically damaged by the annulment of the Palestinian elections in May 2021 by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, launches rockets into Israel on “Jerusalem Day”. By doing so Hamas becomes the “protector of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque”, labeling itself as the most relevant Palestinian political movement. Simultaneously, religious-Zionist organizations and institutions, become the spearhead of the intercommunal violence in the West Bank, in Jerusalem and inside Israel in binational cities.

Religious-Zionist “Torah-based communities” called Gar'in Torani (גרעין תורני, literally “Torah nucleus” or “seed of Torah”) settled amidst Arab population inside Israel (i.e., not in the occupied territories), stood at the center of the Jewish-Arab intercommunal violence during the events. These “Torah nucleuses”, affiliated with the conservative stream of RZ, import the Kookist logic of the settlement into the heart of the Israeli sphere,<sup>5</sup> striving to Judaize the Arab-Palestinian areas in Israel. They are dealt with in chapter four of this dissertation.

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<sup>5</sup> Kookism is the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook (RAYH, 1865-1935) developed and transformed by his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook (RZYH, 1891-1982) into a political a geopolitical program. See below subchapter on Kookism.

In the reality that unfolds in Israel and Palestine, religious-nationalism, i.e. religious-Zionism and Hamas respectively, dictate a confrontational agenda, which intensifies the conflict, generates more violence and broadens the Jewish-Arab split. Such a reality stems from national-religious ideology and at the same time, as examined in chapter 5 of this study, serves and ratifies it.

Before moving on a caveat is needed. Indeed, Naftali Bennett became Israel's first religious-Zionist Prime Minister, but this achievement came with the price of a severe political split within RZ. Bennet's party Yamina (Hebrew for Rightwards) partnered with the center-left parties to replace Netanyahu's long-lasting rule, sending the religious-Zionist Party headed by Bezael Smotrich, in effect a conglomerate of several conservative RZ parties, to the opposition. This political split between Bennet and Smotrich goes deeper, beyond politics. It reflects two distinguished approaches within RZ in regard to the State, modernism and the desirable relations between nationalism and religion. This inner division certainly hurt the RZ's electoral potential, nevertheless it is an outcome of the RZ overwhelming sectorial success.

#### Nationalism and religiosity

For a long time, religiosity was considered as secondary to nationalism in setting the tone of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict. This dissertation argues otherwise. Religion and nationalism are not two separate mediums in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere in general, and the ongoing conflict generates an especially strong sense of religious-nationalism.

Understanding the centrality of the religious element in contemporary conflicts worldwide is crucial, yet it usually gets inadequate attention from scholars and decision makers, who tend to focus on historical, geographical and political aspects of the conflict (FOX, 1999). As a response to this "secular bias", which derives from the Western oriented understanding of modernity, a tendency of de-secularization has appeared in the research since the 1990s. Today, scholars who wish to keep up with contemporary world affairs cannot continue to ignore religious

feelings and faiths. Religious-nationalists and fundamentalists around the world mobilize religion for political ends and vice-versa: such a phenomenon takes place in mainstream politics in the United States and Europe, Latin America, India and throughout South East Asia India and in other places around the world. In the Middle East, political Islam (and some cases of Arab nationalisms) constitute the purest and most powerful manifestation of the prominent role of religion in politics. Zionism (and religious-Zionism within it) in contemporary Israel is another example.

Throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religion was marginalized by scholars who were generally taken by the prevailing theory of secularization. Today, in a fluid and a multipolar world-order, globalized markets, a technological revolution and the apparent transnational and secular reality of progress; both nationalism and religion are ideally regarded as something of the past. However in reality, nationalism is still one of the most potent forces in the world today (DIECKHOFF et al., 2005a; BIRNBAUM, 1997), and the same is true of religion. American sociologist Peter Berger, once a leading proponent of the secularization hypothesis, writing in 1999, asserts that “the world today, with some exceptions [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.”(BERGER, 1999). Prominent historian of religions Mircea Eliade reminds us that

*the completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit [...] desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and [...] he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies*(ELIADE, 1961, p13)

According to Eliade, “the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane”(Ibid., p. 10). In such a dichotomy, as with the distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’, one is defined in relation to the other. This takes us back to the emergence of the secular within the particular context of the European enlightenment project.

Another aspect of the religious experience is that the essence of authentic religious experience is beyond the human ability to grasp rationally (PERSICO, 2007).



The work of Rudolf Otto was central milestone in facilitating this realization (OTTO, 1923). Otto undertook an analysis of the modalities of the religious experience and started a new path in the phenomenology of religion, by allocating religion an independent position in human culture, separate from other forms of human existence such as the rational, the ethical or the aesthetical. Thus, for Otto, the religious feeling – Holiness – is a mental state “perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other” (*ibid.*, p. 7; ELIADE, 1961, p. 8). Yet the religious phenomenon goes beyond the manifestations of the numinous (a word used by Otto to define the feeling of terror before the sacred, from Latin numen, god (*ibid.*, p. 9; OTTO, 1923, p. 5–7)

British sociologist Anthony Smith distinguishes between a substantive and a functional approach to religion. In the former Smith relates to Weber’s treatment of religion, defining it as: “a quest for individual and collective salvation in a supraempirical cosmos that guides and controls our everyday world” (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 25). In the functional analysis Smith defines religion as a moral or social force, relating to Durkheim’s famous definition of religion: “A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things [...] which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” (DURKHEIM, 1964a, p. 47). Smith’s substantial/functional distinction is adequate for our purpose – studying the relations between religion and nationalism – by examining the adaptation of these approaches to nationalism as a culture and ideology. Substantively speaking nationalism is mundane and secular, terrestrial and anthropocentric. Yet in this new political ideology “a worship of the secular nation replaces that of the deity, while the nationalist movement takes the place of the church and posterity becomes the new version of immortality in place of the after-life.” (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 25)

Max Weber described modern secularism as the “disenchantment of the world”. Thus, in order to understand the reality of contemporary religious man and woman, we must “re-enchant” the world. Weber's understanding of the disenchantment embodies an element of liberalism and of the enlightenment philosophy, construing history as a unilinear process of progress (WEBER, 1958); secularism is thus a direct product of Western modernity and it culminates in a

pluralistic public space and a democratic political arrangement that guarantees various individual freedoms. In line with these ideas, many sociologists saw secularization as an almost inevitable result of modernization (BEN-PORAT, 2013). Scholars who rethink secularism altogether, note that

*until quite recently, it was commonly assumed that public life was basically secular [...] scholars could write with authority about politics, economics, and social behavior as though religion did not exist at all* (CALHOUN et al., 2011, p. 113-116).

Seemingly, religiosity and nationalism can be regarded as opposites. Up until recently, it was common to treat nationalism and religion as two separate phenomena in the human experience. At the turn of the millennium more scholars started to note that these two manifestations of symbolic and institutional order, these two system of beliefs, are in fact bound together in many ways (FISCHER et al. (eds.), 2019). When religion *per se* and nationalism *per se*, intertwine, we face a distinguished phenomenon described by a hyphenated term – religious-nationalism (RN).

In many cases, RN is but an instrumental identity marker. In this dissertation, we are concerned with the religious manifestations of Zionism and of the Palestinian National Movement (PNM). The mainstream of both of these national movements constitutes a national interpretation of a religious ethos in modern national dressing, the Islamic sanctity of Palestine and the return to Zion.<sup>6</sup> This religiosity lying at the base of their respective national ethoses, generates a special kind of what I call **strong religious-nationalism**.<sup>7</sup>

These two ideologies, religious-Zionism and Palestinian RN, consolidated and institutionalized into social, political and at times revolutionary movements distinguished from the mainstream of Zionism and the PNM. From the 1990s,

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<sup>6</sup> Alain Dieckhoff argues that Zionism is a modern national manifestation of the Jewish religion (DIECKHOFF, 2003). In this sense nationalism can at times be seen as another expression of religiosity.

<sup>7</sup> The term “strong religious-nationalism” draws inspiration from a book on fundamentalism called “Strong Religion” (ALMOND et al., 2003), which is part of the Fundamentalism Project. It is a seven volumes comprehensive research project on Fundamentalism around the world, edited by MARTIN E. MARTY AND R. SCOTT APPLEBY, EDITORS. Published by the University of Chicago Press.

following the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, these movements both in Israel and in Palestine shifted from the margins to the center-stage.

The religious-national sentiment in our case study – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – is rooted in and shaped by history and theology; it is only wise to give these elements the appropriate attention in order to lay solid foundations for future research.

#### The Comparative Approach

It is astonishing to realize how differently Jews and Arabs understand the same events. Therefore, the best approach to study the Israel-Palestinian conflict is to try and study both sides with similar tools, and according to the same criteria (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. xiv). I will always remain, inevitably, an Israeli Jew, but as a researcher I need to strive not only to academic objectivity, but also to be able to place both sides under the same scalpel. Thus, in order to understand the shift towards the center of both Israeli and Palestinian religious-nationalisms, it is necessary to place both movements under comparative scrutiny. Moreover, it is required to examine whether these Jewish-Zionist and Muslim-Palestinian movements conduct some sort of an indirect dialogue, and if so, how. Israeli historian Hillel Cohen explain this approach in his historical analysis of the nationwide 1929 riots, which broke out at the Western Wall against a national-religious background: “It became clear to me that a focus on one side of the conflict was liable to distort the picture” (*Ibid.*).

Such comparative approach is the most adequate for the Israeli-Palestinian case study. It is also the most difficult one. Such research requires an understanding of the theoretical discourse on religious-nationalism alongside a close acquaintance with the particularity of both elements of our case study: Jewish-Israeli and Muslim-Palestinian societies. An interdisciplinary approach is therefore required here, combining social and political science and comparative politics, and historical research methods of textual analysis with comparative religion, Jewish and Islamic thought, and conflict studies. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach will also enable us to better contain the tension between universal theories and the particular case study, by

building a solid theoretical foundation onto which we shall “pour” the comparative historical development.

There are significant differences and striking similarities between Judaism and Islam. Judaism is a small and introverted religion. Islam is a universal religion and a world civilization. Both are religions of orthopraxis, in which believers and members of the community live according to a sacred law, *Halacha* (הלכה) in Hebrew and *Shari'a* (شريعة) in Arabic, both words deriving from similar meanings: a road to walk by, a path to follow, which specifies in details the proper conduct regarding every aspect of life. Islamic law was shaped when Islam was in the course of a territorial expansion and enjoyed political hegemony (LAYISH, 2005, p. 14). It is widely accepted that in early Islam, religion and politics were inseparable, and that every political activity had to have a religious basis (ELAD, 1999, p. 149).

Jewish law, on the other hand, was shaped under completely opposite circumstances, during a time of political passivity, in diaspora, in a state of exile and detachment from territory. Jews did not possess political power throughout the last two millennia, until the establishment of modern Israel. Lacking a state of its own meant that Judaism did not develop any real political tradition, regarding for example the state, war, and especially ruling over non-Jewish minorities in the framework of a Jewish state. Michael Walzer, a prominent American political theorist and public intellectual, noted on the apolitical condition of the Jews, that “after the great revolt against Rome was suppressed and the Temple destroyed in 70 C.E., there was no Jewish state for almost two thousand years [...] hence, no political thought” (WALZER et al., 2000, p. xxi). Hanna Arendt stated that “the status of the Jews in Europe has been not only that of an oppressed people but also of what Max Weber has called a ‘pariah people’.” (ARENDR, 1944, p. 100). Yet Walzer is well aware of the limits of his argument: “politics is pervasive, with or without state sovereignty. The Jewish communities of the diaspora managed to organize a common life [...]” and dealt with political issues on a regular basis (WALZER et al., 2000, p. xi). Moreover, Walzer mentions the Jewish memory of ancient Biblical politics of the first millennia B.C.E., that of King David and his successors during the First Temple Period, and the priestly regime of the Second Temple Period - memories that led to dreams of a messianic

renewal (*Ibid.*, p. xxi). This aspect of Jewish historical thought, which evolved when Jews lived as a ruled minority in diaspora, was the base upon which the Zionist movement was built (DIECKHOFF, 2003). Therefore, while both Judaism and Islam are Abrahamic and monotheistic religions of revelation and sacred law, they differ not only in scope but also in their basic approach to political power.

Another aspect worth mentioning here is that contemporary RZ and Hamas, as two traditional, nationalist, and religious movements, are naturally patriarchal. By focusing here on the comparative aspect of the shift from the margins to hegemony, important elements of gender and the place of women in processes of change were neglected. In RZ for example, the issue of religious feminism is one of the central lines of inner division (ETTINGER, 2019). In Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (Temple Mount/al-Aqsa Mosque), both Muslim-Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli women organizations play a central role in the conflict over the holy site. The Women of the Temple on the Jewish side, and the Muslim *Murabitat* on Muslim side, for example, contribute to the struggle and see themselves as the avant-garde, both ideologically and physically. In the eyes of the members of their own group, they are part of the first line of defense on the ground (ABU AL-AWAR, 2019; BEN SHITRIT, 2020; TZIDKIYAHU, 2015a).

Another aspect we do not deal with in this dissertation is the inner Jewish ethnic element. Israeli hegemony is by large not only masculine but also Ashkenazi. Mizrahi eastern Jewish women and men are still excluded from the centers of power, also within RZ. Like with religious feminism, the ethnic issue is starting to resurface in recent years within RZ. Mordechai Eliyahu and his son Shmuel Eliyahu were, among others, important Sephardic RZ rabbis. Shuli Mualem and Rabbi Rafi Peretz are two examples of a woman and a man of Jewish Moroccan origins who reached senior positions in RZ politics. However, they are mostly exceptional in both the rabbinical and political levels. As it seems, the shift of RZ from the margins to the center is taking place mainly between white and western men. A blunt example of this was the failed attempt by Naftali Bennett to secure a place for an Eastern Jew, the famous football player Eli Ohana, in the list of the Jewish Home Party (YNET 29/01/2015). It could very well be that the most significant changes that are yet to come will emerge from these bubbling spheres, in the Israeli and Palestinian periphery and most deprived sectors

of society, where gender and ethnicity play a central role alongside religion and traditionalism. Unfortunately, this dissertation does not expand on these important issues.

### The Majority-Minority Anomaly

The Israeli-Palestinian case study provides a historical precedent: an autochthonic Muslim community lives under Jewish rule, in a land both Jews and Muslim consider sacred and over which they both claim religious, historical and political rights. The Jewish religion, which evolved in diasporas as a permanent minority constantly dealing with questions of assimilation and segregation (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 1-12), is now the hegemonic religion of the state of Israel and the faith of the majority population (*Ibid.*, p. 269-289). It needs to adapt to rule over religious minorities, predominantly Muslim native Palestinian-Arabs, which are also perceived as Israel's enemies (LAVIE, 2015, p. 9-16). We are faced with a historical anomaly in which a Jewish polity rule over non-Jews in general and over Arab-Muslims in particular.

In contrast, Islamic thought evolved when Muslims reigned over a vast empire. Muslim rulers and clergy regularly dealt with questions regarding the status of non-Muslims under Islamic rule.<sup>8</sup> The opposite situation, the status of Muslim minorities ruled by non-Muslims, was however an impractical issue for most of the Islamic history (LAYISH, 2005, p. 14). This started to change during the colonial era, when Western, Christian powers, dominated formerly Islamic lands. In the framework of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Algerian struggle against French colonialism, Abdelkader al-Djazairi (1808-1883) ruled that Muslims should not stay under Christian rule but rather emigrate to Muslim countries,<sup>9</sup> basing his ruling on the Hegira of Prophet Mohammad (*Ibid.*).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the status on non-Muslim under Islamic rule, among them Jews, Christians and other religions of revelation see the encyclopedia of Islam (BEARMAN et al. (eds.), 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Abdelkader al-Djazairi was a religious leader who led an armed rebellion against the French rule in Algeria in the 1830s and 1840s.

<sup>10</sup> The Hegira, in Arabic هجرة (Hijra) is the immigration of the Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Yathrib, a city in Arabia better known as al-Medina. This immigration took place in the Year 622 A.D and it marks the beginning of the Islamic Count – the Hijri Calendar. It is also the moment in which Mohammad becomes a political leader, leaving behind the sinful Meccans that persecuted him, moving to a place where his message was accepted and recognized. This Hijra somewhat resembles the Abrahamic concept of *Lech-Lecha* (לך-לך) Hebrew for "go!" or "leave!", recounted in the Book of

Tunisian press defined receiving French citizenship as *riddah*, i.e. apostasy and abandonment of Islam (*Ibid.*). In the late 1970s the “Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs” was founded in London, and launched an academic journal.<sup>11</sup> By the 1990s, when large and well established Muslim communities flourished in Western countries, a legal theory for Muslim minorities (*Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*) was created by two prominent Muslim religious figures, Shaykh Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani of Virginia, and Shaykh Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi of Qatar (FISHMAN, 2006, p. 1). This new theory was especially adapted to Muslim minorities residing in the West, offering them a special new legal discipline to address their unique religious needs, which differ from those of Muslims residing in Islamic countries (PARRAY, 2012, p. 88). The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), a body founded in 1997 by Sheikh al-Qaradawi to provide Europe’s Muslim minorities with Islamic legal guidance, officially adopted this doctrine.

Despite the fact that Muslims are a minority in Israel and are excluded from hegemony as a whole and from political power in particular, this doctrine is **not** relevant for the Muslims of Israel and Palestine. For example, according to this doctrine, Islamic minorities must participate in the general elections in their “non-Islamic” state. Yet Sheik Hussein Halawa, ECFR’s secretary-general, explains that the Muslim vote in Israel will be considered as recognizing the occupation. Indeed, the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel,<sup>12</sup> which is attentive to ECFR’s voice, boycotts the Israeli general election (SHAVIT, 2015). Qadi Iyad Zahalka, a judge in Israel’s High Sharia Court, who wrote the most extensive work in Hebrew on *Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*, completely ignored the question of adapting this doctrine to the Islamic minority in Israel or to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (ZAHALKA, 2014). From an Islamic point of view, Muslims in Israel/Palestine do not see themselves as a minority to be accommodated by the majority society, but rather as the rightful

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Genesis (12:1–17:27). This pattern of leaving one’s location, family and society and going away to a place that better fits one’s religious beliefs thus became a topos and a role model.

<sup>11</sup> The “Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs” is the IMMA’s official journal. It is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by Taylor & Francis: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjmm20/current>.

<sup>12</sup> The Islamic movement in Israel is affiliated ideologically with the Muslim Brothers. The “Northern Branch” split from the main movement in 1996 because of the debate regarding the movement’s participation in Israeli elections (ABU HELAL, 2018, p. 50).

owners of the land now under occupation and oppression within the realm of Islam, awaiting liberation.

It is thus a unique situation for the Muslim community of Israel and Palestine. Up until recently, the Muslims of this region were part of the religious sovereign power. All of a sudden, they became a minority, some citizens in a Jewish state, other subjected to Israel's military occupation or living in diaspora (LAYISH, 2005, p. 14-15).

The conflict between Israel, the Palestinians and the greater Arab and Muslim world created a unique political and religious situation that derives from unprecedented historical circumstances. This situation is reflected not only in the political and national majority-minority polarization but also in religious, social and cultural cleavages. Comparing Judaism and Islam as two religions of law that encompass all aspects of life is common in the literature, yet only few works deal with the systematic similarities and differences between Sharia and Halacha concerning the modern state. In this regard, we can mention the articles of Kozlowsky and of Aharon Layish (LAYISH, 2005; KOZLOWSKI, 1986). Despite their quality, the comparative debate in these studies is minimal (MILLER, 2009, p. 4). As modern political phenomena both Zionism and the Palestinian national movement are considered as anomalies, not frequently referred to in the general research of nationalism or in comparative studies. Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi argues that the case of the Palestinians does contain a certain universal applicability for issues of national identity (KHALIDI, 1997, p. xi). Khalidi's argument applies also to the Israeli case, and this is true also regarding a number of ways in which Palestinians and Israelis mirror other national groups, "including in the manner in which preexisting elements of identity are reconfigured and history is used to give shape to a certain vision [...]" (*Ibid.*). However, we do not need to go far because, as we shall see throughout this work, Israelis and Palestinians primarily mirror each other.

#### The Mirror effect

Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal's 1993 Book "The Palestinian People: A History" binds together the Palestinian story with the history of the Zionist settlement, the State of Israel and the Israeli society (KIMMERLING et al., 2003). One of their



arguments is that it is impossible to understand Israeli history and contemporary society without knowing the history and current affairs of the Palestinians. Similarly, they argue, it is impossible to understand the process by which the Palestinians consolidated into a distinguished social and political collective without exploring the influence of the Zionist settlement in this very same strip of land upon which both sides struggle.

Matti Steinberg, an Israeli scholar and senior analysts of Israeli intelligence, mentions the mirror image effect. In his comprehensive study on Modern Palestinian Nationhood, Steinberg mentions that when dealing with the religious element in the PNM, there is a “mirror image” reflected from the Zionist movement (STEINBERG, 2016, p. 244):

*the unique characteristics of the Jewish adversary further heightened and aroused the religious dimension of the conflict [...] if Judaism was a national creed striving to return to 'Zion' (in its dual meaning of the 'Land of Zion' and 'Jerusalem'), the national conflict was seen as embedded with religion. Zionism's attachment to the holy sites deepened the significance which Muslims attached to their grip on Palestine. They felt themselves to be on the front line as a religious 'frontier territory' ('ard al- ribāt) against Zionism, which coveted Islam's holy places in order to dispossess the Muslim inhabitants.*

By claiming this, Steinberg does not try to diminish Palestinian nationalism into a mere reaction to Zionism, an acceptable academic approach among Israeli scholars of Palestinian nationalism (Meri LITVAK (ed.), 2009; Meir LITVAK, 2012; PORATH, 1974). Steinberg is rather a proponent of Palestinian national authenticity and his quote above asserts the depth of the religious element in both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. Yitzhak Reiter also relates to the way current Jewish and Muslim historical narratives of Jerusalem pose a mirror image of each other. Reiter, an Israeli historian of Islam and a political scientist, focuses mainly on the new historical outlook of the Muslim Arabs since 1967 and the way this outlook addresses the challenges posed by the Jewish and Israeli narratives (REITER, 2008).

Zionism and Palestinian nationalism are at the same time independent phenomena and reactions one to the other. The Palestinian national-religiosity stands on two legs: the first is an independent element rooted in the Islamic sanctity of Palestine as the Blessed Land mentioned in the Quran and the Sunnah. The second is a response to Zionism, perceived by Palestinians from the outset as a religious threat intertwined with national, political and economic dispossession.

Palestinian writers, unlike the Israeli and Jewish historians quoted above,<sup>13</sup> are not required of such argumentation, they tend to present such resemblance in narratives and argumentations simply as Palestinian reactions to the Zionist challenge, without diminishing anything from the “authenticity” of the Palestinian identity or the political rights that come with it (KAYYALI, 1978; KHALIDI, 1997). As we shall see below, the mainstream Israeli and Jewish scholars (such as Porath and Litvak) echo the original position of the early Zionist leadership while the mainstream Palestinian scholars echo the early political and (Muslim) religious Palestinian elite.

On the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, Jews and Muslim Arabs, and later Israelis and Palestinians, are bound together in an ongoing drama that has been evolving since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet in the scholarly literature, since the works of Zachary Lockman on relations between Arab and Jewish workers and labor movements in Palestine during the British mandate (LOCKMAN, 1996; LOCKMAN, 1993), Israelis and Palestinians have rarely been placed under an equal scientific scrutiny, as if each society and national movement had evolved separately. Some works compare Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism, but the emphasis is in many cases on the supra-nationalist ultra-orthodox (*haredi*) Judaism and on radical Islam in the Arab world, notably in Egypt (NOHAD, 2013; KLEIN, 1993; ALMOND et al., 2003a). These works examine each case study separately, comparing it to a general model of

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<sup>13</sup> Trying to avoid ad hominem argumentation, it is nevertheless interesting to note that most scholars on the Palestinians quoted above, are not Palestinians themselves. They are actually Israelis or American Jews. It is understandable that many Israeli and Jewish scholars have a special interest in this topic due to its proximity to Judaism and Israel. This comment might also reflect my own bias, as an Israeli Jew and a graduate of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. It is more than reasonable that many of the scholars quoted above do not separate completely between their research and their own religious beliefs and national identities but this argument demands further research that is beyond the scope of this work.

fundamentalism. Some examine religious-Zionism, others examine Palestinian-Islamic religious-nationalism, each according to general theories on fundamentalism. Going over the voluminous work of the Fundamentalism project indicates that it is not common to compare the two.<sup>14</sup> In the literature, Zionist and Palestinian fundamentalists are regarded as anomalies, and the national-religious background in which these fundamentalists are rooted, stemming from the heart of their respective national ethos, is simply ignored. Throughout the entire project Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism are treated and even compared, but the most expected comparison – between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim fundamentalisms, or religious-nationalists – is neglected.

In recent years some historians of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict started to place both sides of the equation under the same analytical scrutiny. Hillel Cohen emphasizes the deep religious element of the conflict through a systematic comparison between Jews and Muslim in Palestine and Israel (Hillel COHEN, 2015; Hillel COHEN, 2017). Jonathan Gribetz from Princeton similarly places the Jews and Arabs of the Holy Land at the late ottoman period under such equal standards of scrutiny, focusing in his book on concepts of religion and race during the early years of the Zionist-Arab encounter (GRIBETZ, 2014). Several scholars of social and political sciences joined this trend, applying this standard to the study of contemporary affairs. Yitzhak Reiter for example, directly compares Israeli-Jewish to Palestinian-Muslim religious nationalism, examining the role of religion as a barrier to compromise (REITER, 2010).<sup>15</sup> This comparative analysis is a crucial condition for a better understanding of the matter.

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<sup>14</sup> The Fundamentalism Project is a seven volumes comprehensive research project on Fundamentalism around the world, edited by MARTIN E. MARTY AND R. SCOTT APPLEBY, EDITORS. published by the University of Chicago Press. The series includes the book “Strong Religion” that was my inspiration for the term “strong religious-nationalism” (ALMOND et al., 2003).

<sup>15</sup> To the best of my knowledge only few research students adopt this comparative approach on Israel-Palestine. In 2009 a master thesis was submitted at the department of religion at the Wake Forest University comparing between Gush Emunim and Hamas, focusing on the concept of religious land ideologies and violence (LEIDHEISER-STODDARD, 2009). In 2012 a seminary paper was submitted to the department of Middle East and Islamic Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem by Tehila Bigman, herself a RZ women, comparing the concept of self-sacrifice for the homeland in the discourse of Gush Emunim and Hamas (however in her 2016 Master’s thesis Bigman neglected the comparative approach and focused only on Islamic issue)(BIGMAN, 2012).

Again, we see here a majority of Israeli and Western scholars: the absence of Palestinian scholars from this trend may be explained by the difficulty that stems from their particular circumstances as the occupied and weaker side. It is therefore harder for a Palestinian scholar to examine both the Israeli-Zionist and Palestinian narratives as equal (not as a moral judgment, but with the same scientific tools). The work of Palestinian historian Abdul-Wahhab Kayyali (1939-1981) constitutes an early exception to this assertion (KAYYALI, 1978). Kayyali was also politically engaged and served in the PNC, in the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), and in the PLO Executive Committee from 1973-77.

Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalism are two competing ideologies, acting in and relating to the same space. They are two opposing expressions of religious-nationalisms, each located at the extreme ends of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While rooted in their own particular context, the Israeli Jewish and the Arab-Muslim respectively, both trends constantly evolve facing one another. Thus, while on the surface they completely negate each other, a deeper gaze reveals that they actually co-exist in great proximity, sometimes literally and physically in the same street. It would thus be unreasonable to assume that they do not mutually influence each other or conduct some sort of a (direct or indirect) dialogue and, to a certain degree, mirror one another.

The two main locomotives of religious-nationalisms in Israeli and Palestinian societies today are Religious-Zionism and Hamas respectively. Comparing the two requires a disclaimer at the outset. Comparing does not mean equating, nor focusing on identifying similarities between them. They are two distinct political-religious phenomena, which developed over the same period in the same space and often reacting to the same events. Each evolved out of a different inner-national and religious context and historical circumstances, their ideologies and methods differ, and thus their attributes are distinct. Hamas is an institution and an organization, while Religious-Zionism is a sociological, religious, ideological and cultural current. Nonetheless, RZ has its distinct ideology, its institutions, and even a recognized

education program and political party, while Hamas has become synonymous with the Islamic approach to Palestinian nationalism representing millions of Palestinians. Moreover, Hamas' overt Islamic religiosity distinguishes the movement from Fatah, considered as a more "secular" national movement than a religious one. Therefore, Hamas can and should be seen as the Palestinian equivalent of religious-Zionism in Israel (whereas Fatah is equivalent to Zionism more broadly).

Both Religious-Zionism and Hamas, as the main manifestations of Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious nationalism, fought the Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation process in the 1990s with a degree of success. Consequently, both moved from the margins to center stage and gained hegemony. Thus, Hamas and Religious-Zionism's kookist elite, with all their diversity, merit a comparison.

#### Periodization – The Historical Context

The NR shift to center-stage in Israel and Palestine, can be traced back to 1967 and even earlier. It is part of an evolution within wider circles on each side. RZ thought and political action evolved in the context of the larger Israeli-Jewish society. Palestinian RN evolved within the larger Islamic and Arabic arenas and on the background of political Islam rise to dominance. However, it is not until the events, effects, and results of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process commencing in the 1990s that Israeli and Palestinian RN became part of the hegemonic culture. Especially influential here were the territorial and ideological compromises accompanying the peace process in recent decades (INBARI, 2012; AL-MAKADMEH, 1994). In their antagonism to this process, both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalisms can be seen as mirroring each other or as bound together.

This shift started in the early 1990s with the Madrid conference, followed by the negotiations in Washington, the Oslo accord and the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO in September 1993, which led to the foundation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The discourse that we will examine in the third chapter of this dissertation was shaped on the background of geopolitical changes that followed : the launch and collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the 1990s, which

culminated in the failure of the Camp David summit between Barak and Arafat in July 2000; the Second Intifada between 2000 and 2005, and the Israeli disengagement from Gaza that year. During these events, both movements underwent a process of nationalizing their religious message while holding on to their aspiration to religionize politics and society as a whole. This chain of events was followed by the 2006 war, the second Israeli-Lebanese war, and the Annapolis peace conference held at the end of 2007, in which Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and the Chairman of the PLO Mahmoud Abbas discussed further Israeli territorial compromises as part of the final status agreement. The talks included, for the second time in history, an Israeli proposal to divide Jerusalem (the first was Barak's given to Arafat in Camp David) and to share the sovereignty in Jerusalem's "Holy Basin" (ZANANY, 2015). Such territorial compromises that threatened the integrity of the Land of Israel, or that of Palestine, and that of Jerusalem in particular, as part of the peace process, invoked a range of reactions within Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim RN.

#### Chapter review

This dissertation includes five chapters divided to three main parts. The first two parts each include two chapters, and the third part includes one more chapter. The first part covers the theoretical framework and sets conceptual definitions as an infrastructure upon which the rest of the work lies. Chapter One sets forward a theory of strong religious-nationalism (SRN). It surveys the general academic discourse on religion, nationalism and religious-nationalism, asserting that some religious-nationalisms are stronger than others in their religiosity. The religious-nationalism which is at work in the Israeli-Palestinian case study is defined as SRN. The first chapter mainly relies on secondary sources and academic studies.

In Chapter Two the theory of SRN is applied to the Israeli-Palestinian case by reexamining the conflict's historical roots. First the religious base of the founding narratives of both national movements, which renders them more liable to evolve into SRN, is highlighted and juxtaposed. At this point, the chapter reviews the historical roots of the violent conflict between Jews and Arabs in the Holy Land, revealing again the SRN element that stands at its base. The methodology applied includes an innovative interpretation of secondary sources, in a new and comparative framing,

alongside some archival work, and online and written primary sources of contemporary Arabic and Hebrew historical retro perspectives.

A comment on sources that will accompany us from this chapter all along the dissertation is the sometimes-fluid border between primary and secondary sources. At times, the writings of RN intellectuals are read as a primary sources, and at time as a secondary ones. This ambiguity will accompany us throughout this dissertation. For example, Mustafa Abu Sway's work is at the same time both an intellectual product and a reflection of Palestinian RN discourse. RZ academics like Assaf Malach and Mordechai Kedar are referred to as primary sources only. But the work of Michah Goodman, a RZ thinker, stands on the line between a study and an ideological product read as a primary source. The works of Dov Schwartz, yet another RZ academic, are treated as secondary source only.

The second part of the dissertation deals with the shift from the margins towards hegemony through the process of politicization and institutionalization. It includes a short introduction and two chapters, examining first Hamas and then religious-Zionism with a comparative reference to the previous chapter.

In the short introduction of this part of the work, the rationale of comparison between Hamas and RZ is explained, whilst standing on the manifest differences and similarities between them. Furthermore, the institutional logic of RN is developed as an introduction to the examination of the shift of Hamas and RZ from the social and political margins to the center stage.

In the following two chapters, the story of the institutionalization of Hamas and RZ is told, to some extent through the main protagonists who built these movements and their institutions, such as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and RZYH Kook. The bulk of these chapters combines an analysis of political history, of theological-ideological texts, and of institutional structures. Hamas' political history is examined, from its founding 1988 Charter up to the 2017 Document of General Principles and Policies. A parallel political history of RZ and its progenies is studied, with an emphasis on social structures and institutions.

Hamas and Religious-Zionism best represent the Palestinian and Israeli national-religious approaches. Both moved from the political and social margins in the early 1990s, to hegemony in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, while Hamas is first an organization, RZ is first a social and ideological force. For this reason, their respective rise to hegemony is expressed differently, in accordance with the institutional, political, ideological, and social manifestations respectively.

This structural difference between the two movements requires a differentiated methodology. This is why the approach in both chapters is not identical. While the chapter on Hamas is mainly (but not only) treated through official documents (charter, party platform, document of principles etc.) and political history, the chapter on RZ is more sociological in nature, as it surveys BIU, the education system and the political and spiritual leadership.

Nevertheless, despite this structural gap, which dictates the different methodologies taken in each chapter, the comparison between RZ and Hamas is valid and even necessary. Both the religious-Zionist sector and Hamas movement represent the manifest expressions of Israeli and Palestinian strong religious-nationalism. RZ also has its own political parties and institutions and Hamas is also, to a great extent, a social and ideological force in Palestinian society. Thus, while there is an apparent imbalance between the two chapters in terms of methodology, the comparison of both sides, both from that sociological angle and that of political history, demonstrates how strong religious nationalism in both societies moved from the margins to the center.

Chapter Three deals with Hamas. It opens with a review of the literature and historical background, all in light of the upcoming shift that is at the center of this work. Follows a survey of the institutional development of the Palestinian Muslim Brothers (MB), including political, military, religious and educational infrastructures. At this point, we examine Hamas' progress towards the drivers' seat through a scrutiny of seminal points within this shift, in their chronological order: from the shock of the peace process throughout the 1990s, through the Second Intifada at the turn of the millennium and the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip (GS) and northern West Bank (WB) in 2005, and up to the current days.



The sources used in this chapter vary from primary sources in Arabic to secondary sources in Arabic, Hebrew and English, analysis of founding documents, online sources such as personal, official and news websites, new archives, social media and other forms of new media alongside personal memoirs and biographies. Intellectual products and policy papers of Hamas oriented intellectuals are used here as primary and secondary sources as well.

Chapter Four follows in its structure its predecessor in surveying the institutionalization and move towards the political center of RZ, while comparing this evolution to that of Hamas as the chapter advances. A survey of the literature is followed by a historical review of RZ in light of its shift from the margins to hegemony. The political infrastructure of RZ is surveyed as well as its apparatus of civil society and education, and even militarism and violence. Like Hamas, RZ also has a national-religious university, which plays a central role not only in socialization processes but also in the training of a serving elite that will integrate the public service and support the shift from within the state apparatus. The Islamic center of the MB in Palestine throughout the 1970s and 1980s is juxtaposed with the formation of the Kookist ideology and Gush Emunim. Just as Chapter Three, this chapter ends with a review of seminal points within this shift in chronological order. The sources used in this chapter vary, within a wide range of resources most of which are available online. While the evolution of RZ towards the mainstream is commonly discussed, there has not been to the best of our knowledge a comparison of this shift to that of Hamas.

Both movements undergo a change, from severely denouncing the peace process from the opposition, to a ruling elite built from its ruins. The shift Hamas made is more dramatic than that of RZ, since RZ was always a legitimate part of the political game while Hamas was both considered as illegal by Israel and persecuted by the PA. Moreover, Hamas itself negated political participation. The further distance Hamas had to go, might also explain its violent split from the PA, while RZ did not start a civil war and remained part of Israeli politics. Instead RZ set out to take the political system from within.

The institutional approach, whose importance is explained in the beginning of part two, can only go a limited distance if not based on solid ideological foundations.

In part three, Chapter Five reviews the central ideological themes within Israeli and Palestinian SRN. Throughout the chapter a thematic review is conducted, on perceptions of self and other, national authenticity and religious sanctity. This thematic review echoes strongly the theory laid in the first chapter. It starts with the contemporary RN Polemics and direct dialogue conducted by RN intellectuals and clergy. These polemics are a place of direct ideological encounter, and in this way they are a point of contact between two ideologies that seemingly do not meet. Nevertheless, these encounters echo their proximity, on the thematic and ideological level. The proximity in the way each side affirms its own RN identity and negates that of the other is enhanced by this juxtaposition. “We” are a true nation and a real religion, “they” are void. “We were here first” echoes the myth of autochthony shared by both sides; the mere names of Israel and Palestine are under debate, the borders of the Promised Land, the people whom it was promised to, and their historic right to return to this promised land. Finally, we present Jerusalem as a microcosm of the entire national and religious narrative – all these themes represent the current state of polemics. Each theme is examined relatively shortly, focusing on the comparison between the Jewish-Israeli and the Muslim-Palestinian discourse.

This last chapter exemplifies how SRN becomes hegemonic through a dialectic of ideological discourse. Both RZ and Hamas advanced to center stage since the 1990s in their societies by posing a comprehensive ideological worldview. These RN worldviews interact in some kind of a dialectic discourse. The main interlocutors who lead this discourse, surveyed in this chapter, are Jewish and Muslim RN clergy, public intellectuals and politicians. The argumentations examined constitute the prototype of a national-religious ethos (Anthony SMITH, 2003a; BEN-ISRAEL, 1986). Both ideologies, Islamic-Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli RN, are rooted in their own national and religious context, nevertheless, they echo one another, they conduct an indirect debate and more direct polemics. Both ethoses relate to the same land, to the same holy city and site, and thus each ethos build itself while negating the other. Methodologically the chapter relies on religious, popular and pseudo-historic texts published through a variety of media, online, broadcasted and written.



## Part 1

### Chapter 1: Strong Religious-Nationalism: A Theoretical Framework<sup>16</sup>

Religion and the nation-state are two "total institutions" assuming extensive control over the individual (GOFFMAN, 1961). To quote American political scientist and scholar of religions Roger Friedland, both are "models of authority, imaginations of an ordering power, and understandings of how one should relate to those who control forces upon which one depends, but over which one does not exercise control." Moreover, they both "partake a common symbolic order." (FRIEDLAND, 2001, p. 127; FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 381).<sup>17</sup> In this sense, religiosity and nationalism can share ontological and epistemological grounds, which then enables the generation of religious-nationalism.

Religious-nationalism is, as its name indicates, a fusion of both elements into one complex identity, in which the national identity is religionized and religion is nationalized. This dissertation focuses on the Israel-Palestinian case study, in which an especially strong kind of RN appears, creating a hyphenated identity in which the national and the theological feed of each other in a way that both components become completely inseparable. Moreover, in strong religious-nationalism both elements are interdependent and even indistinguishable (see below).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict involves a specifically strong kind of religious-nationalism, different from that which appears in other national religious conflicts in which religion mainly plays the role of a cultural marker in a political conflict (BEN-

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<sup>16</sup> This chapter is based on my work as a visiting student in Sciences Po, presented as a memoir titled "God Cannot Keep Silent - The National-Religious Element in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict". This memoir, directed by Alain Dieckhoff, was defended in Paris on 28/05/2014 and its main conclusions were summarized and published in CERI's online journal "*Questions de recherche*" (TZIDKIYAHU, 2015). It is presented here revised and updated.

<sup>17</sup> According to Friedland all contemporary religious-nationalisms share a common symbolic order in four distinguished fields: first, in configuring the territorial collectivity as a sacred space. Second, in the way RN strive to regulate the bodies and sexuality of women. Third, in the considerable symbolic importance RN accord to money; and fourth, in the way they submit lovingly to God (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 396).

ISRAEL, 1986, p. 331-340). In the Israeli-Palestinian case, religion per se is at the heart of the conflict, in the sense that “winning” the national-political struggle would also entail a “theological” religious victory. The initial mainstream Zionist movement was based on a secular interpretation of a religious ethos and myth. The early Palestinian national movement did not undergo a similar process of secularization. From the outset, Palestinian nationalism was based on the sanctity of Jerusalem and of Palestine in Islam and was in its early stages even led by a religious clerk, the mufti Hajj Amin al Hussein. Therefore, the Palestinian national movement reacted to the Zionist challenge with religious tools of its own.

In this strong sense of religious-nationalism, religious holiness and national authenticity intertwine. National territory is sanctified, especially that of the Holy Land where the three Abrahamic religions were founded and forged, clashed and coexisted. Paraphrasing on the famous assertion of Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem, in such a place, in such holy languages as Hebrew and Arabic, in which God has been invoked and summoned into our existence in countless ways, God will not remain mute. He will inevitably find ways back into the reality of life (CUTTER, 1990). Indeed, perhaps one can argue that a national ethos that flows from a religious myth is inevitably destined to undergo religionization. I thus claim that in order to better understand the processes shaping the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the barriers to its solution, we must look beyond political processes and theories and into the realm of culture and identity embodied in religion. In other words, we must examine the interaction between religiosity and nationalism in a comparative approach.

#### Religion and Nationalism

According to American sociologist Rogers Brubaker, the study of religious-nationalism poses the multidimensional challenge of being able to say something about each of these charged, often-conflated umbrella-terms (BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 2). In order to overcome this methodological difficulty concomitant to the study of religious-nationalism, we shall first try to produce a suitable working definition. One way of going about this matter is Anthony Smith's (Anthony SMITH, 2003a) suggestion to generate a working definition of religious-nationalism with regards to the relations between these two elements in society and politics. In what follows, I review the main

features of each part of this working definition, i.e. "religious-" and "-nationalism," while attending to the manners in which each of these terms inherently relates to the other. That is, within religiosity, we find echoes for nationalistic modalities, and within nationalism there lies a religious sentiment. Together, they sketch out what is to be meant by this term in this dissertation.

#### Religious-

As William James noted, it is difficult to define 'religion' in general terms. James thus calls to admit at the outset "that we may very likely find no one essence, but many characters which may alternately be equally important to religion." (JAMES, 1902 Lecture 2). Keeping James' insight in mind, one way to approach religiosity is through its lived experience (GEERTZ, 1966). Moojan Momen argued that the human experience of religion is grounded in the experience of the holy and the sacred. He defines religion thematically in a multilayered fashion, connecting the numinous and the social aspects by intertwining the individual, conceptual and social levels, with a substantial, symbolist and functional definition (respectively): (1) religion is the *individual* experience of the 'holy'; *substantively* "Religion is humanity's response to what is experienced as holy" (MOMEN, 2009, p. 27-28). (2) On the *conceptual* (and *doctrinal*) level it is the universal idea that there is some 'ultimate reality', and that humanity must establish and clarify its relationship with this reality; *symbolically* "a religion is a system of symbols that creates a universal order that is so cohesive [...] that it becomes 'reality' for the social group [...]".<sup>18</sup> (3) On the *social* level religions create social cohesion and integrate the individual into society. Religions create a social and institutional order that is the source of their ethical and social aspect; *functionally* religion provides humanity with "a worldview which unifies society, which provides a moral code, and within which human beings can orient their lives." (*Ibid.*).

Throughout the last 200 years, European modernization and the philosophy of the enlightenment have been manifested in secularization and adoption of new ideologies such as liberalism, capitalism, socialism, and nationalism. Ernest Gellner described this process as if religion was transformed into culture, fused with ethnicity

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<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz made similar assertion in his 1966 essay Religion as a Cultural System ([GEERTZ, 1966](#)).

and over the years with the state (GELLNER, 1983, p. 100-101), and thus with nationalism. Momen's social-functional definition of religion corresponds with the nation-state. The conceptualization of national ideology within the state or the national movement is done through symbols, in many cases the same old pre-national cultural and religious symbols. In some cases, even the concept of the holy and the divine can be traced in national and ideological ideas – promising meaning, salvation, authenticity (which is for nationalism what 'holy' is for religion) and eternity. German intellectual Carl Schmitt evoked these ideas in his 1922 essay "Political Theology" (SCHMITT, 1922, p. 36):

*All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development [...] but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.*

Schmitt, who was a jurist, also pointed to the reminiscences of theology in the modern law of the nation state, also hinting to the problem of heteronomy (*Ibid.*, p. 38):

*"Whoever takes the trouble of examining the public law [...] will see that the state intervenes everywhere. At times it does so as a deus ex machina [...] at other times it does so as the graceful and merciful lord who proves by pardons and amnesties his supremacy over his own laws. There always exists the same inexplicable identity: lawgiver, executive power, police, pardoner, welfare institution. Thus to an observer who takes the trouble to look at the total picture of contemporary jurisprudence, there appears a huge cloak-and-dagger drama [...]. The 'omnipotence' of the modern lawgiver, of which one reads in every textbook on public law, is not only linguistically derived from theology. Many reminiscences of theology also appear in the details of the argumentation [...]"*

Faced with the collapse of the faith in progress and the discourse of culture-crisis, Schmitt's understanding of 'political theology' signifies the transformation of modernism to a stage of self-criticism and the end of the modernist-utopist tendency

(SCHMIDT et al., 2009, p. 24). Modernism seemed to be the liberation of man from authority in general, and from religious authority in particular. As Schmitt points out, Kant defines the project of enlightenment and modernism as the “the emancipation of man from a state of self-imposed tutelage”, yet he uses the theological narrative of the Exodus as a metaphor for the liberation of man from religious control and authority. This contradiction between content and rhetoric in Kant’s words is not coincidental; it “exposes the double standards of enlightenment towards religion [...]” (*Ibid.*, p. 18).

However, religion is also a set of institutions. According to Roger Friedland, who adapted the institutional theory to religious-nationalism, religion is not merely a doctrine, a set of myths, or a collection of rites. Religion is an institutional space, with which religious nationalists wish to remake the world (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 383). Beyond its individual and doctrinal aspects, religion is a network of sacred sites, of ritual and social spaces, such as community centers, associations, schools, hospitals, courts, and charities, from which it mobilizes.

#### -Nationalism

There is close affinity between the evolution of the national phenomenon and its conceptualization in the scholarly discourse. The modern historiography and nationalism were always connected in a Gordian knot. Historian Shlomo Sand mentions that “historical writing carries a national birthmark from its beginning, and nationalism began its long journey tenderly caressing in its bosom the profession of history.” (SAND, 2006, p. 6). Nation-states nurture historians, who in return provide the state with collective memory and identity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the national structures were stretched to the edge of historic time, tracing the roots of modern nations in ancient kingdoms, whether it was the Gauls, Franks or Romans, the ancient Egyptians or the Kingdoms of Israel and Judea. Sand demonstrates how historians radiated this national time into the entire education and culture systems of the modern era. Their stories were deposited to the hands of teachers and other cultural agents and became general knowledge, until the free market of symbols reacted accordingly and authors, poets and journalists accomplished the mission of constructing the national culture (*Ibid.*, p. 8-9). Thus in our treatment of nationalism, alongside the development of the actual phenomenon, we shall follow the



development of the scholarly scrutinization and historiography of the national phenomenon.<sup>19</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century European identities went through a process of unification and standardization, turning from a mixture of linguistic and cultural groups to nations that correspond to the forming modern market-economy. The little existing common denominators didn't suffice for this project so the nation-state recruited the past, constructing shared memory and culture.<sup>20</sup> This Gordian knot between history, culture, ethnicity and nationalism was tied up with the help of intellectuals; later on it was also untangled by them. Ernest Renan was maybe the first to 'untangle' this knot in his famous Sorbonne lecture from 1882: "*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*" ("What is a nation?") (RENAN, 1887). Renan's idea that "a nation is a daily referendum" emphasizes the voluntary and political aspects of modern collective identity. Renan argues that the nation is a community of memory, giving the Jewish collective memory as an example. These ideas were greatly innovative in 1882 and they stayed so for another century (SAND, 2009, p. 20). Only in the second half of the twentieth century, when nationalism itself was challenged, did scholars who doubted the historicity of the nation start to move from the margins to the center of the academic discourse.

Early in the twentieth century some first hesitations about the historicity of nations and nationalism were evoked by non-academic Marxist thinkers such as Gramsci, and later on by sociologists and historians. The first and foremost were Carlton J. H. Hayes (1882-1964) and Hans Kohn (1891-1971), who wrote in the interwar period. Both scholars reflected, as Smith noted, "the growing importance of nationalism as a political ideology and movement, and as a subject of investigation in its own right." (LAWRENCE, 2004, p. 83-86). Hayes, being both American and religious, was an external observer of European (so-called secular) nationalism, a fact that might

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<sup>19</sup> Indeed, national identity is constructed by intellectuals backwards into the religious identities time and Biblical prototype. In this sense some of the scholarly works that will be reviewed in this dissertation will be considered as primary sources of recruited intellectuals that, in the long run, lay down the infrastructure for institutions of governance.

<sup>20</sup> Collective memory in the sense of memory space as depicted by Pierre Nora in his voluminous work "Realms of Memory" (*Les Lieux de mémoire*). In his scrutiny of the French Identity Nora laid the grounds for the study of national memory in general (NORA, 1989).

have contributed to his depiction of nationalism as a competing religion.<sup>21</sup> In his 1926 book *Essays on Nationalism* Hayes devotes a whole chapter to 'nationalism as a religion', arguing that nationalism mobilizes a "'deep and compelling emotion' that is 'essentially religious'." (HAYES, 1926, p. 95).<sup>22</sup> But Hayes' primary concern was "to delineate his theory that nationalism (a belief in the desirability of a single state for each nation) was 'a modern, almost a recent phenomenon'." (LAWRENCE, 2004, p. 85). What tipped the balance in favor of modern nationalism according to Hayes was a combination of the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of romanticism (*ibid.*, p. 86), three elements that are crucial for the understanding of modernism as a whole. Hayes was also one of the first to criticize the correlation between nationalism and race (before the term "ethnicity" became common) and the elevation of nationalism above all other collective identities (SAND, 2006, p. 10).

Kohn's post war writings were eventually more influential than Hayes'. Born in Prague, Kohn immigrated as a Zionist to British Mandatory Palestine – the Promised Land of Israel (EY)<sup>23</sup> – where he headed the advocacy department of the central fundraising organization for the Zionist movement.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after his arrival to the holy land in 1925, alongside his Zionist activity, Kohn, joined a group of prominent Jewish intellectuals in founding the first "Jewish–Palestinian Peace Alliance" in Mandatory Palestine called *Brit Shalom* (covenant of peace, ברית שלום).<sup>25</sup> Following

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<sup>21</sup> Hayes' personal identity is even more relevant if we look at the background of other three scholars we are about to revise here: Kohn, Kedourie and Deutsch. It seems more than a coincidence that they were all immigrants, torn by historical circumstances from where they were born and grew up, and resettled in new cultural centers. Sand argues that this sharp cultural transfer was decisive in the ability of many scholars of nationalism to transform nationalism and nationality into research objects (SAND, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> "Now, as one looks back over the multifarious pages of man's history, one is struck by the frequency and force of human movements which have had their mainspring in religious emotion. Herein is a valuable clue for us. May it not be that we shall here find the most convincing explanation of the strength of modern nationalism, the zeal of its apostles, and the devotion of its disciples? Is it not a demonstrable fact that nationalism has become to a vast number of persons a veritable religion, capable of arousing that deep and compelling emotion which is essentially religious? To this aspect of the subject let us address ourselves." (HAYES, 1926, p. 95).

<sup>23</sup> "EY" indicates "Eretz Yisrael", the land of Israel, thus stating the name of the geopolitical entity created in Palestine under British administration in its various forms between 1917-1948.

<sup>24</sup> *Keren Hayesod* (קרן היסוד – literary the Foundation Fund), the United Israel Appeal, is the official fundraising organization for the Zionist movement and later for the state of Israel. It was established in 1920 in London at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Zionist Congress.

<sup>25</sup> *Brit Shalom* was founded in 1925 by a small group of prominent Jewish intellectuals such as Arthur Ruppin, Hugo Bergmann, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Judah Leon Magnes and supported by Henrietta Szold and Albert Einstein. It advocated a bi-national co-existence in the holy land, and the

the first large scale national-religious violent outburst in Palestine known as the 1929 Palestine riots (Hillel COHEN, 2015), Kohn published a manifest in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and in Palestine, identifying Zionism with Western imperialism, harshly criticizing the British forceful policy and what he called “the Zionist hypocrisy”: “[...] We are in Palestine for over a dozen years now, without seeking even once the consent of the Arabs, without conducting any discussion with the people dwelling in this land. We relied only on the force of the British super-power. We set ourselves goals that would inevitably and immediately lead to a conflict” (LAVSKY, 1990; COHEN, 2015, p. 226). These words of “heresy” created a scandal and exposed the unbridgeable gap between Kohn’s pacifist vision and mainstream Zionism, which led to Kohn’s resignation from the United Israel Appeal in 1929 and from Brit Shalom the following year. In 1933 he left the country and the Jewish national project altogether in search for an academic career. He moved to North America and became one of the most influential researchers of modern nationalism in the world (COHEN, 2015, p. 226; GORDON, p. 67-92). In his classical work from 1944 “The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of Its Origins and Background”, Kohn mentions, in agreement with Hayes, that “nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, which since the French Revolution has been more and more common to mankind (KOHN, 1944, p. 10-11)”. Kohn developed a historical theory delineating a dichotomy between the political-civil nationalism that became hegemonic around the North-Atlantic West (U.S.A., Britain, France, Holland); and the ethnic nationalism that prevailed East of the Rhine (Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Russia). In his dichotomy of East-West or political versus cultural nationalisms Kohn laid the foundations for the more recent typology of civic versus ethnic forms of nationalism (DIECKHOFF et al., 2005b, p. 63-65). Sand mentions that in this dichotomy Kohn never concealed his own political-moral preferences towards the Western-political model, upon which he also judged his Zionist past (SAND, 2006, p. 10).

The most important successors of Hayes and Kohn after the Second World War were Elie Kedourie (1926-1992) and Karl Deutsch (1912–1992) (DIECKHOFF et al.,

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foundation of a spiritual center for world Jewry instead of a Jewish state. It never exceeded 100 members until its final desolation in 1933, with the escalation of the Jewish-Arab/ Zionist-Palestinian conflict (GORDON 2008).

2005, p. 63-65). In his 1960 essay “Nationalism”, Kedourie accused the “prophets” of nineteenth century nationalism, especially the Germans, of spreading this new and contagious ‘disease’ of identity. For Kedourie, politics replaced religion in the same way as for Syrian philosopher and Arab nationalist Michel Aflaq the revival of the Arab nation supposedly preceded the commandments of faith and even of Islam (but not for Lebanese historian George Antonius) (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 10). But later on, Kedourie’s early assumption regarding the role of religion in nationalist ideology both in the West and beyond evolved into a more complex approach. In his second book, *Nationalism in Asia And Africa* (1971), Kedourie argues that African and Asian nationalists imported the Western ideas of nationalism and secularism to their homelands, adapting them to their needs and eventually turning them against European imperialism itself. These new non-Western nationalists discovered that they could fuel mass emotions by turning traditional prophets into national heroes and religious holidays into national festivities, which enabled them to exploit the atavistic emotions of the masses. In this way, Smith notes, “Kedourie brought religion back into the analysis of nationalism: nationalism often became an ally, albeit a false one, of religion.” (*Ibid.*, p. 12; KEDOURIE, 1974). Fifty-five years after Kedourie described this process as a pathetic fallacy, Walzer called it “the paradox of liberation” (WALZER, 2016).

In yet a third stage of his writings Kedourie traces the origins of nationalism in distant medieval sources arguing that nationalism is the “secular heir of Christian millennialism and proclaims the same apocalyptic message.” Smith explains Kedourie’s approach (KEDOURIE, 1974, part. IV), that nationalism is exposed as “the secular, political version of heterodox religion, with the same consuming desire for purity and an all-embracing brotherly love, the same concern for the elect of faithful believers, and the same belief in the imminent advent of a new age of absolute love and justice.” (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 12). Kedourie’s initial modernist approach then evolved into a more complex position. This evolution is divided by Smith into three parts: first was the modernist approach, described by Smith as the ‘secular replacement’ shared by scholars such as Gellner and Deutsch (hereinafter); secondly, the ‘neo-traditional’, envisages a return to a transformed, radicalized and modernized

form of religion that conduct some sort of reciprocal relations with nationalism (*Ibid.*, p. 13). The third and more complex position in Kedourie's work describes nationalism as a secularized form of a millennial 'political-religion'. Here nationalism is a substitute, a kind of heterodox religion that opposes traditionalism yet inherits traditional symbols, liturgies, rituals, and messianic fervor – politicized and charged with national meanings. According to Smith this last point "may help to account for the predominant secular content but religious forms of so many nationalisms, as well as for their ability to transmute the values of traditional religion into secular political ends." (*Ibid.*, p. 14). Thus religion is seen as vital for the sources of nationalism and for its persistence and appeal, without which it is difficult to explain the depth and strength of emotion that nations and nationalism provoke. Smith however objects to Kedourie's focus on heterodoxy and millennialism. While eschatology and messianism take an important place in medieval and contemporary monotheistic religions, Smith sees nationalism as mundane and does not wait for a supernatural – divine – intervention, but rather for a human auto-emancipation, which is necessary for national fulfillment. This assertion is true of some religious-nationalisms, but is not valid in the case of strong religious-nationalism, which unites the mundane with the divine.

Kedourie's reflections on the nature of the relations between nationalism and religion were reinforced by the political reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which saw a revival of religious-nationalisms around the world – "*nationalisms that are specifically religious in form and content*", not only in an Islamic context (*Ibid.*). One of the early proponents of this trend is Conor Cruise O'Brien who wrote in 1988 a short book titled "God Land – Reflections on Religion and Nationalism", analyzing types of sacred nationalisms starting with the Bible and up to contemporary United States. O'Brien argues that "nationalism, as a collective emotional force in our culture, makes its first appearance, with explosive impact, in the Hebrew Bible. And nationalism, at this stage, is altogether indistinguishable from religion; the two are one and the same thing. God chooses a particular people and

promises them a particular land” (O’BRIEN, 1988, p. 2-3).<sup>26</sup> This fusion of religious features into nationalism was also demonstrated by George Mosse, who examined nationalism, especially in Germany, focusing on “the background, genesis and effects of national festivals, monuments, and remembrance rituals [...] as vital components of the liturgy and choreography of nationalist movements and of fascism.” (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 14-15). Jules Monnerot and Raymond Aron introduced the idea of “secular religion” through communism (MONNEROT, 1953, p. 224; ARON, 1957, p. 265-294).

Hayes, Kohn and Kedourie were all historians who worked with texts, thus their research was restricted to the ideological-political aspects of the rise of nationalism. The first who diverted his gaze from words-manufacturing elites towards a wider social and cultural direction was the social scientist Karl Deutsch. His 1953 book *Nationalism and Social Communication* was an early attempt to understand nationalism from below (DEUTSCH, 1966). Deutsch tried to tackle the lacuna in the literature of his time and developed a methodology for the social sciences to study nationalism, focusing on socio-economic modernization processes that are the base of this new and shared consciousness which is nationalism (SAND, 2006, p. 12). Focusing on mass communication, Deutsch “considers that modernization, and the explosion of communication encourage ethnicity more than national integration. The ethnic form of nationalism thus benefits from modernization, and generates the failure of the national form of nationalism which is turned towards progress and assimilation.” (BIRNBAUM, 1997). This analysis of Deutsch converges with Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt’s understandings on the modernity of fundamentalists, bringing us the realization that fundamental religious-nationalists – who see the state as a vessel of the divine, though they may well root their consciousness in some golden age taken from the past – are actually a political-totalistic and even totalitarian

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<sup>26</sup> Other scholars, such as Hedva Ben-Israel (BEN-ISRAEL, 1986) and even Adrian Hastings (HASTINGS, 1997), also make similar assertions. For this reason, in my opinion, Jewish nationalism can be considered as the ultimate model for religious-nationalism and theocracy. This is felt in particular when examined on the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hastings, which argued that “by the fifteenth century most of the main nations of western Europe can be seen to exist”, mentioned in that regard that “it seems too that the more powerfully one identified one's own nation as chosen, the more one might want to eliminate the first chosen nation, the Jews, from the face of the earth.” (HASTINGS, 1997, p. 114,198).

modern phenomenon. The most striking example of this phenomenon today is the Islamic State that emerged during the summer of 2014 in Iraq and Syria, and its wide use of mass and social media.

In 1983 two landmark essays on nationalism were published: Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. These two short essays had an immense and long-term influence on the study of nationalism (ANDERSON, 2006; GELLNER, 1983). Gellner focuses on industrialization processes, centralization, and bureaucracy as aspects of modernization which cause social cohesion and form the unified mass culture of the nation (*Ibid.*, p. 52-56). Anderson argues that neither "economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create *in themselves* the *kind*, or shape, of imagined community [...]" (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 65). It was rather the construction of culture and the role of "print capitalism" that developed the new consciousness of the nations. He argues that national identity is based on imagined rather than on actual acquaintance between members of the nation, made possible by new means of communication, most notably the simultaneous availability of printed books and newspapers in a well-defined territory: this process was coined by Anderson as "print capitalism". In 1990 Eric Hobsbawm, a prominent English historian, published his book *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780, Programme, Myth, Reality* (HOBSBAWM, 1991), which explicitly launched the post-nationalist current. Holding a Marxist view of nationalism as "a temporary and irrational relic" (DIECKHOFF et al., 2005b, p. 1), Hobsbawm asserts that "no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist [...]" since "nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so, as Renan said: getting its history wrong is part of being a nation" (HOBSBAWM, 1991, p. 12). From this moment onward, critical discussion of nationalism became common in academia. An increase in the numbers of studies holding supra-national and post-national theories from various disciplines collapsed the dogma of the antiquity and continuity of nations (SAND, 2006, p. 15). Accordingly, this tendency also deepened the secular bias: if in 1926 Carlton Hayes depicts "nationalism as a religion", in 1996 Liah Greenfeld argues that "nationalism is an essentially secular form of consciousness" and that "religion

now exists [...] mainly as a tool for the promotion of nationalist ends.” (GREENFELD, 1996a, p. 169).

Reality, so it seems, opposed the scholarly discourse: while the intellectual deconstruction of nationalism occurred, nationalism itself spread during the second half of the twentieth century, both within the communist bloc as well as the Non-Aligned and post-colonial states and the third world in general. This invited an intellectual response to the deconstructionist trend. The most manifest scholars of this counter-reaction are Walker Connor (1926-2017) and Anthony D. Smith (1939-2016), who tackled the most significant flaw in the work of Hobsbawm: the portraying of pre-modern masses as lacking any identity or popular cultures and deprived of traditions and memories. Connor emphasizes the emotional and non-rational aspects of nationalism, establishing a conceptual grounding for the study of nationalism (CONVERSI, 2004, p. 1). People do not need factual and scientific basis for their nationalist feelings: ignoring this is similar to ignoring the holy when dealing with religion.

Adrian Hastings (1929-2001), a catholic priest, a theologian, a historian and a politically involved intellectual, went one step further away from the modernist-constructivist approach. Connor and Smith argued the modern nationalism has some historical basis, Hastings, in his 1997 book “The Construction of Nationhood” combined ethnicity, religion and nationalism to argue that nationalism already existed in Europe in the Middle Ages (HASTINGS, 1997). Being the religious clerk that he was, Hastings gave Christianity a central role in this early appearance of nationalism, basing his arguments on the Bible and the ethos of the ancient Israelite polity which combined land, people and God, calling the Jews “[...] the first chosen nation” (*Ibid.*, p. 198). It is no wonder, as we shall demonstrate elsewhere in this dissertation, that religious-nationalist Jewish scholars found Hastings’ work to be a good base upon which they can establish and develop their claims.

Today most scholars refer to nationalism as a distinctively modern way of constructing collective identities, most widely connected to state-power (CALHOUN, 1998, p. 29). This goes back to Weber who linked national solidarity to language, but



also to other great 'culture value of the masses', namely a religious creed and ethnic elements, yet above all to memories of a common political destiny (GERTH et al., 2009, p. 168). Weber wrote that "insofar as there is at all a common object lying behind the obviously ambiguous term 'nation,' it is apparently located in the field of politics", offering a possible definition to the concept: "a nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own" (*Ibid.*, p. 171-172). Connor argues that due to the terminological chaos most researchers confuse the nation with the formal representation of it – the state – thus missing out the range of competing allegiances within a society, in which the informal is actually stronger than the formal. Indeed, nationalism was identified with the state, in its various expressions and forms, since the middle of the 19th century. In this respect, based on Kohn's theoretical dichotomy and the more recent civil versus ethnic typology of nationalism, Connor notes that nation based states (that is 'real' nation-states like Japan and Germany) can go as far as radical nationalism, fascism and totalitarianism, in contrast with 'weaker' or more political expression of nationalism elsewhere. For this reason, strong religious-nationalism, uniting nation, state, ethnicity and religion, are more likely to fall into radical nationalism, fascism and totalitarianism (CONNOR, 1994, p. 98-99).

Anthony D. Smith studies the complex relationships between ethnicity, nationalism, and religion since the 1970s. Smith argued that in a similar way to our above treatment of religion, whoever searches the foundations of nationalism in external factors will never understand its force, and that this is the mistake of both classical Marxism and individualistic liberalism. This understanding of nationalism calls for a "different kind of analysis of its forms and contents, one that focuses on the cultural resources of ethnic symbols, memory, myth, value, and tradition, and their expression in texts and artifacts – scriptures, chronicles, epics, music, architecture, painting, sculpture, crafts, and other media [...] in the hope of uncovering some of the fundamental sacred sources of national identity and nationalism." (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 18). It is indeed a tricky road for the researcher to take, but it is more dangerous to ignore. Smith cautiously and critically discusses issues like the covenant, the sanctity of the homeland and the status of mythic and national heroes, in his quest

to discover “some of the reasons for the wide-spread persistence of national identity in the modern world [...]” despite the common feeling that we live today in “a post national epoch” (*Ibid.*, p. 1). Smith provides a functional working definition of nationalism suitable for examining its relations with religion: “[...] *an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 24). The main ideals rising from such a definition are national autonomy, unity and identity, which together with *authenticity* furnish the main concept of nationalism. Smith then defines the ‘nation’ as “[...] *a named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members*” (*Ibid.*). The elusive and more dynamic ‘national identity’ is defined by Smith as “*the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 24-25). Despite the variety in which different nationalisms are manifested, nations are confined by interior and exterior boundaries: externally it is territory and politics, meaning the geopolitical location of the community and its political and economic resources that limit its scope for action and change; internally, the “aspirations, cultural resources, and traditions that help to create and sustain it as a nation set limits to the development of its members’ national identity”.

According to French political sociologist Alain Dieckhoff, nationalism is too often described “[...] as a totally modern phenomenon dethroning religion”, yet the facts force us to “come down firmly on such a clear cut, simplistic view, which makes an absolute separation between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, between ‘temporal’ and ‘spiritual’, between ‘politics’ and ‘religion’.” (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 128). Dieckhoff follows Durkheim in asserting that “religion was thus recognized as an element bearing witness to the permanent existence and distinct character of the group” (*Ibid.*, p. 129). Writing about the formation of Zionism, Dieckhoff distinguishes, so it seems, between religion and nationalism, but he describes the relations between the two and gives religion a prominent role in the formation of the group (*Ibid.*):

*Nationalism was not a derivative of religion, a mere dressing up of ancestral reality. By making the group itself, rather than its relationship to a higher divine principle, the major point of reference, nationalism set out to be resolutely worldly. Fitting into the world of reality in this way did not stop it getting sway over a group that till then had been essentially held together by religion. Often religion was even taken over and considered a primary manifestation of the groups 'ontological specific character'. The previous existence of a distinctive indicator such as religion even made it possible for nationalism to defuse its modernity (and hence its disruptive potential).*

According to Dieckhoff this complex dialectic is true, to varying degrees, in America, Polish, Irish and of course Jewish nationalism (*Ibid.*). It is also true for the Palestinian Arab Muslim nationalism.

#### Religious-nationalism (the Hyphen)

When Yosef Burg, the leader of the NRP during the 1970s, was asked what is more important in the Religious-Zionist identity – the Jewish religion or Zionism, his reply was “the hyphen” (KATSMAN, 2020). In some cases, as in the catholic-protestant conflict in Ireland or the Catholic-Orthodox-Muslim conflicts in Bosnia, religion is used more as a cultural mark and manipulated for the service of national ends. However, in the religiously strong form of religious-nationalism, like in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the essence of the conflict is theologically charged and its religious aspects are inseparable from its national one. Thus, strong religious-nationalism is a form of hyphenated identity, in which both elements of the compound form a portmanteau word. Both components, religion and nationalism, are at least equal elements, and in any case inseparable and interdependent in consisting this identity.

Juergensmeyer divides religious-nationalism into three types (JUERGENSMEYER, 1996a, p. 4-9): the first is termed ethnic religious-nationalism – linking people and land and politicizing religion by employing religious identities for political ends (both Catholics and protestants in Ireland; Muslims in Chechnya and Tajikistan; Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosnians in the former Yugoslavia; Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka; Muslims in Kashmir etc.). The second type is

ideological religious-nationalism – this approach *religionizes* politics by putting political issues and struggles within a sacred context (as in the Islamic revolution in Iran). The third is ethno-ideological religious-nationalism – this type combines the first two and is both ethnic and ideological. This last type seems the most suitable for the Israeli-Palestinian case study since religious violence issued by fundamentalists from both sides is directed both against ideological foes from within their ethnic group and against their ethnic enemy. This approach also demands a more thorough study of the connections between religious-nationalism and ethnicity (FOX, 1999, p. 431-436; COAKLEY, 2002, p. 206-226).<sup>27</sup>

On top of these three types of religious-nationalism are the manners through which we can study the connection between religion and nationalism. Brubaker identified four such approaches (BRUBAKER, 2012):<sup>28</sup> (1) treating religion and nationalism, along with ethnicity and race, as analogous phenomena; (2) specifying ways in which religion helps explain things about nationalism – its origin, its power or its distinctive character in particular cases; (3) treating religion as part of nationalism, and specifying modes of interpenetration and intertwining; (4) positing a distinctively religious form of nationalism.

The first of these approaches indicates that religious-nationalism involves faith in some external power, feelings of awe and reverence, and ceremonial rites. This brings us back to Smith’s description of nationalism as a “new religion of the people” both in a substantive sense as it entails a quest for a kind of worldly collective salvation, and in a functional sense (Anthony SMITH, 2003b, p. 26; BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 3). This new religion both “parallels and competes with traditional religions”

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<sup>27</sup> This connection is usually studied in the context of conflicts. Jonathan Fox analyzes the theories dealing with ethnic and national conflicts in which religion is a central factor.

Paul Zawadzki, whose conclusions are opposite to those of most scholars cited in this paper, uses the term ‘ethnolatry’ to convey the notion of the sacralization of the nation and the absolutization of identity (ZAWADSKI, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Brubaker also discusses three ways of considering religion and nationalism alongside ethnicity, under more encompassing conceptual rubrics: as a mode of identification; as a mode of social organization; and as a way of framing political claims. In this regard ethnicity and nationalism, just like religion, can be understood as “perspectives on the world rather than things in the world” (BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 3-4). Yet religion is an order that goes beyond this world, for this reason many religious-nationalists consider the religious element to be more important than nationalism and politics, the last two becoming a tool in the service of religious ends.

(Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 41-42; BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 3). The heroes of the nation embody and exemplify such authenticity and sacrifice themselves for the community. They are the equivalent of prophets and messiah-saviors. Posterity, in which the legendary deeds of the fallen live on, is the national version of the afterlife (through rituals of memorialization).

According to Brubaker it is clear that religion influences the origin and development of nationalism through the appropriation of religious symbols and narratives. But it does so in more indirect ways: for example the Protestant reformation contributed to the development of nationalism through the process of confessionalization. Seeing religion as deeply imbricated or intertwined with nationalism rather than as something external to it, transforms the former into a part of the national phenomenon. This happens in two main ways, the first of which being the coincidence of religious and national boundaries. In its stronger variant the nation is imagined as composed of all and only those who belong to a particular religion (Sikh & Jewish nationalisms), while in weaker forms religion serves to mark ethnicity or nationality, yet the religious community extends beyond the nation. For this reason, in our view, empirically testing the robustness of these assumptions by applying them to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will prove the boundaries of this theory and the specificity of this case study.

Religion does not only serve to define the boundaries of the nation; it supplies myths, metaphors and symbols, central elements in the discursive or iconic representation of the nation (in a way that relates to the study of discourse) (*Ibid.*, p. 9). Yet focusing on language and discourse in our regard entails some methodological difficulties, as noted by Brubaker: it is hard to assert that every use of 'religious' language and rhetoric in political context is indeed religious and not merely a metaphor, or to judge the degree of religiosity within the religious language being put to political use, for example with the term 'sacred values'. To properly judge and measure this use, Brubaker suggests to conduct a systematic discourse-analytic study of the field of nation-talk as a whole, which would avoid sampling on the phenomenon of interest (*Ibid.*, p. 11).

Friedland conceptualizes religious-nationalism as a particular type of nationalism bounding together state, territory, and culture. According to Friedland the power of religion is in that it provides “models of authority”, “imaginings of an ordering power” and that it is a “totalizing order capable of regulating every aspect of life”. Simply put, religious-nationalism joins state, territory and culture by managing, beyond national politics, private life, focusing to a great extent on family, gender and sexuality (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 390; BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 12-13). When religion is the key diacritical marker that defines the parties to a given conflict, like in Northern Ireland, the conflict itself is not necessarily about which religion is the true religion. Political rhetoric will use religious motifs, images and symbols to appeal to people’s religious affiliation (the cultural group), not necessarily to their religious faith. Thus, religious-nationalism has a recruitment potential that goes beyond the limits of its religious dogma.

Even in the strong sense of religious nationalism, the popular resentment against the secular political and cultural elites is used by religious-nationalists as a means of recruitment, demonstrating once again that religious movements with a strong anti-secular bent can appeal to people with resentments that sometimes have quite non-religious sources (BERGER, 1999, p. 246-247). Such strong religious-nationalism exists in the USA, India and Pakistan and throughout the Middle East, obviously in Iran but also in Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Iraq (in a new form within the “Islamic State”) and in Israel and Palestine. Brubaker and Friedland argue that religious movements cannot ignore the state and are obliged to act within its framework if they seek power, but this does not necessarily mean that they are nationalists. Brubaker warns us from overstressing the concept of nationalism: “it must be limited to forms of politics, ideology or discourse that involve a central orientation to ‘the nation’; it cannot be extended to encompass all forms of politics that work in and through nation-states”. According to Brubaker the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement - Hamas is an example for combining “a classical state-seeking nationalist agenda with a distinctively religious programme of Islamisation, although not without considerable tension.” (BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 14).

Bearing this in mind, religious-nationalism in its most manifest expression is a complex set of identification in which both components of the combination are inseparable, when one's nationality is 'religious' and when one's religion is 'national'. In the less strong manifestations of religious nationalism, one can belong to a nation and in addition be religious; one might even connect the two, in some way left open for interpretations. But in its strong manifestations, a symbolic hyphen connects the two components of the phrase, demonstrating the inseparability and interdependence of both parts of a national-religious identity. Both adjectives, though not identical, are equal in importance. Strong religious-nationalism plays an important role in ethnic, religious and national conflicts throughout the world. It seems particularly striking in the contemporary Middle East, where it can be argued to be exhibited not only by fundamentalists and dissident groups, but also by states and political parties, and appears in mainstream social norms. To better understand this, we need to be able to assert what the place of religion is in a national movement: this interesting and important question is hard to answer, both on the individual and the collective level. How can an observer of the Israeli or Palestinian society evaluate the extent to which it is religion that motivates national activists? When discussing the creation of national consciousness, can we separate feelings of rage, deprivation, insult, and fear, from economic, religious, cultural, and ideological motives? Moreover, can we even separate between religion and nationalism in the Muslim-Arab-Palestinian and the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli national movements and oppose them as if they were two separate systems? (ZELKOVIZ, 2012).

#### Strong Religious-Nationalism

*If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion (DURKHEIM, 1964b, p. 419).*

Religion and nationalism are both independent phenomena that stand for themselves, completely sui-generis and irreducible to any other in the human experience. Nevertheless in the study of religious-nationalism, political and 'national' aspects are usually treated as superior to religion (GREENFELD, 1996b). This imbalance is all the more astounding when realizing that religion stands on its own as the

ultimate proto-institution and the “source from which all other institutions sprang at the very dawn of each society’s history ” (POGGI, 1971, p. 253-254; POGGI, 1973, p. 236). Thus, any definition of nationalism that ignores religion will be incomplete. Smith defined the different religious-nationalisms around the world as “nationalisms that are specifically religious in form and content” (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 14), yet as we saw some manifestations of religious-nationalisms around the world use religion merely as a cultural marker in a political conflict. Thus, Smith’s definition seems valid only for a specific type of nationalism characterized by especially strong religiosity, in which the two adjectives are fused together into one conceptual unit, creating a hyphenated identity that produces a specifically strong kind of religious-nationalism.

When religion and nationalism merge successfully within the framework of the nation-state, politics becomes a religion, religion is politicized, and the nation-state is transformed into a “vehicle of the divine” (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 381). Such a religious state is called a ‘theocracy’, a term coined by the first century Jewish-Roman historian Josephus Flavius to describe the Jewish political-religious form of governance throughout antiquity, “by ascribing the authority and the power to God” rather than man (JOSEPHUS, 2014). The most manifest modern theocracy of our time is the Islamic republic of Iran, founded in the 1979 Islamic revolution. Both Judaism and Islam carry the inner religious and political baggage of a potential theocracy.

The relation between religion and nationalism is complex and multilayered. Certain nationalisms are related to the reinforcement of pre-modern religious tradition of some ethnic communities. Drawing examples from the Israeli-Palestinian case-study, such are the case of *Gush Emunim* (block of the faithful) in Israel and of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas. In other cases, we see that religion goes against nationalism, as with some pan-Islamic Salafi movements and Jewish Ultraorthodox fundamentalist ideologies (ALMOND et al., 2003b). On the other hand, some nationalisms negate the public and collective role of religion, as can be seen in the French concept of *Laïcité*, in (the former) Turkish Kemalism and in a variety of socialist nationalisms; while others rely on religion, such as in Poland, Russia, Greece, India and Israel. Juergensmeyer points out those religious-nationalisms which,



in their strong manifestation, aspire to force the nation to abandon “the corruption and alienation of such secular and often atheist nationalisms to what they consider the true and holy path of the community.” (SMITH, 2003, p. 14; JUERGENSMEYER, 1996).

While western scholars tend to focus on the secular aspects of nationalism and to subject religion as a tool in the service of national ends, from the perspective of strong religious-nationalists “it is secular nationalism, and not religion, that has gone wrong. They see the Western models of nationhood-both democratic and socialist-as having failed, and they view religion as a hopeful alternative, a base for criticism and change.” (*Ibid.*, p. 2). Strong religious-nationalists are often seen by Western liberals as religious fanatics (FRIEDLAND, 2001). On the ground they are devoted political activists seriously attempting to reformulate the modern language of politics and provide a new basis for the nation-state (JUERGENSMEYER, 1996, p. xiii). As nationalism and religion meet and mold, strong religious-nationalism emerges as a new phenomenon, the study of which requires a new and separate approach. Inspired by a historic golden age while rooted in modernism, SRN is influenced by the enlightenment, while aiming to create a new order, in which the particular nation-state is based on religion.

### Conclusions

Nationalism and religion are both independent phenomena in the human experience, completely sui-generis and irreducible. Religion is one of the sources of modern nationalism. In some cases – when one’s nationality is ‘religious’ and when one’s religion is ‘national’ – the two mold into religious-nationalism. Strong religious-nationalism appears when the religious element stand on its own, equal to the national one, or even precedes it in importance. The Israeli-Palestinian case study is a classic example of SRN. Religious-Zionism, Kookism, Gush Emunim (block of the faithful) and their contemporary ideological and institutional expressions in Israel on the one hand, and the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas on the other hand, are both prototypes of a SRN that is bound together in an ongoing national,

political, territorial and religious conflict. RZ and Hamas are a manifest example of SRN as laid out in this chapter. Both of them awakened in the early 1990s, provoked by the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. RZ and Hamas both stood in the front of the struggle to halt the Oslo Process from reaching a permanent peace treaty. Their furious struggle against the peace process bore fruit beyond expectations – not only the collapse of the Oslo process, but also the fact that the two national-religious forces, Hamas and RZ, became hegemonic powers in their respective societies .

This shift from margins to hegemony is depicted in details in the second part of this dissertation (chapters 3-4). Nevertheless, SRN in Israel and Palestine stem from a deeper sources from within the bosom of both national movements. Both Israeli-Zionist and Palestinian national movements are based, at the outset, on a religious ethos. This fact renders Israeli and Palestinian nationalism more liable to become strongly religious in reaction to a threat on the basic themes of their narrative. Moreover, as the following chapter demonstrates, the Jewish-Zionist and Palestinian-Muslim clash carried from an early point a deep national-religious sentiment connected to sacred and national symbolic time and space. Thus, the latent SRN allegedly awakened in the 1990s was actually always there, at the very foundation of the national thought, waiting to burst out and re-claim its place .



## Chapter 2: Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim Strong Religious-Nationalism

Nationalism as a “political religion” is, according to Smith, that of “a sacred communion of the people” (Anthony SMITH, 2003a, p. 32). Smith considers the Arab-Israeli conflict as “the most intractable example” of this dynamic. He argues that this conflict’s “bitterness can only be explained if we realize that the Arab-Israeli conflict involves a fratricidal struggle between two religions and religious communities, however much they dress their dispute in secular terminology” (Anthony D. SMITH, 1973, p. 24). Indeed, our case study – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – is a political, national and territorial dispute, yet it is painted in strong religious shades from the outset. According to Smith, “throughout the Palestine conflict religion has played a leading part” (*Ibid.*). Let us turn now to review this argument in detail, and through this, to understand how and why the Arab-Israeli conflict constitutes a mode of strong religious-nationalism.

### The Religious Roots of Nationalism in Israel/Palestine

Both the Zionist-Jewish and the Palestinian (Muslim) national movements, despite their secular appearances at times, are based from the outset on the interpretations of religious traditions. For this reason, it is worthwhile to delve into the national-religious ethos themselves, not into their historicity, but rather to lead a comparative examination of the way these central ethos gave way to strong religious-nationalism. As already mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, Religion *per se* is at the heart of the conflict in the sense that “winning” the national-political struggle would also entail a “theological” religious victory (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 113; TZIDKIYAHU, 2015a, p. 4).

This strong religiosity is a natural consequence of the place under conflict – the Holy Land – the cradle of Judaism and Christianity and the third holiest place in Islam, historically the manifest arena of the encounter and clash between the “West” and “Islam”, and immersed in the memories of the crusades of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This memory generates a geographical-political-theological competition. Such

contestation is reflected in the notions of a “Holy Land”, “Promised” to a “Chosen People”. When both movements share these notions, the national-religious collision becomes unavoidable, generating a dynamic of escalation, radicalization and religionization of the national discourse altogether, paving the way for strong religious-nationalism to move from the political and social margins to the center.

The Holy Land,<sup>29</sup> sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is a long and narrow strip of land, stretched altogether on a south-north axis between the Arabah valley and the Jordan River in the East, through a central mountain plain, and the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea in the West. Today this land is called both **Israel**, the national territory of Israeli-Jews; and **Palestine**, the national territory of Palestinian-Arabs, the vast majority of which are Muslims.<sup>30</sup> Conflicts involving sacred spaces provide spatial platforms in which religious, ethnic, national and political tensions surface, making such conflicts more vulnerable to violence (HASSNER, 2009). This is especially true when it comes to the Holy Land, with its central, shared and contested sacred places. For this reason, it is only natural that the clash between the Zionist-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim national movements takes at some point a strong national-religious turn based on the notion of sacred places, territory and holy sites.

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<sup>29</sup> In Hebrew the Holy Land is *eret hakodesh* (ארץ הקודש) in Arabic it is *al-ard al-Muqaddasa* (الأرض المقدسة). Much was written on the conceptual notion of the Holy Land, its rediscovery and invention. I will mention shortly only a handful of relevant sources: Yehoshua Ben-Arieh wrote about “the rediscovery of the Holy Land in the nineteenth century” (Magnes Press 1979); Zachary Foster handed in a somewhat poetic PhD dissertation about “the Invention of Palestine” (Princeton 2017) and Haim Gerber wrote about how the term “Holy Land” was used by Palestinian Muslims throughout history (GERBER, 2008, p. 51-53). Similarly, to Ben Arieh, Alain Dieckhoff also stresses the return of the Holy Land into European consciousness with Napoleon Bonaparte's French campaign of 1798–1801 in Egypt and Syria (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 154-155).

<sup>30</sup> The Palestinian-Arab Christians are a small minority within the Palestinian society. The vast majority of Palestinian Arabs are Sunny Muslims. Palestinian Arab Christians affiliate to diverse denominations. According to Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Christian Lutheran pastor and an academic, in 2017 the Christian population of historic Palestine (Israel, West Bank and Gaza), “makes up, at best, no more than 1.7% of the total population [...]” and in 2014 in Gaza alone there were “approximately 1,212 Christians [...] from an estimated total population of 1.82 million” (RAHEB, 2017, p. 9). Palestinian-Christians do not express separate national-religious political aspiration. For these reasons I will not deal specifically with the Palestinian-Christians in this dissertation. Maayan Raveh from the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem is currently writing a PhD dissertation on the Theological Discourse about the Promised Land: The Influence of Palestinian Liberation Theology on Contemporary Christian Thought. Raveh examines in her study the work of Palestinian Christian theologians and the Kairos Palestine Document, and the intricate interactions between Christian theologies and traditions and political activism in the context of the political conflict.

In regard to relations towards the Holy Land there are some striking similarities between the Zionist-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim national-religious ethos of *chosenness*, based on the connection of a specific people, a community of destination, to a promised and holy land. In the coming paragraphs I do not intend to deal with historical phenomenon of the ancient world, only historical and archeological scientific research based on the study of the ancient Near East can deal with such questions. Here I wish to examine the historical roots of modern and contemporary Zionist and Palestinian national thought. I argue that both Israeli and Palestinian national-religious stories examined here contain an ethos of divine selection that lead to a somewhat similar construction of a national narrative and collective memory.

In both the Israeli and the Palestinian cases, the revelation of the scriptures and the establishment of (what we now call) religion, took place outside the Holy Land (Sinai/Mecca and Medina). In both the Zionist-Jewish and the Palestinian-Muslim national-religious ethos the establishment of a primordial political-religious entity in the Holy Land started with a victorious religious war and military conquest (occupation), which was followed by a period of settlement. Once this formative stage was established, a period of consolidation followed, focused around a center. This center was in both cases the veneration of Jerusalem as a Holy City and the elevation of its political importance. The manifest expression of this consolidation was the construction of monumental and central religious shrines in the Holy City, the Jewish Temple (10<sup>th</sup> century BC) and the Islamic Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque – al-Haram a-Sharif (7<sup>th</sup> century AD), all three were erected in the Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade. Then paradise is lost.

In both stories, the inhabitants of ancient theocracies suffered a similar fate:<sup>31</sup> a foreign conquests, destruction, loss and exile. In an article titled "exodus" Benedict Anderson quotes Lord Acton's assertion that "exile is the nursery of nationality" (ANDERSON, 1994, p. 2). The Jewish "first temple period" ended with the Babylonian conquest of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and the "Early Islamic Period" ended with the arrival

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<sup>31</sup> While the kingdom of Judah was indeed closer to the model of a theocratic state, Islamic Palestine was part of various empires, thus not a states *per-se*. Yet these Islamic empires were indeed "theocratic" in essence and were under the direct control of the caliphate of payed homage to a Muslim Caliph.

of the crusaders to Jerusalem in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Judaism is a small religion, forged by millenias of existence as a minority in a diasporic situation. Islam is a world religion, which was created as part of an empire which for the most part was the religion of the ruling power. Despite these striking differences in experience, it is worth mentioning that both Jewish and Muslim “exiles” from the Holy Land were not only in a situation of forced dislocation, but also included the loss of political sovereignty to the religious other. Jews and Muslims understood exile as an idea and a political situation, which was later construed into a collective ethos, even though the historical facts prove that many Jews and Arabs remained in the occupied land after the Babylonian, Roman and Crusader occupations (respectively).<sup>32</sup>

The short Islamic “exile” from Palestine during the first crusades’ occupation, which lasted for almost ninety years (1099-1187AD) generated the ethos of a Palestinian destiny of protecting the Islamic holy shrines in Jerusalem and the blessed lands around it from a foreign takeover. Zionism (and the British Mandate) was thus perceived as yet another, modern, crusade. The first Babylonian Jewish exile also lasted for about 70 years during the sixth century BC, ended with the return to Zion and the reconstruction of the Temple. The fact that the first exile was short and had a “happy ending” shaped the way the second Jewish exile (by the Romans) was perceived. It also supplied the Jews with a recipe of how this exile should end. This experience, as we shall see, also shaped the Jewish-Zionist view of the Arabs. Similarly, the Palestinian exodus of the 1948 Nakba is anchored in this consciousness of exile, receiving a conceptual, historical and theological depth.

The Islamic ruler of Tripoli in the early twelve century Fakhr al-Mulk Ibn Ammar wrote that “the Franj (i.e. the Crusaders) [...] occupied all of Syria and exiled the Muslims of that country” (MAALOUF, 1984, p. 57). At the same time, many Muslim believers regarded exile as a religious duty and expressed shock when they realized that “some Muslims, ‘slaves to their love for their native land’, were willing to accept

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<sup>32</sup> Israeli historian Daniella Talmon-Heller studied the lives of Muslims under the crusader rule in the Holy Land (TALMON-HELLER, 1992). Israel Yuval and Shlomo Sand (among others) criticized the notion of Jewish exile and mention their presence in the Holy Land after the destruction and during the exile (YUVAL, 2006; SAND, 2009).

life in occupied territory” arguing that “there is no excuse before God [...] for a Muslim to remain in a city of unbelief” (*Ibid.*, p. xv), indicating more than anything that some Muslims remained in the land to live and worship under Christian Crusader rule while others saw exile as a forced condition or a political and religious necessity.<sup>33</sup> Muhammad and the first Muslims have set a model of voluntary exiles, the first immigration to Abyssinia, and the second immigration (*al-hijra*) to al-Madina.<sup>34</sup>

Nowadays, the leading hypothesis among Judaic scholars is that the Jewish concept of exile is a constructed myth more than a historical reality of a complete forced displacement (YUVAL, 2006).<sup>35</sup> Israeli historian Israel Yuval demonstrates how the Jewish myth of exile was constructed during the first centuries after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple, dressing the second destruction in the clothing of the first, Babylonian exile: “In other words, it seems that the triple expression—destruction of the House, burning of the Temple, exile from the land—originally (in the sources from the Land of Israel) referred to the First Temple and were applied to the Second Temple [...]” in retro perspective by the Jews in Babylonia (*Ibid.*, p. 21). Yuval also relates to the Zionist narrative of the end the Jewish “exile”, and asserts that “it is impossible to ignore the parallel between the myth of Jews driven from their historical homeland and the opposing myth: the abandonment of the land by the Palestinians. The common Zionist view presents the flight of the Palestinians from their settlements in the years 1947–48 as ‘leaving.’ That word has moral and political consequences.” (*Ibid.*, p. 18).

Ben-Zion Dinur (1884-1973), a historian, an orthodox rabbi, a Zionist politician and Israel’s first Minister of Education (on behalf of Mapai, the predecessor of the

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<sup>33</sup> In the Encyclopedia of Islam (second edition), under the article *Hidjra* (immigration), it is said that for “Muslims residing in the *Dār al-Ḥarb*, emigration to the *Dār al-Islām* (*hidjra*) is a recommendable act. If they cannot perform their religious duties in freedom, emigration becomes obligatory. These prescriptions are founded on *Ḳur’ān*, IV, 97-100 and some traditions, like Muḥammad’s saying: ‘I have nothing to do with Muslims residing amongst the polytheists’ (Abū Dāwūd, *djihād*, 95; Nasā’ī, *ḳasāma*, 27).” Some muslim schools of thought “hold that emigration is always obligatory” according to the tradition “No emigration after the Conquest of Mecca” (PETERS, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> Both immigrations are described in details in the Prophet’s canonical biography “The Life of Muhammad” written by the eighth century historian Muhammad Ibn Ishaq (IBN ISHAQ, 1967, p. 146-167, 219-231).

<sup>35</sup> In his article Yuval also sums up the academic literature on the development of the Jewish understanding of ‘exile’ and “diaspora” (YUVAL, 2006, p. 18-19 n. 1).



Israeli Labor Party), wrote in his voluminous work “Israel in Exile” that the Exile of Israel really started only with the Arab conquest of the Land of Israel in 637 AD (DINUR, 1962, p. 5-6):

*Until then the history of Israel was mainly a history of a nation that dwells in its land [...] the process of pushing the people away from the Land [...] took place mainly because of the continuous penetration of the desert dwellers (=the Arabs) to the Land [...] the decisive battle in the war was the occupation of the Land by the Arabs, the expropriation of Jewish lands by the occupiers and the creation of a new national majority in the Land. For this reason we start only from these times the period of Israel in exile.*

Dinur proposed a new, entirely Zionist, history, in which it is not the Romans but the Arabs that occupied the land and took it from the Jews (YUVAL, 2005, p. 25). Obviously this view was influenced by the new struggle of Zionism against the Arabs. Similarly, Muslim, Arab and Palestinian writers see the new Palestinian exodus as an embodiment of the ancient Jewish occupation of the Holy Land, and the Modern Jews as an unchanging meta-historical embodiment of the Jews as they appear in the Quran (SABRI, 2011; TAJI-FAROUKI, 1998).

Both the Islamic exile after crusaders occupation and the Jews first exile under the Babylonians lasted less than a hundred years, a time span in which the memory of first-hand witnesses of the events is kept alive. In both cases a culture of longing to Jerusalem evolved during the years in exile. The famous hymn in Psalms 137 captures well the Jewish longing to Jerusalem during the first exile: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”. The Islamic exile from Jerusalem during the Crusader’s rule caused a surge in the dissemination of “The Merits of Jerusalem” (*Fadā'il Bayt al-Maqdis*), an early genre of Islamic literature that elevated the status of Jerusalem in Islam (SIVAN, 1971; LIVNE-KAFRI, 1995).<sup>36</sup> This ideological and literary consolidation around Jerusalem contributed to the military

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<sup>36</sup> The most important composition of manuscripts of this genre appeared at the first half of the eleventh century, compiling and preserving earlier materials from the seventh and the eighth centuries (LIVNE-KAFRI, 1995).

victory of the Muslims over the crusaders.<sup>37</sup> In both cases this loss, we know today, was but a temporary break. Jews and Muslims came back to their lost Jerusalem. Retrieving their desecrated shrines in the city symbolized their renewed political rule over the Holy Land as a whole. Such a return of a people to their land is perceived as a miraculous event. Guided by the divine, the chosen people returns against all odds to its promised land. Reestablishing the shrines in Jerusalem and renewing the liturgy in them symbolizes the renewal of political rule and of past glory. Such a return, after less than a hundred years of exile, reaffirmed and perpetuated the transcendental connection between the “nation” and the place, transforming it to a divine and cosmic bond. It formed a meta-historic connection, a collective memory that transcends thousands of years of severance. This is the historical *topos* which shapes the modern Zionist and Palestinian nationalism, elevating their connection to the place into a transcendental and a-historic bond. This *topos* shapes not only the internal relations between nationalism and religion in each movement, but also influences the nature of the encounter between Jews and Arabs during the national era in modern Palestine/Israel, transforming it into a strong national-religious clash.

As in every national movement there were early expressions of Zionist and Palestinian nationalisms, some sort of proto-nationalism, decades (sometimes

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<sup>37</sup> The Islamic literature of “The Merits of Jerusalem” existed in early Islam, possibly already during the rule of the Umayyad dynasty. It is certain that they existed since Abu Bakr al-Wasiti (d. 932), about two centuries before the crusades. During the Crusaders these merits were re-used and re-disseminated. We have at least 3 manuscripts from the 11th century, yet this genre especially thrived after the Crusader occupation of Jerusalem and served the propaganda towards a Jihad to liberate the Holy Land from the Crusaders. See Emanuel Sivan's first book, *L'Islam et la Croisade* (1967); also Sivan, “The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam” in his *Interpretations of Islam*, 75-106; Sivan, “La genèse de la contre-croisade: un traité Damasquin du début du XIIIe siècle” in: *Les relations des pays d'Islam avec le monde latin du milieu du Xe siècle au milieu du XIIIe siècle. Articles réunis par Françoise Micheau*, pp. 26-51, Paris, 2000. Prof. Isaac Hasson wrote extensively on the early Islamic literature of *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas* (praises of Jerusalem): *Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas of Abu Bakr al-Wasiti* (1979); “Muslim Literature in Praise of Jerusalem: *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis*,” *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, 1 (1981); “The Muslim View of Jerusalem—The Qur'an and Hadith” in J. Prawer and H. Ben-Shammai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem, The Early Muslim Period 638-1099*, (1996). Ofer Livne-Kafri also published several articles on the topic and a scientific edition of the Arabic manuscript: *Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Musharrāf b. al-Murajjā b. Ibrāhīm al-Maqdisī, Kitāb Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al-Khalīl wa-Fada'il al-Shām* (Abu Maali b. Murajja: The merits of Jerusalem, Hebron and Syria). For more information on the pre-crusader Islamic sanctity of Jerusalem see: S. Mourad, “The Symbolism of Jerusalem in Early Islam”, in T. Mayer/S. Mourad (eds.), *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*, London 2008, 86-102; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*; I. Hasson, “The Muslim View of Jerusalem: The Qur'an and Hadith” in J. Prawer/H. Ben-Shammai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period, 638-1099*, New York 1996, 349-385.

centuries) before the actual foundation of the national movement per se. In both cases, the harbingers of Zionism and of Palestinian nationalism were of a religious nature. As we shall see below, most (if not all) of the early proponents of Zionism up to Leon Pinsker's 1882 "Auto-Emancipation" were rabbis or religious figures (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 13-14, 154-155);<sup>38</sup> similarly most of the early expressions of particular proto-national Palestinian identity were religious-based and evolved around religious feelings and holy sites (GERBER, 2008).

It is interesting to examine how each side related to the emergence of the proto-national movements of the other side. Indeed, the religious elements in these embryonic movements was clearly observed by the other side. At the dawn of the Ottoman period, during the early years of the Zionist-Arab encounter in the Holy Land,<sup>39</sup> Zionists and Arabs often saw one another in religious term (GRIBETZ, 2014). Nationalist feelings indeed motivated many Arabs and Jews back in those days, and each side was certainly aware of the developing nationalism of the other, yet as Gribetz's analysis of mutual perceptions in late Ottoman Palestine indicates, "categories and interpretations were more expansive than a single-minded focus on nationalism would permit" (*Ibid.*, p. 4). Such perceptions continued into British Mandatory Palestine and beyond, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A letter Zionist leader Eliezer Rokeah sent in 1886 to Leon Pinsker, reflects some of the most primal Zionist attitudes towards the Arab inhabitants of Palestine.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Leon Pinsker (1821–1891) was a Russian-Polish Jewish physician from Odessa which became a pioneer Zionist activist, considered to be one of the founding fathers of Jewish territorialism and of Zionism. In 1882 Pinsker published a pamphlet in German titled *Auto-Emancipation (Selbstemanzipation)*. This text soon became the founding document of Zionist activity. In his pamphlet Pinsker discussed antisemitism, Jewish national consciousness and the idea of Jewish self-rule. Following his writing Pinsker founded, alongside figure such as Rabbi Samuel Mohilever (1824–1898) and Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843-1910), the *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) movement, consolidating several Jewish associations that appeared between 1881-1884 into one movement, which led to the first wave of Zionist immigration from Eastern Europe of 1882-1903.

<sup>39</sup> Their latter-day descendants are the Israelis and Palestinians.

<sup>40</sup> Eliezer Rokeah (1854-1914) was a Jerusalemite Jew of the Old *Yishuv* (Hebrew: *haYishuv haYashan*, the Jewish communities of the Palestine during the Ottoman period). Rokeah was a prominent writer and journalist and unlike most members of his community he was also a Zionist activist. Rokeah was a descendant of Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Amsterdam (1665-1742), who immigrated in 1740 from Amsterdam to the Holy city of Safad in Palestine. Rokeah is traditionally considered to be a descendant of Rabbi Elazar of Germiza (Mainz), a famous 12th century Jewish sage, with a lineage going back to King David. This claim that was refuted recently by the ultraorthodox Rabbi Joseph Kwadrat, a London based historian studying Jewish genealogies and family trees. In any case the Rokeah Family produced

The letter, a relatively less familiar source, demonstrates these religious based proto-national Palestinian feelings as seen in Zionist-Jewish eyes. This document shows that Palestinian local patriotism at the time was immersed in religious feelings. In his letter Rokeah describes the collective feelings of the local Arabs, seeing themselves as better than the ruling elite of Ottoman Turks because of their historical precedence and seniority in Islam. According to Rokeah the Arabs of Palestine “are comfortably leaning to follow the religious faith” (ROKEACH, 1886, p. 768-770 doc 203; TZIDKIYAHU, 2012, p. 11). For this reason, Rokeah notes, the local Arabs follow notable Jerusalemite families carrying religious authority, considered to be direct offspring of the Prophet Muhammad (*Ashraf*).

In Palestine those traditional leaders, described by Albert Hourani as the “politics of notables” (HOURANI, 1968), were Ashraf and large land owners from families such as Abd al-Hadi and Tuqan in Nablus; Shukeiri in Acre; Tamimi and Ja’bari in Hebron; al-Ghusayn in Ramla and Nashashibi, Nusayba, Khalidi, Dajani and of course al-Husseini from Jerusalem. They became the leaders of the emerging Palestinian national movement (PAPÉ, 1997, p. 166-167; TZIDKIYAHU, 2012, p. 11).<sup>41</sup>

This early Zionist recognition of what can be seen as Palestinian proto-nationalism was later developed into a set of complex nuances which focused to a great extent on social class (which was the preferred approach of the hegemonic socialist Zionist leadership). Historian Haim Gerber notes that “beyond some general points, it is somewhat difficult and possibly misleading to talk generally of Zionist views” regarding Palestinian nationalism, and thus it is “preferable to deal with individual thinkers.” (GERBER, 2008, p. 31). Gerber notes that David Ben-Gurion, the most prominent Zionist political leader, was also an important Zionist-Jewish thinker

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leaders and prominent members in both the Zionist movement and in several Hasidic courts, especially the leadership of the Hasidic dynasty of Belz.

<sup>41</sup> The social layer of Ottoman *‘ayān* (the traditional Arab leadership of local notables) in Palestine, a district of Islamic religious significance, was based on religious status and lineage. In the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and more so after WWI (1914-1918), as societies changed and adopted modern nationalism’s ideology and structure, the Palestinian traditional notables adapted and transformed into national leadership. This adaptation represents a continuation of the traditional religion-based structures in modern national form (TZIDKIYAHU, 2012, p. 10-11). Maybe such continuum represents the specific religious character of Palestinian nationalism stemming out of the religious attribute of Palestine as the Islamic Blessed Land surrounding the al-Aqsa Mosque that is mentioned in the Quran (17:1).

on the issue of the Palestinian Arabs during the British Mandate. He adds that Ben-Gurion tacitly recognized the Palestinian collective identity, but openly spoke of them as “a crowd, incited and inflamed by the fire of religion and fanaticism” (*Ibid.*, p. 34).<sup>42</sup> This conscious belittling of Palestinian nationalism undoubtedly served a political cause with the British.

Just like the Zionist leadership of the British Mandate, many Israeli (Zionist) historians of the Palestinians tend to adopt constructivist attitudes towards Palestinian nationalism (Meir LITVAK, 2009; PORATH, 1974), without necessarily applying similar standards on other national movements, mainly their own, as Gerber demonstrated (GERBER, 2008, p. 34-36). Palestinian modernist historian Musa Budeiri from Birzeit University is an interesting example of a Palestinian constructivist view. Unlike the Palestinian national elite, according to Budeiri most Palestinians during the British Mandate did not hold a national identity but purely a religious one. This is why, according to Budeiri, the elite mobilized the masses through Islam (BUDEIRI, 1997, p. 196; GERBER, 2008, p. 37).

Similarly, to Budeiri, Israeli historian of the Palestinian national movement Yehoshua Porath, one of the pioneers of academic writing on the emergence of Palestinian nationalism, also emphasized the religious discourses of the Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini (1895-1974) as exploiting religious symbols (PORATH, 1974; PORATH, 1977). Without decisively ruling in this dilemma, it is clear that both national movements carry with them a traditional religious baggage of identity from which their modern nationalism evolved (REITER, 2017).

Zionists used religious symbols and images of holy places such as the Tower of David and the Western Wall in Jerusalem and the Menorah – the manifest Jewish symbol in antiquity - to mobilize Jewish religious feelings. For example, the title on the front page of the Yiddish language weekly *Dos idishe folk* from April 30, 1920,<sup>43</sup> reads

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<sup>42</sup> Under the sub-titles “Zionism and the Palestinians” Gerber provides a critical summary of the different approaches towards the Palestinian collective and national consciousness held by prominent Zionist leaders and later also by several Israeli historians (GERBER, 2008, p. 30-37).

<sup>43</sup> A Yiddish language weekly published in New York as the official organ of the Zionist federation in the USA. The drawing was painted by Leon Israel (Lola, 1887-1955). A copy of the newspaper is taken from the collection of the Jewish Press in the USA/ the Yiddish Press Section of the Hebrew Union College

“A dream come true” (דער חלום פֿערווירקליכט). Beneath the title figures an imaginary drawing of a massive procession in which a multitude of people are making their way to Jerusalem, and above them, standing on a hill, is Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, holding a sheet – the protocols of the First Zionist Congress held in Basel on 1897. Jerusalem is depicted in a non-realistic manner in the drawing, an imaginary city with towers and minarets. In the center of the city, a large dome arises, almost certainly the Islamic Dome of the Rock built on the center of the Holy Esplanade Jews refer to as the Temple Mount. From the top of the dome the Zionist flag fly.

The Muslim Palestinians used their own symbolic religious baggage. First and foremost, the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, which bestows its sanctity on the entire land of Palestine, became the symbolic and physical center of Palestinian nationalism (as will be explained below in this chapter). Another example is the tradition regarding the Prophet Muhammad’s companions (Sahabah) who died and were buried in Palestine after participating in the battles and occupation of the land from the Byzantines in the seventh century AD alongside the second Caliph, Omar ibn Al-Khattab. Some of the notable families in Palestine see themselves as direct offspring of these companions, connecting their presence in the Holy Land to the formative age of Islam in the seventh century (NUSSEIBEH et al., 2007).

Another way to look at it would be to say that not only Zionist and Palestinian nationalism were dyed in religious shades, but that their traditional religious identities received national shades, that their age-old religion became nationalized.

#### [Strong Religious-Nationalism in Action: Israel/Palestine from the 1920's Onward](#)

So far, we have considered the religious ethos and how they played out in the Jewish-Arab encounter. However, to understand the way they materialize in practice, we should consider the particular events that unfolded in the Israeli-Arab conflict in the 1920's, when the conflict emerged.

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Library. This image won the attention of the Palestinian leadership and provoked anger and fears ([ETZION, 2014, p. 50-59](#)). This title celebrates the San Remo conference which officially confirmed the British Mandate over Palestine, and was held four days before the paper was published and three weeks after the April 1920 riots (see below).

## **We must defend Palestine**

The Palestinian national movement emerged out of the Arab national movement. What started in the late Ottoman period as intellectual clubs in Damascus and Beirut became a political movement in the aftermath of the First World War and the rise under British patronage of the Arab kingdom of Greater Syria under the rule of King Faysal bin Hussein al-Hashimi. The first political expression of Arab nationalism was immersed in Islamic feelings: King Faysal was the son of Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif and Emir of Mecca, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and a contender to the Islamic Caliphate.<sup>44</sup> Thus, while some of the manifestations of Arab nationalism supported separating religion from the state, proudly carrying the slogan “the state is for all and religion belongs to god” (*al-din li-Allah wa-al-watan lil-jami'* coined by Saad Zaghloul during the Egyptian revolution of 1919), in practice Arab nationalism was from the outset closely connected with Islam (ANTONIUS, 1965). In any case, Arab nationalists poured to Damascus from the entire region, including future Palestinian leaders such as Muhammad Amin and Musa Kazim Paşa al-Husseini (1853-1934),<sup>45</sup> to take part in the emerging project of Arab independence. But this short lived vision collapsed swiftly when the French invaded Syria. The Palestinian national movement was born out of this failure, as described by Rashid Khalidi (KHALIDI, 1997, p. 165; PORATH, 1974, p. 107):

*“[...] less than a month after the fall of Faysal’s government in Damascus, Musa Kazim Paşa al-Husseini, who was the preeminent nationalist leader in Palestine until his death in 1934, declared: ‘Now, after the recent events in Damascus, we have to effect a complete change in our plans here. Southern Syria no longer exists. We must defend Palestine’.”<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>44</sup> After the Turks officially canceled the Caliphate in 1924, attempts were made within the Arab world to renew the seat of the caliphate. These attempts lasted up until the late 1930s (PODEH, 1998, p. 52-56).

<sup>45</sup> Musa Kazim Paşa al-Husseini (1850/1853-1934) was the founding leader of the Palestinian national movement. After holding notable positions in the Ottoman administration, Musa Kazim was head of the notable Husseini clan who stood at the top of the traditional Palestinian aristocracy (FURAS, 2017). After his death, Musa Kazim’s relative, Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husseini (1895/1897-1974), the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and president of the Supreme Muslim Council during the British Mandate, inherited the PNM’s leadership until 1948 (TZIDKIYAHU, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Israeli historian Haim Gerber explains that the term “Southern Syria” was not the traditional name for the country but rather a new invention. According to Gerber the name simply known to the people of the region was simply *Filastin*, Arabic for Palestine (GERBER, 2008, p. 8).

## The Bible is Our Mandate

In its break from tradition, classical Zionism was secular from the outset. In the words of the Zionist writer M. J. Berdyczewski (1865-1921) “[...] the last Jews of the first Hebrew” (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 130). Yet Zionism was completely based on Judaism’s religious rationalizations (*Ibid.*, p. 128-133). The Bible was its major (if not the first) source of legitimization. Postcards of Herzl, the secular founder of Political Zionism and an outspoken secularist, presented him on the background of the Judaism’s holy sites in the Holy Land (the Gershon Gera collection); Haim Weizman, the secular scientists who led the Zionist movement, attempted to purchase the Western Wall from the Muslims already in 1918 (REITER, 2017, p. 22; GOREN, 2017). On January 7, 1937 David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Zionist institutions and later the first prime minister of Israel, claimed before the British Royal Commission visiting Mandatory Palestine in 1937 (the Peel Commission 1937, 118):

*Our right on the land of Israel does not come from the Mandate or the Balfour Declaration. It precedes them. The honorable chairman of the royal committee, or one of his colleagues, said in one of the meetings that the Mandate is the “Bible” of Zionism [...] I can say in the name of the Jewish people the contrary: the Bible is our Mandate, the Bible that was written by us, in our Hebrew language on this very land, is our mandate. Our historical right exists since the dawn of existence of the Jewish people. The Balfour declaration and the Mandate only came to recognize this right and ratify it. The declaration and the mandate clearly state that the nations recognize the right of the Jewish people to re-establish its national home.*

Ben Gurion was a secular nationalist with deep historical consciousness,<sup>47</sup> a socialist and a pragmatic politician. He referred to the Bible as a historical text, an ideological framework for solidarity and justification of modern Jewish political rights. But the Bible is first and foremost a religious text, a holy scripture not easily

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<sup>47</sup> David Ohana deals broadly with Ben-Gurion’s approach to religion and nationalism, messianism and *mamlachtiut*, **Invalid source specified**. In a television interview from 1970 Ben-Gurion revokes the possibility of divine revelation and the existence of “a God that hears prayer”. He further explains that his approach to the question of the existence of God is somewhat similar to that of Spinoza (Starting at minute 37): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIAVBDHfdhc&t=2444s>



secularized. The Bible serves as the founding myth of Zionism and is greatly revered in contemporary Israel, far beyond its pure religious meaning. The prominent status of the Bible is ratified on a daily basis in the Israeli national education system and public discourse. This is also expressed in 1948 Israel's declaration of independence.<sup>48</sup>

It is well known that Zionism started as a break-off from religion and at the same time fulfils the ancient religious prophecies. This proximity between the Zionist action as a whole and the Jewish traditional religious ethos and especially the realization of the Jewish messianic vision, indeed receives more attention by scholars of Zionism in recent years. According to scholar of religious-Zionism Dov Schwartz, one can follow the transformation of the traditional Jewish messianic idea into rational political language already in the books of the prophets, in the biblical interpretation of the sages (*midrashim*) and the rationalist currents of Middle Ages. This is not a Zionist invention, as Israeli historian Jacob L. Talmon already noted: with the spring of nations of 1848 the messianic idea started to be translated in national terms (SCHWARTZ, 2016, p. 126; TALMON, 1960, p. 1-14; DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 132).

Indeed, the two main characteristics of the Jewish messianic idea: a new environmental, social and conscious reality and a new human being, similarly define the Zionist revolution: a new society and a new man – a national Jew, a redeemed Jew, and no longer in exile. Thus Zionism preserved certain religious elements. Dieckhoff points to the fact that Zionism, and later the State of Israel, adopted *de jure* the Jewish orthodox criterion to determine membership of the Jewish people (*Ibid.*, p. 130). According to Schwartz these elements were chosen carefully in order to serve the development of the new ethos: heroism and nature, and interpreting them solely on a symbolic basis. Thus in the Zionist use of messianic elements God is not present, he remains silent (SCHWARTZ, 2016). But Zionism awakes the atavistic and latent Jewish messianic tension. Israeli scholar Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin explores the theological element within Zionism, arguing that despite its declared secularity (and not secularism) Zionism did not lose its deep ties to theology (RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, 2005).

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<sup>48</sup> Proclamation of Independence: [https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\\_eng.htm](https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm)

This inherent religious tension within secular Zionism makes it “vulnerable” to strong religious-nationalism’s hegemonic aspirations. In more global terms it reminds us of Walzer’s “paradox of liberation”. These early stages of Zionist secular interpretation of a religious text and ethos are an unconscious appeal more than a cynic mobilization of religious myths. Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem wrote in 1926, on the new secular revival of the Hebrew language, which had been preserved throughout the generations as a holy language used for liturgy:<sup>49</sup>

*[...] Indeed, people here don't know what they are doing. They believe they have secularized the language, pulled out its apocalyptic thorn. But this is surely not true; this secularization of the language is only a façon de parler, a holy phrase. It is absolutely impossible to empty out the words filled to bursting, or only at the cost of the language itself.*

*[...]*

*Every word that has not been newly coined but drawn from the good old treasure chest is full to bursting [...] God will not remain mute in a language in which he has been invoked and summoned into our existence in countless ways.*

Paraphrasing on Scholem’s remark, Hillel Cohen asks whether the same argument cannot be applied to the Palestinian discourse: will Allah keep silent in a language with which he was evoked in a thousand ways to return into the reality of life (Hillel COHEN, 2013, p. 351)? The Palestinian and the Zionist movements, like other national movements, are created and shaped by their own discourse and language, no less than they control and produce it.<sup>50</sup> This discourse flows from the deep currents of a people’s social existence, necessarily from its linguistic and religious roots, shaping the political terminology at its disposal.

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<sup>49</sup> Translated from German by William Cutter ([Cutter, 1990](#)), from a letter which Gershom Scholem, living in Palestine, wrote to Franz Rosenzweig in Germany in 1926 titled: A confession Regarding Our Language (Gershom Scholem to Franz Rosenzweig, December 26, 1926).

<sup>50</sup> George Antonius described the revival of the Arabic language and the dissemination of the Arab print as a necessary and crucial step in the evolution of Arab nationalism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a process that was started by Christian religious missionaries ([ANTONIUS, 1965, p. 35-40](#)).

### **Holy places**

What is true for holy languages is in our case even more so when it comes to sacred grounds, holy places and promised lands. In the strong sense of religious-nationalism the territory is of course holy, especially so in the “Holy Land” sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, where religions were created, formulated, consolidated, and met and clashed for millennia.

Just like “nation-talk” (BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 11) cannot be secular when the national languages are sacred, one can argue, a territorial conflict cannot be secular when the disputed land is the Holy Land. Scholem, an expert of mysticism, opened his 1926 letter with the words “This Land is a volcano! It harbors the language!” (JAMES, 1902, p. 59-60).<sup>51</sup>

In the “Holy Land”, the tension embedded in the holy languages, as described by Scholem, is even stronger when it comes to the holy territories themselves, to sacred places and sites. Altogether this adds up to a strong national-religious cocktail that will find its way, like magma rising up to the surface of the earth, from the atavistic depth of our collective consciousness, back to the reality of life, bursting throughout the Holy Land, just like Scholem’s volcano. One place in particular embodies this tension more than any other: a hilltop in Jerusalem, flattened and defined by men about three millennia ago, referred to by Jews as the Temple Mount and by the Muslims as al-Haram al-Quds al-Sharif (the Jerusalem noble sanctuary) also known to Palestinian Muslim as al-Masjid al-Aqsa (hereafter “the Holy Esplanade” - HE). This site is the most important national-religious Holy Place, contested and claimed by both Israel and Palestine. We will see how Jewish-Arab violence first erupted around this site, and later on we will examine the changing approaches of religious nationalists to Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade at the turn of the second millennium.

### **Defending Palestine: the 1920s**

Since the 1920s, the holy places in and around Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade have been employed and mobilized by nationalist politicians, symbolizing the Arab-Jewish conflict as a whole (REITER, 2017, p. 12). During the previous century’s third

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<sup>51</sup> From German: “*Dies Land is ein Vulkan: Es beherbergt die Sprache*” (Cutter, 1990).

decade, large scale inter-communal violence erupted for the first time between Jews and Arabs. This violence occurred in and around the country's most important holy sites in Jerusalem, contested by Jews and Muslims. Anecdotal conflicts around the central shared holy sites in Jerusalem and to a lesser extent in Hebron, evolved around religious practices and conduct evolved into an overall wave of national-religious and ethnic based violence. It becomes clear that these anecdotal conflicts in the holy sites actually embody the larger political and national-religious struggle. In other words, as Yitzhak Reiter asserts, the religious conflicts around the holy sites reflected the struggle for control over the country between Jews and Arabs (*Ibid.*, p. 22).

During the 1920s, the Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine underwent significant changes. During this decade the Palestinian national movement was formed and consolidated. According to Palestinian historian Abdul-Wahhab Kayyali it was a decade of sober awakening of the Palestinian masses and elites to the threat posed to them by the Zionist movement (KAYYALI, 1978, p. 79, 84-86). As such, the 1920s was a formative decade which started with the first national violent clash, in April 1920 in Jerusalem, and ended with the first large scale inter-communal violence throughout the country, which also started at Jerusalem in August 1929.

We can notice a pattern in which wide national tensions escalates to violence in the holy sites of Jerusalem and Hebron during national-religious holidays. This pattern first appears during the early years of the British Mandate – the formative period of the Zionist-Palestinian struggle. It then became dormant for seventy years until it re-surfaces in the 1990s, when attention was drawn once again from outside in; away from the regional perspective back into the land, focusing directly on the Israeli-Palestinian issue itself. In response to this change, religious-nationalists were awakened and moved from the margins of their national movement to center stage of both Israeli and Palestinian societies, using and to a great extent generating the tensions around the holy sites.

The first wave of Jewish-Arab inter-communal violence erupted in Jerusalem Between 4-7 April 1920. It was during a manifest national-religious moment – the

annual Islamic pilgrimage to Nebi Musa, the manifest site around which modern Palestinian national-religious identity consolidated (AUBIN-BOLTANSKI, 2007).

Small-scale skirmishes between Jews and Arabs had already erupted during the previous month in the Galilee panhandle in the North of mandatory Palestine on the background of the French invasion to Syria, but they are not considered a significant “starting point” of the Zionist-Palestinian in the same manner as the event at Nebi Musa (KAYYALI, 1978, p. 75). On March 1920, Palestinians became disillusioned by the dream of Palestine as Southern Syria, a part of the greater Arab kingdom, and founded their own particular Palestinian national movement. Weeks later, Palestinian nationalism expressed itself loud and clear in Jerusalem. The March 1920 events that took place in the Galilee became known in Zionist and Israeli collective memory especially because of the Battle of Tel Hai and the fall of Joseph Trumpeldor (1880-1920, a Zionist pioneer and warrior),<sup>52</sup> which generated an ethos of heroism and self-sacrifice. Yet most Zionist accounts of the events also consider them part of a larger Arab campaign against the French-British colonial policies in the region and mainly as a prelude to the more significant events that took place in Jerusalem the following month.<sup>53</sup>

### **1920 - Nebi Musa**

Some weeks after the Galilee skirmishes mentioned above, Palestinian-Muslims attacked Jews in Jerusalem during the annual rally of the Islamic pilgrimage to Nebi Musa. On April 4, 1920, an Arab crowd gathered in Jerusalem, slogans were

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<sup>52</sup> Trumpeldor fell in the battle over the Zionist settlement of Tel Hai in northern Palestine in March 1920. According to the Zionist narrative Trumpeldor’s last words were “It does not matter, it is good to die for our country”, made him a role model and a Zionist national hero. The authenticity of these famous last words generated a debate and some historians challenged it while others reiterated.

<sup>53</sup> For example the article on the 1920 events, written by Yehuda Lapidot (Historian of Jewish underground during the British Mandate) and published on the Daat website (<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/history/haifa/1-2.HTM>), also stresses the notion that the event of March 1920 in the Galilee were a prelude to the events of April 1920 in Jerusalem. The Daat website (daat.ac.il) is run by the national-religious Herzog College, and reflects the mainstream approach of religious-Zionism. Herzog Collage is an academic institute affiliated with *Yeshivat Har Etzion* (the Gush) located in Alon Shvut settlement in West Bank Gush Etzion settlement block south of Jerusalem. This approach is also reflected in other mainstream Zionist and religious-Zionist academic and publicist writings: Shragai, “This is how it all began (Hebrew, IsraelHayom 25/03/2013). Similar approach can be seen in the Israeli Ministry of Education’s remote learning website (<https://lib.cet.ac.il/Pages/item.asp?item=1160>). This notion is also echoed by Israeli historian and geographer Gideon Bigger (Cathedra 1988, vol 49).

sung and fiery speeches were delivered (PALIN, 1920). The atmosphere was ripe for violence, when a Jewish man was beaten to death by an Arab crowd near the Jaffa Gate of the Old City (REITER, 2017, p. 23).<sup>54</sup> This led to an overall Arab attack on Jews in Jerusalem's Old City, which met a pre-organized Jewish Revisionists guard.<sup>55</sup> The clashes lasted five days leaving casualties on both sides.<sup>56</sup> The events were perceived differently on each side: while the Palestinians named the events "the 1920 Revolt" (ثورة 1920) expressing heroism and resistance to the British and Zionists in Palestine; the Jews referred to the event as *meoraot* (מאורעות), a term similar to the Irish "Troubles" this term literally means "bad events", disturbances, riots or targeted attacks), echoing the memory of the anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia (*Ibid.*).<sup>57</sup> It was no coincidence that the first Jewish-Arab intercommunal violent clash on a national basis erupted on this time and place.

The annual rally of the Islamic pilgrimage to *Māqam Nebī Mūsā* (مقام نبي موسى), the tomb of the Islamic Prophet Musa (Biblical Moses) located east of Jerusalem,<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Some sources mention that the Jewish victim was a provocateur, who tried to tear up a flag carried by the Hebronite delegation to Nebi Musa (REITER, 2017, p. 23). The May 1920 Palin Commission of Inquiry report (article 56) asserts that "the exact incident which caused the explosion has not been clearly ascertained" (PALIN, 1920).

<sup>55</sup> According to Palestinian historian Kamil Asali who wrote about Nebi Musa pilgrimage, both British and Zionists "feared this expression of Palestinian national unity" and prepared to it by "taking special security measures". In addition, Asali adds, on many occasions the Palestinian festivities were tainted by Zionist provocations (ASALI, 1990, p. ٦٣).

<sup>56</sup> 6 Jews dead and 211 wounded with 18 severely injured, 4 Arabs dead and 24 wounded, and 7 British policemen wounded (REITER, 2017, p. 23). According to the Palin Commission of Inquiry that examined the April 1920 riots in Jerusalem it was "clear that the incidence of the attack was against the Jews" (PALIN, 1920 article 66). A year later, in May 1921, another wave of violence erupted, this time mainly in Jaffa and the coastal areas, causing close to 100 dead and 219 injured. The British "Haycraft Report" that examined the events again put the responsibility on the Arab side, but also described with some understanding the rising feeling of anxiety, frustration and anger on the Arab street due to the Zionist immigration and the British "Jewish National Home" policy in Palestine as mentioned in the Balfour declaration from 1917.

<sup>57</sup> The Arabic Wikipedia article of the events is titled "انتفاضة موسم النبي موسى" literally meaning "the Intifada (uprising) of the Nebi Musa festival, similar to the English title: "1920 Nebi Musa riots". While the English title is neutral and descriptive, the Arabic Word Intifada carries the baggage of the Palestinian struggle for liberation; the Hebrew article is called מאורעות תר"פ (1920 events). The Hebrew word *meoraot*, meaning events or incidents, is used in Israeli history to describe the bloody clashes between the Jews and the Arabs in the Holy Land during the British Mandate, and carries a reminiscence of victimizing diaspora mentality more than that of a national struggle.

<sup>58</sup> The Nebi Musa compound is a monumental mausoleum surrounded by a wall, with several wings, a central mosque and a minaret. It is located about 1.5 kilometers south of road no.1, the main road connecting Jerusalem and Jericho. The mausoleum is in the Judaeen Desert about 20 kilometers east of Jerusalem and 10 kilometers south of Jericho and it is surrounded with cemeteries of the Nomadic Palestinian Bedouin communities of the region. From a geopolitical perspective the site is in today's West Bank, area C, which according to the administrative division of the Oslo Accords is under both the

became during the British Mandate a focal point of Palestinian nationalism (GERBER, 2008, p. 93; FRIEDLAND et al., 1966, p. 89-118). Every year since the late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century Muslims from all corners of Palestine gathered in al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem a week before the Christian Easter, and moved together in a large and colorful procession to the Nebi Musa mausoleum, where they would celebrate and perform various religious ceremonies (GERBER, 2008, p. 71). Throughout the Ottoman period, in which the prevailing collective identity was Islam (and not Ottoman or Arab ethnicity), local saints, visits to holy sites and religious festivals, such as Nebi Musa and the mosques of Jerusalem and Hebron, provided the symbolic infrastructure for the emergence of local patriotism which nurtured particular identities.

The Nebi Musa pilgrimage reflected both dimensions composing the Palestinian identity: the “positive” aspect of Islamic sanctity and a unifying feeling of togetherness and belonging, alongside the “negative” aspect of a shared destiny – the obligation to protect Islam’s Holy Places against a foreign Christian invasion – an experience rooted in the Middle Ages and the memory of the Crusades (*Ibid.*, p. 71-75, 92-97). The ethos of defending Islam’s holy places in Jerusalem is a central axis for the Muslims in Palestine, combining both the internal (positive) and external (negative) aspects of their particular identity.

According to Shmuel Tamari the Islamic use of the Nebi Musa monument was, at the outset, external: to perpetuate the Islamic antagonism against the two rival monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism (TAMARI, 1979, p. 178). Such hostile approach of anti-Jewish and anti-Christian reaction can be traced all throughout the history of Maqam Nebi Musa, since its establishment. Tamari develops his argument further into the realm of theology, by connecting the Nebi Musa ritual to the relations between Muhammad and Moses. He argues, based on the Quranic verse (46:12), that the prophet Muhammad saw himself as a direct heir of Moses – the prophet of the book. Thus, Tamari concludes, the builders of Nebi Musa, just like the builders of the Dome of the Rock before them, wanted to symbolize not only the continuity of Islam

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civil and security responsibility of the IDF’s civil administration. At the same time, the site is under the responsibility of the Islamic Waqf department of the Jericho district of the Palestinian Authority.

regarding Judaism and Christianity but also – mainly – their victory over them (*Ibid.*, p. 179).

Tamari's insights seem reasonable on their own. Taking into account René Girard's theory of mimetic desire (GIRARD, 1965), one may observe that maybe it takes a hawkish national-religious Zionist Jewish scholar to notice the theological nucleus element of Palestinian national-religious polemic.<sup>59</sup> Kamil al-Asali (1925-1995), a Palestinian Jerusalemite historian, writes with nostalgia how anyone who witnessed the festivities realized how they channeled the fervor of national feelings to resist the British and Zionist project and at the same time contributed to the crystallization of the Palestinian national identity (ASALI, 1990, p. ٣). It becomes clearer why the first significant national-religious demonstration of power against the British Mandate, as well as the first wave of Palestinian violence against Jews and Zionism, came out of the Nebi Musa pilgrimage.

The inter-communal violence that erupted in Jerusalem during the pilgrimage of April 1920 gains a new - so far neglected - meaning based on the intrinsic Islamic religious-national character of the Nebi Musa festival, thus providing significance to the emerging Palestinian national movement. Three years after the British occupation of the country, and after the Jewish "National Home" policy was declared on the basis of the Balfour Declaration; shortly after the British betrayal of the Arabs in Damascus, the ancient Islamic mechanism set in motion the latent feeling of consciousness of destiny, dressed with the modern clothing of Palestinian religious-nationalism. As some Palestinian historians argue, it was only natural that the Nebi Musa festival should become a manifest expression of anti-British and anti-Zionist feelings (*Ibid.*, p. 100; KAYYALI, 1978, p. 147-148). In any case, the procession for the 1920 Nebi Musa

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<sup>59</sup> Shmuel Tamari was a historian and archeologist focusing on the symbolic and theological meanings of early Islamic architecture. According to his son he became an observant Jew in 1977 and always looked for his own religiosity in his studies. He worked in Bar Ilan university, the country's most important national-religious academic institute (BIU will be further discussed in the following chapter) and became a member of the hardline right wing group of academics called "Professors for a Strong Israel" currently headed by Prof. Asher Yahalom, a physicist from the WB Ariel University, opposing political and territorial compromises with the Palestinians and acting to secure the Jewish character of the State of Israel. Prof. Tamari passed away in 2015 and I thank his son Assaf Tamary for his kind insights (interview 25/06/2019). Scholars, so it seems, will continue to discuss the extent to which the researchers own identity plays a role in his or her research questions and conclusions on a given matter.



festival became a bloody clash, the preamble to a century of violent clashes between Arabs and Jews in the Holy Land.

The 1920 Nebi Musa affair was the first significant event of Jewish-Arab intercommunal violence on national basis. It was a defining moment in which the Palestinian national movement materialized. It was the launching pad to a century long bleeding conflict, still ongoing. In the Palestinian Encyclopedia it is called the “1920 Revolt” and described as “the first national mass popular action expressing the Palestinian feelings of disappointment from thwarting their demand” of an independent Arab country. There were many reasons for the Arab Palestinian popular resentment at the time, among which political hostility to Zionism alongside socio-economic motives, all over the country (PALESTINIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA COMMITTEE, 1984; GERBER, 2008, p. 97). Yet this resentment turned to violence in a symbolic national-religious time and place. The anti-Crusader Islamization efforts of the Holy Land, that Nebi Musa is a manifest expression of, is the ancient infrastructure of the Palestinian local patriotism (Hillel COHEN, 2017; GERBER, 2008; PALESTINIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA COMMITTEE, 1984). This is what made the Muslim community in Palestine “a community of destiny [...] not merely a collection of people who happened by chance to live in the same location but, rather, a chosen cohort representing the Islamic world as a whole in the vanguard of its struggle against foreigners seeking to attack it in its sacred places” (Hillel COHEN, 2017, p. 4).

Encyclopedia Palestina ties this ancient destiny to the eruption of the modern Jewish-Muslim clash, comparing the Zionist Jewish immigration to a modern British backed crusade (PALESTINIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA COMMITTEE, 1984). In my analysis of this affair, I accept Haim Gerber’s arguments, which challenge the traditional scholarly approach to the topic. Gerber rejects argument of cynic mobilization, arguing that “the Palestinians, to all intents and purposes, instituted a ‘national’ holiday”, and that the memory (invented or imagined for that matter) of the Crusades and the Holy Land was kept alive throughout the centuries as reflected from the work of Sadan and Tamari on the Nebi Musa compound and myth (SADAN, 1979; TAMARI, 1979). This memory reflected the country’s local patriotism, which will eventually evolve into Palestinian nationalism, and the connection of the inhabitants of the medieval Jund Filastin (the

military district of Palestine under the Muslim rule), stretching from Hebron in the South to Nablus and Jenin in the North, to Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque. Similarly, the above mentioned *fadail* literature represented at least since the 12th century onward local patriotism in the wider sense of the country as a whole (GERBER, 2008, p. 73-74). "Small wonder then" Gerber argues, "that during the Mandate the pilgrimage was to become the single most important annual event for nationalist excitement and mobilization. Its meaning was already built-in and ready-made in the Ottoman period" (*Ibid.*, p. 74).

In summary, the events of April 1920 set the national movement into motion, and laid down the ground for the emergence of the future national-religious leadership of Hajj Amin al-Husseini as well as for the inner Palestinian institutional-political split between the "national camp" led by the Husseinis and the "opposition" led by al-Nashashibi family. For the Palestinians, the starting point of "the conflict" was immersed in national-religious symbolism connected to their destiny to protect Jerusalem's holy sites from foreigners.

### **The 1921 Jaffa Revolt**

Other violent Jewish-Arab clashes followed the April 1920 events. On May 1st of the following year, severe clashes started during the International Workers' Day march in Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and again on November 2<sup>nd</sup> on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. The first wave of violence lasted between May 1-7 and claimed the lives of about 47 Jews and 48 Arabs. It is interesting to notice that the May events took place almost exactly one year (and a few days) after the previous clash, a week after the 1921 Nebi Musa pilgrimage ended, and during the week of the Nebi Saleh pilgrimage - a procession to the Maqam (cenotaph) of a Muslim saint in Western Palestine on the central coastal strip of the country. The local festival (*mawsim*) of Nebi Saleh takes place every year exactly a week after the end of the Nebi Musa pilgrimage (AUBIN-BOLTANSKI, 2007, p. 51-88).

This fact somehow escaped the attention of most accounts on the events, which generally ignored the national-religious context of this symbolic time and focused on the May 1<sup>st</sup> International Workers' Day march in Tel Aviv and Jaffa as the

symbolic and physical starting point of the violence (PORATH, 1974, p. 57). Indeed, this time violence concentrated in the coastal areas (Jaffa, Tel Aviv and several Zionist colonies) and not in the country's mountain lane and Jerusalem. This could be explained by the special security measures the British authorities took beforehand due to the previous year's bloody experience (GERBER, 2008, p. 97-99; DINUR, 1973). May 1<sup>st</sup> was indeed a symbolic day for the Zionists and socialists and thus inner Jewish violence broke out between Bolsheviks and socialists on that occasion (HAYCRAFT, 1921; DINUR, 1973). It is not completely clear how, but this inner Jewish clash developed rapidly into a large scale Arab attack on Jewish localities, mainly around Tel Aviv and Jaffa and around several Zionist farming colonies near the Palestinian towns of Qalqilya, Tulkarm and Ramla. Gerber speculates that maybe some Arab passers-by thought it to be an Arab-Jewish clash and intervened, thus turning the affair into an Arab-Jewish confrontation (GERBER, 2008, p. 97).

Arab resentment towards Zionism had been on a constant rise since the British "Jewish National Home" policy based on the Balfour Declaration. It could also be the case, as sources indicate, that Arab popular sentiment feared the militant atheism of the communists and connected it to the general feelings of an attack on their tradition and religious identity (PORATH, 1974, p. 56-57). Indeed, it is not unreasonable to assume that the proximity to Easter and the symbolism accompanying Palestinian Muslim *mawasim*, festivals of local saints, contributed to the transformation of the general Arab resentment to violence. Palestinian historian Mustafa al-Dabbagh (1897-1989) calls these festivals "Palestinian spring festivals" and puts them in historical pre-Islamic context and also in the Islamic militant and anti-crusader context we have discussed above, referring to Nebi Saleh as second only to the Nebi Musa festival (AL-DABBAGH, 1965, p. 334).

Palestinian writer, poet and political figure Nahid Munir al-Rayyis from Gaza (1937–2010) published in May 2007 a short article about the "1921 Jaffa revolt" in a Hamas media outlet, presenting the events as a direct continuation of the Nebi Musa disturbances in April 1920 (palinfo 7/5/2007).<sup>60</sup> According to al-Rayyis the clashes

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<sup>60</sup> Palestinian Information Center website (palinfo.com, المركز الفلسطيني للإعلام) is a group of news websites affiliated with Hamas. See for example in: "The E-Marketing Strategy of Hamas" (MOZES et

occurred when Jews marching in Tel Aviv headed towards the Palestinian al-Manshiyya Neighborhood in Jaffa in order to avenge the death of the Jews who were killed in the previous year during the Nebi Musa riots in Jerusalem (palinfo 7/5/2007). Although this claim is not backed by historical evidence, it at least demonstrates how events are remembered by Palestinians. Connected to the Nebi Musa events this argument echoes the Palestinian national-religious consciousness. On the one hand, al-Rayyis counts many reasons for the Palestinian resentment against the Zionists and British. On the other hand, he presents the entire episode of May 1921 as a defensive act against Zionist attacks backed by the British army.

The connection made by al-Rayyis between the events of Nebi Musa festival in 1920, and those of May 1921 also appears in a video titled “The Jaffa Revolt against the British Mandate and the Zionist Movement at the early twenties of the previous century” posted on Pal27, a Palestinian internet platform launched in 2018 which aims to recount Palestine history from a national angle in short videos ([www.27k.online](http://www.27k.online)). The video uses similar terminology to that of al-Rayyis (Pal27 07/05/2018), presenting the Jaffa events of May 1<sup>st</sup> 1921 as a direct continuation of the Nebi Musa disturbances from the previous year.<sup>61</sup> So it seems that this linkage, has become Palestinian common knowledge, part of the national narrative.

The history Book of the Haganah (the main Jewish paramilitary group in Mandatory Palestine) and the Haycraft report (a British launched commission of Inquiry to investigate the 1921 riots in and around Jaffa) mention that the attack on the Zionist colony of Rehovot took place on May 6 during the annual pilgrimage to Nebi Saleh’s tomb in Ramla, a time known to be especially hazardous according to the Haganah (DINUR, 1973; HAYCRAFT, 1921, p. 41-43).

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al., 2010). According to the website the article was first published in *felesteen* newspaper on 7/5/2007 and republished on palinfo in May 25 2007. <https://www.palinfo.com/news/2007/5/25/-ثورة-يافا-عام-1921-> Al-Rayyis was a Palestinian nationalist affiliated at some point to Fatah and the Palestinian Authority, but as it seems from the very positive article written about him in the Muslim Brothers Wikipedia Ikhwan Wiki, he won the sympathy of Hamas. Some pictures in the article show al-Rayyis alongside Hamas’ leader Ismail Haniyeh, in one picture Haniyeh is seen praying beside al-Rayyis coffin during the latter’s funeral: [https://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php?title=ناهض\\_الريس](https://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php?title=ناهض_الريس).

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOxK-gSwmrl> accessed 7/8/2019 17:45.

From the angle of this dissertation, it is interesting to note how Hamas' ideologist Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh, in his summary of April 1920 events, argues in the 1990s that Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner for Palestine (and a Zionist Jew) foresaw the decisive role of Muslim Palestinian religious clerks in the popular national and religious awakening in Palestine (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994).

In 1922 Palestine RN launched for the first time the "al-Aqsa is in Danger" campaign. Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Muzaffar (1880-1949), a prominent Palestinian religious-nationalist from Jerusalem, was maybe the first to warn about the dangers posed to al-Aqsa mosque by the Zionist Jews.<sup>62</sup> The website "Palestinian Journeys" of the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS) recounts that "in June 1922 the Arab Executive Committee placed Sheikh al-Muzaffar in the head of a Palestinian delegation to Egypt, Sudan, and the Hijaz. The delegation arrived in Mecca in early July for the Hajj season, enabling al-Muzaffar to launch a widespread information campaign among the many pilgrims which resulted in several thousand telegrams sent to the League of Nations protesting the British Mandate over Palestine."<sup>63</sup> Part of al-Muzaffar's appeals was translated and published in the Hebrew press, such as the Palestine Daily Mail (*Doar Hayom*, 07/07/1922 pp. 2-3):

*The Palestinian Muslim people, guardian of the place of the Temple and the Foundation Stone for thirteen hundred years, announce the Muslim world that these holy places are in great danger of wild Zionist take-over [...] The 'World Zionist Organization' strives to establish a Jewish kingdom in Palestine and to dispossess the Muslims of the place of the Temple, since it is built on the ruins of the Temple of King Solomon (peace be upon him) and to make it the place of their great Temple [...]*

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<sup>62</sup> Al-Muzaffar was one of the founding leaders of the PNM. Born in Jerusalem, al-Muzaffar had great public influence. He belonged to a family of *'ulamaa* (Islamic scholars) and himself studied at al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo. After WW1 al-Muzaffar went to Damascus together with other nationalists to participate in the establishment of the united Arab kingdom. After the collapse of this dream al-Muzaffar founded the PNM alongside Musa Kazim Paşa al-Husseini (COHEN, 2015, p. 24-25). In a 2019 video of "Palestine 27k" on YouTube al-Muzaffar is described as the most prominent speaker of the PNM (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8P-tSYojcw>).

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.paljourneys.org/en/biography/9864/abd-al-qadir-muzaffar>, also see Etzion 2014, 34-35.

### **1929 – Eruptions in the Holy Sites**

The August 1929 disturbance, known as the Western Wall Riots or the 1929 revolt, started in the Western Wall of Jerusalem's HE. During the last week of August 1929, a wave of inter-communal violence broke out, causing the death of 133 Jews and 116 Arabs, and injured hundreds on both sides. This event presents a strong national-religious element which is relevant to our case and is considered by many to be a watershed line for Jewish-Arab relations in the Holy Land.

A recent book by Israeli historian Hillel Cohen titled "1929 – year zero of the Arab-Israeli conflict" shed new light on these events. Cohen goes back to the 1929 Western Wall riots "not because it is the real starting point of the conflict [...] but because it is the year in which relations between Jews and Arabs changed radically, the year that shaped the consciousness of both sides for decades thereafter" (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. xi). Importantly, 1929 was also the beginning of the armed conflict and the birth of the Zionist military ethos. Cohen describes the 1929 events as the Jewish Yishuv's greatest trauma during the British period (*ibid.*). The events of August 1929 which started around Jerusalem's holy sites demonstrate how one bloody event (which lasted a week) reflected a multitude of tensions, emotions, and national-religious anxieties of both Jews and Muslim-Arabs, Zionists and Palestinians. The events started and concentrated in and around the holiest sites to both Jews and Muslims in the land, claimed and contested by them, in Jerusalem and Hebron. As we shall see, this dynamic of violent eruptions around the holy sites will become a recurring pattern 70 years later during the 1990s, once the focus of the Israeli-Arab conflict returns back into the Israeli-Palestinian core.

In the antiquity, since the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD and up to the eighteenth century, Jews prayed in various locations around the four walls of the trapezoid shape Holy Esplanade in Jerusalem. Already as early as the 1700s, under the Ottoman rule, there were tensions between Jewish worshipers at the Western Wall and the Muslim inhabitants of the nearby Arab Maghrebi majority neighborhood (*ibid.*, p. 70; Amnon COHEN et al., 1996, p. 116-118).<sup>64</sup> Leaders of the Maghrebi

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<sup>64</sup> As Cohen mentions, "to the best of our knowledge, permanent Maghrebi settlement in Jerusalem commenced after the city was retaken from the crusaders by Salah a-Din in 1187" (COHEN, 2015, p. 70).

community filed suit against the city's Jewish leaders, complaining "that Jews who habitually prayed at the Western Wall littered the neighborhood and worshiped at a volume that disturbed Muslims who were studying the Qur'an. During the trial, it emerged that the Jews had never received a permit to pray there. The Qadi (the Muslim judge who heard the case) ordered the Jews to stop entering the Maghrebi neighborhood and from praying at the Wall" (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 70; Amnon COHEN et al., 1996, p. 116-118).

Israeli national-religious scholar Dotan Goren studied the Jewish consolidation around the Western Wall from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century up the British Mandate. Goren demonstrates that during this period Jews attempted to renovate and develop the Western Wall area and repeatedly tried to purchase the site from the Muslims without success (GOREN, 2017, p. 51-103). Thus, as we can see, the conflicts around the Western Wall during the 1920s were loaded with historical baggage.

As Tom Segev argues, the beginning of the August 1929 events should be traced back to the Jewish High Holidays of the previous year. On 24/09/1928, Yom Kippur – the Jewish Day of Atonement, some Jewish worshipers placed benches at the Western Wall alley and a dividing screen to separate between men and women during prayer (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 67; SEGEV, 2000, p. 295-296). The British authorities removed the screen immediately and the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC) expressed its opposition.<sup>65</sup> The Western Wall conflict began (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. xvi).

The chain of events that unfolded throughout the following year, as described in Hillel Cohen's book, led to the violent eruption of August 1929 (*Ibid.*, p. xvii-xix). Following the incident of Yom Kippur in September 1928, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and head of the SMC Hajj Amin al-Husseini assembled an Islamic conference which was attended by Muslim clerics from throughout the world, demanding to

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The houses of the Muslim Maghrebi Quarter's practically surrounded the Western Wall alley were Jews prayed. The Maghrebi settlement in Jerusalem was immersed in the historical calling, the destiny or consciousness of defending Jerusalem's Islamic holy sites.

<sup>65</sup> The SMC was high institution responsible for the Muslim communities in Mandatory Palestine headed by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husseini. For more information on the SMC see Kupferschmidt's study on the SMC and the institutionalization of Islam in Palestine under the British Mandate (KUPFERSCHMIDT, 1987).

restrict the Jewish activity at the Western Wall (*Ibid.*, p. xvii; ETZION, 2014, p. 95). The next day, on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, the SMC published a 10 pages manifesto in Arabic arguing that for the Jews the Western Wall is but a springboard to al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>66</sup> The SMC's booklet deal with the deep connection of the Muslims to al-Aqsa, and defined the Western Wall as part of the HE, calling it *al-Buraq* after the magnificent beast who drove the prophet of Islam to Jerusalem during his miraculous "night-journey", and according to Muslim tradition was tied by Muhammad on the western side of the HE - the Western Wall (PETERS, 2006). The Booklet also shows that Palestinian leadership was well aware of the place of the Temple in the Jewish faith.

At the same time, the quotations of contemporary Zionist leaders in the booklet and the use of Jewish artifacts which relate to the place of the Temple also demonstrates the lack of understanding of the complexities and subtiles of the issue in contemporary Jewish and Zionist discourse. This gap made the Palestinians paint the entire Zionist discourse as Temple-oriented. For this reason, on November 8<sup>th</sup>, the Jewish National Council (JNC) published an official advocacy letter in Arabic which was also published in Hebrew the next day (CZA J1/329, CZA J1/330, Doar Hayom 09/11/1928).<sup>67</sup> In this letter the JNC completely rejected the SMC's arguments and wished to reassure the Muslims of Palestine that Zionism does not poses a threat to Islamic holy places, that all they wish for is to be treated with respect at the narrow alley of the Western Wall.

The letter stressed the history of Jewish freedom of worship in Jerusalem under Islamic rule and used reconciliatory language, completely ignoring Zionism's political threat to Muslim hegemony in the country, which stood in the center of this national-religious tension. This initial Jewish-Arab "dialogue" by correspondence demonstrates the lack of mutual understanding and how each side used the tensions in Jerusalem's holy places to strengthen their own self-image, the Palestinian's

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<sup>66</sup> A Hebrew translation of the SMC's booklet appeared in the frond and inner pages of the Hebrew newspaper Doar Hayom from 04/11/1928 under the subtitle "a pile of slanders and falsehoods" (accessible via [jpress.org.il](http://jpress.org.il)).

<sup>67</sup> The JNC (in Hebrew *Va'ad Le'umi*) was the main executive institution on the national level of the Jewish community – the *Yishuv* – In Mandatory Palestine.



religiosity and the Zionist's secular bias, the latter also suppressing inner national-religious voices like that of Rabbi Kook.<sup>68</sup>

On December 1928, the British mandatory authorities issued a policy paper on the Western Wall, stating that Muslims own the site, but that the Jews have a right to pray there, and in May 1929 the SMC held construction works, opening an entrance to the HE adjacent to the Wall. This enhanced the friction between Jews and Arabs making skirmishes a routine at the site. On August 1929, the sixteenth Zionist Congress was held in Zürich, declaring on 11<sup>th</sup> August that the Jews have a right to pray at the Western Wall. Four days later, on 15<sup>th</sup> August, during the fast of *Tisha B'Av* (the Ninth of Av, commemorating the destruction of the Jewish Temples), the *Betar* youth movement of the Revisionist party demonstrated at the Wall declaring "the Wall is our Wall!" (SAMRIN, 2003, p. 165; PORATH, 1974, p. 269; Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 65-66; SEGEV, 2000, chap. 13). During the fast, after hearing of the demonstration, Avraham Isaac HaKohen Kook (RAIH), Palestine's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, called to evacuate the Maghrebi quarter in order to expand the Western Wall Plaza. The following day, Friday August 16<sup>th</sup>, was also the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (*mawlid*). After the Friday-noon prayer a multitude of Muslims exiting the al-Aqsa Mosque marched to the Western Wall and held a counter demonstration during which they desecrated Jewish scriptures at the site. The next day, Jews and Arabs clashed in Jerusalem, one Jewish man was killed and several Arabs injured and several homes were set on fire. On 20<sup>th</sup> August, after the funeral of Avraham Mizrahi, the Jew killed a few days before, clashes resumed and the British police intervened. Jewish-Arab clashes continued throughout the following week.

On Thursday August 22 a British reconciliation attempt failed, and so on August 23, after the Friday-noon prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque, the riots began and Jews and Arabs clashed in Jerusalem. The Arabs attacked Jewish neighborhoods in the city, causing many casualties. On Saturday morning, August 24<sup>th</sup>, Arabs massacred Jews in Hebron, killed a Jewish family in Motza (west of Jerusalem), and attacked a Jewish

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<sup>68</sup> I was first exposed to this correspondence as well as to the correspondence of 1931 (below) in the book of Temple Activist Yhuda Etzion ([ETZION, 2014](#)). Beyond it being an intriguing primary source, Etzion's book is an excellent historical research work.

neighborhood in Haifa (an attack which continued for two days). On August 25<sup>th</sup>, the Arab attacks on Jews spread to Jaffa and Tel Aviv.

The riots lasted for several days, until the end of the month, and Jewish communities were attacked and massacred by Arabs all throughout the country (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. xvii-xix). By the end of the riots 133 Jews and 116 Arabs were killed, and 341 Jews and 232 Arabs injured.<sup>69</sup> It was now clear that an armed conflict between two national movements was in taking place; a conflict that emanated during sacred times and in holy places and was immersed in national-religious symbolism.

Importantly, placing the divider at the Wall was not really the issue. Reading through Muslim and Jewish contemporary sources reveal that the Western Wall conflict reflected deeper and greater issues. On the Muslim Palestinian side, it touches upon the fundamental anxiety of losing the al-Aqsa Mosque to the Jews who wish to build their Temple in its stead. For nationalistic and national-religious Jews, those whom Dieckhoff called the diehard nationalists of the Zionist right (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 175), having autonomy in the Western Wall reflected the Jewish-Zionist case altogether, their control over the country as a whole, the legitimacy of their narrative and their claim for belonging. It is a struggle between nationalist hawks which touches the core religious dispute between Jews and Muslims, a dispute simply phrased by Hillel Cohen as that of determining: “which religion is the true religion” (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 65).

The fundamental assumption subscribed to by both Jews and Muslims during this conflict was that God granted them the Land of Israel/ Palestine because they are the bearers the true faith (*Ibid.*).

### **Polemics: the 1930s**

On June 1936, Hajj Amin al-Husseini sent a letter to Sir Arthur Wauchope, the British High Commissioner to Palestine, in which he stresses the centrality of the Holy

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<sup>69</sup> Most Jews killed in their homes while unarmed, most Arabs were killed by British security (some from Zionist defense) while attacking Jewish areas. About 20 uninvolved Arabs were murdered by Jewish lynching or revenge or from British indiscriminate gunshot (COHEN, 2015, p. xxi). In some cases, Jews and Arabs confronted members of their own group and even risked their lives in order to protect and save the lives of their neighbors.

Esplanade in the national-religious Jewish-Arab encounter and states that, “the Jews should be fought against with their own weapon, the weapon of religion” (PORATH, 1977, p. 194). Claiming that controlling the Temple Mount is at the very essence of Zionism and that its supreme goal is to rebuild the Temple in the place where now stand the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Mufti found it necessary to mobilize religious feelings and argumentations against Zionism (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 144).

One can find the irony in such rationalization when it comes from Jerusalem’s “Grand Mufti”, a senior religious clerk simultaneously leading the Palestinian national movement. Indeed, the Mufti drew his political authority from his roles in Palestine’s religious apparatus. He did not need external reasoning in order to mobilize religious feelings and holy sites for national aims. Such religiosity is *sui generis*, embedded in the nature of Palestinian nationalism. To take this rationalization further, due to its religious nature and roots, one might argue, it is only natural that the “Grand Mufti” of Jerusalem will lead the Palestinian national movement, which carries in itself, *ipso facto*, a special religious essence. Palestinian nationalism stems from the Islamic sacred scriptures, traditions and holy places (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

The Mufti’s letter demonstrates that in the eyes of the Palestinian leadership during the British Mandate, Zionism’s political threat was perceived in religious terms, embodied in Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade. This religious threat justified the PNM’s own religiosity from the outset. The deepest element of Palestinian national identity – religion - was projected on their immediate rivals – the Zionists – this way justifying itself. Palestinians believed that Zionism obliged their own national movement to bluntly fuse together religious and national feelings. A blend that anyway existed at the core of Palestinian identity.

### **Jerusalem’s 1931 Islamic Congress**

The mainstream of the Zionist movement couldn’t agree less with the Mufti’s perception of their movement. They saw themselves as a modern, secular and enlightened national movement. Five years before the Mufti’s letter, on November 18, 1931 Chaim Arlozoroff, the Political Director of the Jewish Agency for Palestine,<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Equivalent to a minister of foreign affairs of the proto-state Zionist institution

held a press conference in which he delivered a statement denying the Mufti's accusations regarding the Zionist plot to replace the al-Aqsa Mosque with the rebuilt Jewish Temple. For Arlozoroff the question of the Temple is but a "morbid theme":<sup>71</sup>

*"The Zionist movement is not a child of the Middle Ages, but one of the great constructive efforts of our generation [...] what occupies the mind of the Zionist movement is not this morbid theme, but efforts of settlement and immigration [...] the endeavor to introduce a new cultural and economic spirit into this country"*

Arlozoroff emphasizes that the focal point of Zionism is far from such religiosity ascribed to it by the Palestinian leadership (by labelling such ideas as morbid Arlozoroff stings the Palestinian leadership's focus on the holy sites). Throughout his appeal Arlozoroff repeatedly stressed Zionism's obligation to safeguard and respect the Christian and Muslim holy places in Palestine and in particular the al-Aqsa mosque. The Jewish Agency translated this statement to Arabic and published it in an eight-page long booklet. The booklet was disseminated in thousands of copies among the Arab population in order to appease the Muslim world in general and the Muslims of Palestine in particular.<sup>72</sup>

Zionist apologetic advocacy in the Arabic language of this kind appeared in the background of the first General World Islamic Congress that was due to assemble in Jerusalem in December 1931 (WIC-J), organized by the Palestinian SMC (WORLD ISLAMIC CONGRESS, 1931; GIBB, 1934).<sup>73</sup> According to Palestinian American historian Philip Mattar, the Mufti convened the congress in order to "[...] unite the Arabs and Muslims against the Zionists and to make London aware that British interests lay in

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<sup>71</sup> Statement by Dr. Chaim Arlozoroff made before a Press Conference on November 18, 1931. The transcription of Arlozoroff's statement is available in both Hebrew and English in the Central Zionist Archive, no. CZA S25/2109 ([ARLOZOROFF, 1931](#)).

<sup>72</sup> The Arabic booklet is available in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, shelf number S34 V 4565, titled in Arabic: *Zionism and the Islamic Holy Places in Palestine / Statement of the Jewish Agency delivered by Dr. Chaim Arlozoroff in Jerusalem, November 1931*. After reading through all versions of the statement I will refer here to the official English translation as it appears in the CZA ([ARLOZOROFF, 1931](#)).

<sup>73</sup> A 20 pages booklet summarizes the decisions and conclusions of the congress: DECISIONS of THE GENERAL MOSLEM CONGRESS IN ITS FIRST SESSION, opened at the holy Al-Aksa Mosque on the 27th of Rajab and closed in its precincts on the 7th of Sha'aban 1350 of the Hejira era, corresponding to 7-17th of December 1931 A.D., Beyt Ul-Makdes Press, Jerusalem – available in the National Library of Israel.

the Muslim and Arab worlds, not with the Zionists. However, in the end, Mattar concludes, “the effect of the congress on the British was negligible” (MATTAR, 1988, p. 232).

In his statement, Arlozoroff argued that he does not know if the Muslim leaders who spread the false allegations regarding the Jewish plot to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque lied knowingly or genuinely believed what they claimed. Such a belief, according to Arlozoroff, should put into question their judgment of these leaders (ARLOZOROFF, 1931). By revealing a lost historical episode Israeli historian Hillel Cohen rolls the question regarding the Arab leadership back to Arlozoroff (Hillel COHEN, 2015, p. 77):

*Did he in fact believe what he was saying, or did he say it for political purposes? Could he correctly claim that “no Jew has ever thought and is not thinking now in any way whatsoever of impinging on Muslim rights and their holy places?” Did he know, for example, about an underground group in Jerusalem that was, about the same time, plotting to plant a bomb on the Temple Mount?*

Cohen recounts how the Jewish paramilitary organization *Haganah* stopped this initiative by killing the Jewish perpetrators (*Ibid.*, p. 77-78). Thus, at the very time the Jewish Agency denied any Jewish aspirations regarding the Temple Mount, deep currents within the Jewish *Yishuv* did want to hasten redemption and some Jews were willing to act on it. This should be no surprise according to Cohen, “given Judaism’s long history of longing for the return to Zion and rebuilding of the Temple” (*Ibid.*, p. 78).

We can also learn that the Zionist mainstream and official bodies in Mandatory Palestine were concerned from the possibility that Jews will be acting on such messianic fervor, up to the point that they were prepared to kill a fellow Jew to stop a plan to blow up the al-Aqsa mosque from being carried out or even discovered (*Ibid.*). However, the struggle of the mainstream Zionist leadership against such proactive tendencies did not prevent the autochthonous Muslims from feeling the messianic awakening that accompanied Zionism (*Ibid.*, p. 79-82).

The SMC replied to Arlozoroff's arguments with a manifesto of eighteen pages in Arabic issued by the "Guardians of al-Aqsa Mosque", an Islamic society connected to the SMC (BAYAN, 1932),<sup>74</sup> arguing that Arlozoroff was lying. The SMC claimed that Arlozoroff is "deceiving the public". Because Arlozoroff's statement oppose the obvious truth, so they claim, the Society for the Protection of the Islamic Holy Sites in Palestine took it upon itself to expose the truth on the matter before the participants of the Islamic congress in Jerusalem (*Ibid.*, p. 1):

*Palestine is a small land lacking any natural resources to fulfil the hopes of the world Jewry and their financial principles. It is not an industrial land or an important trade center. Its fertile lands are no more than six million dunam (6,000,000,000 square meters) [...] The Jews, known for their love of money [...] did not choose for themselves this small and poor land for their National Home, while other and better lands were offered to them [...]. **It is a religious ideal, the ingathering around the Temple, which is the al-Aqsa mosque today, on the basis of a Jewish government in Palestine.***<sup>75</sup>

The SMC manifesto goes on to claim that these are not empty allegations, an "invention of Muslim imagination", or of some individuals that aspire to manipulating religious feelings for political gains as the Jewish agency argues in Arlozoroff's booklet (*Ibid.*). The SMC manifesto provides hard evidence "in order to validate the Islamic public opinion on the quality and extent of the Jewish aspirations regarding this Holy Land and its religious Islamic sites" (BAYAN,).

The document presents a series of quotes and Jewish visual manifestations of the Islamic Dome of the Rock decorated with Jewish symbols to prove its point. Yehuda Etzion, a prominent and radical national-religious thinker and Temple Activist (see below), systematically analyzed these quotes and visuals, demonstrating that the SMC's translations are more than lacking and their analysis of the visuals is partial at

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<sup>74</sup> *Bayān Jam'iyat hirāsāt al-masjid al-Aqsa waal-amākin al-islāmiyyah al-muqadasah, matba'at al-aytām al-islāmiyyah, Bayt al-maqdis.* An original copy of this document is available at the National Library of Israel, location AP 3021.

<sup>75</sup> Emphasis in bold added by me.

best (ETZION, 2014). It nevertheless exemplifies the Muslim-Palestinian anxiety for their holy places and suspicion regarding the Jewish intentions.

The SMC did not believe the Zionist leadership, and the Mufti did not believe Arlozoroff. And in return, despite his reserved tones, Arlozoroff made it clear that the Zionist leadership did not believe the Mufti and the Islamic Palestinian leadership. Arlozoroff claimed that the Muslim-Palestinian leaders are lying knowingly and that they themselves do not really believing the allegations regarding a Jewish plot to destroy al-Aqsa and rebuild the Temple. Arlozoroff accused the Muslim Palestinian leaders of cynic exploitation of religious feelings, consciously mobilizing the sanctity of al-Aqsa Mosque for political ends to overcome internal opposition. As we can see from both indirect correspondences of 1928 and 1931, both sides were consistent in misunderstanding each other and projecting their own self-perceptions on the other. This consistency will continue and reemerge throughout the coming century.

From the Zionists' secularist standpoint the Palestinians' deep religiosity was nothing but a cynical mobilization. Nonetheless, the PNM was deeply religious from the outset. From this national-religious standpoint they ignored Zionism's secular tendency and saw it as a predominantly religious movement. The Palestinian fixation regarding the Zionist plot to take over the al-Aqsa Mosque reflected the Palestinian communal destiny to protect the Islamic sanctuaries in Jerusalem (and Hebron) from a foreign political and religious takeover – the main generator of Palestinian identity. On the other hand, The Zionist leadership insisted to belittle the role of religion and tradition in generating the Zionist cause, ignoring the place of the TM and the holy sites in the latent yet potent religious element in Jewish nationalism.

This mutual misunderstanding and mistrust goes on throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sixty-five years after the 1931 polemics, in 1996, the Islamic Movement in Israel began to organize mass rallies under the banner “al-Aqsa is in danger” (*al-Aqsa fi khatar*, الاقصى في خطر), what became the biggest and most significant gathering of the Palestinians citizens of Israel for over two decades (TZIDKIYAHU, 2015b, p. 6).<sup>76</sup> Similarly to how Muslims continue to fear for al-Aqsa,

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<sup>76</sup> This episode will be further discussed in the pages below.

Jews continue not to believe this fear is authentic. In 2012 Nadav Shragai, an Israeli national religious journalist and author published a book titled: “the ‘EL-AKSA IN DANGER’ Libel: A Profile of a Lie”, calling it a modern “blood libel”, a lie and a cynic manipulation aimed at mobilizing the Islamic feelings of the masses against Zionism (SHRAGAI, 2012).

It is tempting to argue that not much has changed, that Muslims still fear for al-Aqsa and Jews continue not to believe them. But Shragai is not Arlozoroff and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Shragai’s intellectual home – the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), a national-religious and ultra conservative think tank – is not the Jewish Agency in Mandatory Palestine. As we shall see below, in contemporary Israel the theme of the Temple is no longer considered morbid. In Israel, Religious-Zionism is now claiming political and cultural hegemony, and the theme of the Temple and Jewish right of worship on the HE are discussed seriously.

During the British Mandate, the mainstream of the Zionist movement and leadership saw themselves as secular and enlightened on both the collective and individual levels. On the other hand, at the same period the PNM, led by clergy, was deeply religious. The Palestinian masses in both the villages and cities understood their identity as a mixture of modern, national, cultural, geographic elements, but predominantly in religious-traditional terms – their destiny was to protect the country’s sanctuaries for the entire Muslim world.

This Zionist-Palestinian correspondence from 1928 and again in 1931 between Arlozoroff and the Mufti is an interesting touchstone to examine founding Zionist and Palestinian perceptions of self and other. It exposes the significant difference between Zionism and the PNM regarding national-religious perspective and Jerusalem’s HE in the formative period of the British Mandate. Arlozoroff’s statement demonstrates that the Zionist leadership did not ascribe any authenticity to the Palestinian identity, they saw the national-religious unrest as a consequence of the Mufti’s cynical manipulations. Concerning the Zionist’s self-perception, Arlozoroff’s statement teaches us that the mainstream Zionist leadership at the time was secular and



detached from the Temple Mount. But they were also detached from the deep currents and the national-religious trends within Zionism.

#### A Question Bubbling for a Hundred Years

Hamas' strategist Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh is not the only one to go back to these early events in order to understand the roots of the contemporary conflict (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994). In 2014, Yehuda Etzion dedicated a whole book analyzing this indirect dialogue conducted in 1931 between the Mufti and Haim Arlozoroff, titled "The Adventures of the Mufti and the Doctor: the Zionist-Muslim Discourse about the Temple Mount and the Temple on the Backdrop of the 1929 Riots" (ETZION, 2014). Etzion is a well-known Religious-Zionist thinker and Temple activist. He became famous for his involvement in the Jewish Underground and especially for his plan to explode the Dome of the Rock (see relevant chapter in this dissertation). Etzion is thus not just "another writer" but an active player in the ongoing drama of Jewish/Zionist-Muslim/Palestinian competition over Jerusalem's sacred space. For this reason, his perspective is interesting and relevant.

Etzion sees Arlozoroff's detachment, not to say hostility, towards the Temple Mount, as nothing less than a disgrace. "Complete alienation, the Temple Mount does not interest the Zionist movement at all" laments Etzion (ETZION, 2014, p. 15). Etzion wonders whether to believe Arlozoroff and his friends at the Jewish Agency, whether "they are really convinced, to the bone, that they speak the truth, or on the contrary: they know that they are lying, because somewhere – in their brainstem, in their Jewish DNA the oath 'if i forget thee O Jerusalem' (Psalm 137:5) is scorched and the prayer 'to Jerusalem, your sanctuary, with everlasting joy' is playing" (ETZION, 2014, p. 15) (the prayer is from the Musaf service for *Rosh Chodesh* "ולירושלים בית מקדשך בשמחת" "עולם"). Etzion does not have a definite answer to this question, but "it is bubbling for a hundred years, passed on – like a baton in a relay race – from Sokolow to Weizmann, onto Moshe Dayan, and up to Netanyahu and his colleague in the coalition and the opposition (not including a few righteous that have no influence)" (ETZION, 2014, p. 15).<sup>77</sup> They lied, concludes Etzion, even if they did not know it. And the lie was

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<sup>77</sup> Nahum Sokolow (1859–1936) a Zionist author and journalist, served as president of the World Zionist Organization (WZO); Chaim Weizmann (1874 –1952), also served as president of the WZO and later

exposed not by the protest of the Jews asserting their longing to their holy site, but rather by the manifesto mentioned above issued by the Islamic society of the "Guardians of al-Aqsa Mosque" in response to Arlozoroff's appeal. This episode thus reflects in more than one way the Palestinian continuity and the Zionist change of approach and of discourse regarding the holy sites throughout the last century.

In the 1920s, the PNM was formed, along with the establishment of the British mandate, and became an institutionalized power. Throughout this formative decade, the first violent conflicts erupted between the PNM and the Zionist movement. Importantly, these conflicts consistently emerged in times and places that carried religious meaning. As this conflict continued in the following years, it took various shapes, which drew upon a RN ideology, like Izz al-Din al-Qassam and the Holy Jihad militias of the 1930s in the Palestinian side. From 1948 onward, the conflict received an inter-regional tone, and the Palestinians were pushed to the margins. Only in the 1990s, the Palestinians return to occupy center-stage and the conflict again focuses inwards, on the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the division of the land and administration of the major and shared holy sites. This process included a re-organization of the RN ethos of both movements so that it would not undermine their claims. In summary, similarly to what happened in the 1920s, the 1990s too were characterized by a re-engagement with internal core issues, which then brought about the eruption of violence. And similar to the 1920s, this wave of violence was followed by another violent eruption a decade later, with the al-Aqsa Intifada that started on October 2000, after an intermediate period in which numerous violent events occurred in the NR space-time.

### Summary

In the first part of this dissertation it was demonstrated that Israeli and Palestinian nationalism is based, at the outset, on the interpretation of religious

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became the first President of the State of Israel; Moshe Dayan (1915–1981), an Israeli general leader and politician, Israel's Minister of Security during the 1967 war. Dayan is resented by religious-Zionists for his blunt secularism, and specifically by the Temple activist for laying down the "Status Quo" at the Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade, delineating the code of conduct on the site that prevents Jews from praying; Benjamin Netanyahu (1949-), Israel's Prime Minister in 2014. About 20 months after Etzion's book was published Netanyahu was the first Israeli Prime Minister to publically assert the "Status Quo" and to reaffirm the prohibition on Jewish prayer on the Holy Esplanade ([YNET 24/10/2015](https://www.ynet.co.il/24/10/2015)).

ethoses. At times this ethos was secularized, adapted to modernity and dressed in national clothing. However, in such holy languages, in such a holy land, in which God has been invoked and summoned into our existence in countless ways, God will not remain silent nor absent. He will inevitably find ways back into the reality of life. Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim strong religious-nationalism combine religious holiness with national authenticity, into a one intertwined whole. In the Holy Land, which is practically the prototype of the "Holy Land" concept, where the three Abrahamic religions were founded, forged, evolved, clashed and coexisted, national territorialism became a religious decree.

In the 1920s, under the British Mandate, Jewish-Arab relations in the Holy Land were intensified and the PNM was forged based on Arab-Islamic-Palestinian identity and faced with the double challenge of colonialism and Zionism. At this point the first violent clash between Jews and Arabs, Zionists and Palestinians occurred, carrying a clear religious undertone. A pattern emerged in which national-political tension culminates and which occurs in a holy time and place of religious-national importance. The catalysator of the violence can be anything, a mundane object of little significance on its own, reflecting deep rage, anxieties, political anger and religious feelings.

Perhaps one option is that a national ethos that flows from a religious myth is inevitably destined to undergo religionization. Thus, in order to better understand the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we must go back to its roots and look beyond political theories, into the realm of religion. Zionism and Palestinian nationalism carry religion at the outset. Moreover, the Jewish and local Palestinian Islam are nationalized.

It is interesting to examine how this strong national-religious foundation in both national movements, even if latent or dormant, paves the way for RN to resist, gather power and claim its place in the hegemony, when faced with a real threat to its ideological and political foundation, as happened in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process of the 1990s. this will be discussed next.

## Part 2

### The shift

As demonstrated in this part of the dissertation, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process of the 1990s, the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, and the willingness to re-examine the defining axioms and national ethos of both Zionism and the PNM, shook the foundations of both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim RN movements. On both sides, RN set out to battle the process and halt it. They were fighting for their lives, as the new crystalizing political order left no room for their own axioms to exist. Faced with this existential challenge, Israeli and Palestinian RN set out to re-invent themselves, harnessing to the mission their entire institutional and ideological baggage. It was a tricky road filled with vicissitudes, but three decades later, in the beginning of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not only did they succeed in halting the peace process, but they also moved from the social and political margins of their societies, to become the new rising hegemony.

The following chapters describe the chronological parallel evolution of religious-Zionism and Hamas and the major ideological changes that accompanied their move from the margins to the political and cultural center-stage in both Israel and Palestine. It also presents the process of institution-building through which the two movements consolidated their power and national standing in society. Whether this shift to hegemony was unexpected and coincidental, or the inevitable result of the latent force of strong religious-nationalism waiting to resurface and explode, a comparative examination of its political and institutional aspects in Israel and Palestine is called for.

According to Antonio Gramsci, the famous Italian Marxist philosopher, hegemony is a dynamic and changing term. It includes a combination of political control by the state apparatus with civil-cultural and ethical hegemony dictated by the civil society.

As mentioned in the introduction, though Hamas and RZ really are the equivalent of each other in their respective society, comparing does not mean

equating, and we shall keep in mind the essential distinctiveness of each movement: Hamas as an organization, and religious-Zionism as a sociological sector.

RZ and Hamas both shifted from being a marginal annex to the leading party (or sector) or oppositional to it, to becoming an influential actor on the national level. At first, both RNs wanted to influence the national leadership and limit its maneuvering space by delineating some borders and red lines. Later, starting with the 1990s peace process, these aspirations were replaced with the will to stand behind the wheel and directly steer the mothership altogether.

We shall start our study by briefly reviewing the relevant historical background on the formation and institutionalization of the two movements, and continue by a direct examination of their move to the center stage from the 1990s onward. Institutional theory, rooted in the work of seminal thinkers such as Durkheim and Weber, contributes to a better understanding of modern societies (LEPSIUS, 2017, p. 1). Specifically in the case study examined in this dissertation, institutional theory can help explain the shift of religious-nationalism as a religious, national, social and political power.

Hamas first appeared as an opposition to Fatah and the PLO, and as mentioned in Hamas' first memo published in December 1987 aimed to pose an Islamic "solution and alternative" to the path Fatah and the PLO had taken for the Palestinian struggle (BACONI, 2018, p. 3). Thus it was only natural for Hamas to oppose the 1990s' Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the formation of the Palestinian Authority, fundamentally challenging its legitimacy. Due to its ideological rejection Hamas refused to run for office in the PA's first elections in 1996. A decade later, in 2006, a year after the Israeli disengagement from Gaza and after five bloody years of the Second Intifada, Hamas did participate in the elections and won. In 2006, Hamas gained the majority of the votes and established a government. By 2007, it completely lost its hold over the West Bank and tightened its grip over the Gaza Strip through a violent *coup d'etat*, governing it until today. Hamas shifted from a marginal opposition group to a self-ruling government of an isolated mini-state. The Hamas government is still viewed today by many in Israel and elsewhere (even by some of the political elite of the West Bank) as merely a terror organization ruling over the GS. Yet as this

chapter demonstrates, alongside its military wing, Hamas should be viewed as a political, social, religious and civil organization.

While religious-Zionism was at the outset a legitimate and integral part of the Zionist movement and (after 1948) of the Israeli politics, Hamas from its beginning was - and still is - an illegal movement. This poses a significant obstacle for any researcher of Hamas. Due to the unique circumstances under which Hamas was created and operates, it does not make public the identity of the members of the Shura Council (the consultative body which selects the movement's Politburo), and its decision-making process is not transparent.<sup>78</sup>

For this reason, the shift of Religious-Zionism from the margins to hegemony in Israel is less dramatic in comparison to that of Hamas. Nevertheless, this shift is of real consequences both for the religious-Zionist sector and for Israel altogether. Scholars of religious-Zionism in recent years are pointing to a discernible change toward political and ideological hegemony led by rabbis, politicians, educators, and the leaders of the settlement movement. One popular saying usually affiliated with the Israeli Author Amos Oz (1939-2018) epitomizes this shift in the Israeli reality of post 1967 war, by describing it as a change in the sitting order within the "Zionist train": from the position of overseeing kashrut in the kitchen car at the back of the train, religious-Zionism rushed to the locomotive to settle in the driver's seat, took hold of the wheel and now wishes to steer the train, meaning to burst out of its own sectorial glass ceiling and lead the State of Israel on the national level.

National-religious thinkers from both religious-Zionism and Hamas expressed this change, from a marginal sector aiming only to influence the direction of the national movement from the outside, to replace the hegemonic elite and lead the national movement themselves. We can find the ideological base of this shift in the writings of Hamas' ideologist Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994) and in the writings and activity of Rabbi Eliezer (Eli) Sadan, founder of the first pre-military

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<sup>78</sup> The *Shura* (شورى, Arabic for consultation) is an Islamic term which originally denoted a traditional Islamic advisory body to the caliph. It is seen by modern Islamists, among them Hamas ideologists, as an early example of Islamic democracy and an example of Islamic political progressiveness (RIZQA, 2017, p. 16). It is now used to refer to a consultative council for the management of an organization and facilitating its decision-making process (BACONI, 2018, p. 26). For more on Hamas' Shura Council see Yusuf Rizqa's paper on Hamas' political vision. (RIZQA, 2017, p. 82-87).

program for religious-Zionist youth located in the West Bank settlement Eli (SADAN, 2016). This shift is also described in the work of Hillel Ben Sasson who studied the rise of the religious right in Israel (BEN\_SASSON, 2007; BEN\_SASSON, 2020) and Tareq Baconi who studied the rise (and what he calls pacification) of the Palestinian Hamas (BACONI, 2018).

#### The Institutional Sources of Religious-Nationalism

Religious-nationalists seek to broaden religions' institutional logic onto the sphere of the democratic nation-state. Religious-nationalism is to a great extent the sum of its institutions. Thus, to understand RN we must situate it as an institutional project (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 382). According to American sociologist of religion Roger Friedland, the cultural order of RN derives from the institutional space it inhabits, at least as much as it derives from the social position of the individuals that are religious-nationalists, often the laity and not clergy (SIMPSON, 1983; ARJOMAND, 1995). Institutions are transrational ways of organizing people and objects in space and time (ALFORD et al., 1991). Friedland goes as far as arguing that institutions are themselves spaces and times, “locations in which those persons and objects carry particular meanings” (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 382).

By large, being a religious-nationalist in Israel and Palestine is not necessarily a matter of what you believe in but rather your belonging and participation in national-religious institutions (GOODMAN et al., 2004). It is through institutions that the national-religious shift of power took place in Israel and Palestine. This approach helps to account for the political power of religion and its organizations. Friedland explains how institutions embody substances of, for example, state sovereignty, bureaucratic rationality, democratic representation, familial love, religious faith, and capitalist property (what he calls “institutional ontologies”).

Institutional logic constitutes a meaningful cosmology that couples means and ends. For Friedland, religion is essentially an institutional space “according to whose logic religious nationalists wish to remake the world” (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 383). Institutions tend to increase their power and expand their scope and thus their ideologies.

Friedland's assertion that religious-nationalism "posits an institutionally specific substance of the social [...] the communal solidarities of faith" (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 385), is strongly ratified by the case studies examined in this dissertation. Indeed, the primary practices of faith are prayers and other religious rites within structures of family and community, which become "a site of faith-based solidarity and of divine creation" (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 385). The shift of Israeli and Palestinian RN from the margins to hegemony is explained through institutional changes.

Indeed, marginalized religious-nationalist clerics and laity constantly seek to transform the relation between religion and state, striving for hegemony. Groups are, to some extent, the sum of their institutions, defined by their institutional projects. The politicizing of these projects reshape the rational of collective representation. Groups strive to make their particular institutional language primary as a political act, strengthening the group's political (and other forms of) power. In Friedland's words "group political power is always also a question of institutional hegemony" (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 386).

The emergence of religious-nationalism depends, among other things, on the level of autonomy religious institutions have from state control. Early manifestations of RN appeared in places where religion was free from the grip of the state, or firmly embedded in society. This is true for Israel, where religion is strong and independent despite its strong bond with the state. It is also true for the Palestinian Islam, in a society that never achieved secularization in terms of the Western sense of modernization. Palestinian Islamic clerics under Israeli occupation in Gaza for example were free from Jordanian or Egyptian control and enjoyed the relative "freedom" to develop ideas and institutions that will later become hegemonic Islamic Palestinian RN.

By extending religion's "institutional logic" as the basis of legitimacy of the nation-state, RN makes politics a religious duty (FRIEDLAND, 2002, p. 388). According to this logic, religious-nationalism transforms the sovereign national territoriality into a sacred space. Similarly, the national history becomes part of the cosmic narrative of redemption. Political practices are ritual spaces, and religiously sacred sites turn to politicized public spaces identified with the nation (FRIEDLAND et al., 2000).



While religion is often discussed as a system of symbols (GEERTZ, 1966) and has individual and doctrinal aspects (ELIADE, 1961; JAMES, 1902), it is also a network of institutions, sacred sites, ritual and social spaces. In this sense, community centers, associations, schools, universities, hospitals, courts, and charities, are all part of religion and they are mobilizing structures (ROBINSON, 2004). The most significant institutions in this context are houses of worship. Borrowing from Durkheim (quoted in chapter 1), the house of worship is religion's "proto-institute", the most basic institution in religious life. Synagogues and mosques are the manifest arena of socialization and politicization of religious nationalism in Israel and Palestine. RN regularly meet in Israeli Jewish synagogues and Palestinian Islamic mosques, celebrating the religious calendar on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis and on special life events occasions. In these institutions, the most basic sense of community crystalizes, knowledge is created and information disseminated. It is also where politicization of religion begins. Having houses of worship from which to mobilize is an advantage that religious-nationalists have over secular nationalists (or other secular ideologies).

In the two chapters below we will examine how this institutional and political theory was implemented in the Palestinian and Israeli reality through the shift of RN from the social margins and political opposition to the hegemony of both national movements.

## Chapter 3: Institutionalization and the Move toward the Political Center Stage – Hamas

Seeds of RN in the early PNM (Before Hamas)

### **Hamas in the continuity of a tradition of religiosity**

The Palestinian national movement, as we have seen above, was marked at the outset by its strong religiosity. This fact brought many scholars studying Palestinian nationalism to the conclusion that religion was manipulated by the elites to influence the masses which, as these scholars argue, lacked national consciousness but had religious feelings (PORATH, 1974; PORATH, 1977; KHALIDI, 1997; BUDEIRI, 1997). As Gerber (and Cohen in his footsteps) asserted, this religiosity was actually part and parcel of the early Palestinian national identity (GERBER, 2008; COHEN, 2017). Indeed, from an early stage Palestinian nationalism, both as an ideology and as a movement, was led by religious clerks and ideas.

Beyond the violent eruptions of the 1920s mentioned in Part 1, the early significant expressions of armed Arab resistance to Zionism and to British foreign rule in Palestine carried a manifest Islamic tone, such as the violent insurgency of Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (1881-1935) and the first Palestinian militia called “the Holy Jihad Army” (جيش الجهاد المقدس, *Jaysh al-Jihād al-Muqaddas*) led by Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni (1907-1948) and Hasan Salama (1913-1948) in the 1930s-1940s. In this sense, Hamas saw itself as the true heir of these early expressions of Arab-Palestinian-Islamic resistance (ADWAN, 1991; AL-MAQADMEH, 1994).<sup>79</sup> This fact was noted by early Hamas ideologists (BIN YUSUF, 1990; AL-MAQADMEH, 1994). Some of Hamas’ early pamphlets were dedicated to the martyrs of the 1929 revolt (*Thawrat al-Burak*) and to the martyrs of Ya'bad, a town in the north of today’s West Bank where Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam was killed together with several of his men by British forces in 1935

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<sup>79</sup> Israeli writer Daniel Rubinstein recently published a comprehensive monograph in the Hebrew language on the Holy Jihad Army and its leader Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni (RUBINSTEIN, 2017). For biography and more information on Sheikh al-Qassam see (LACHMAN, 1982; NAFI, 1997; BACONI, 2018, p. 5). A new English biography of al-Qassam was published in mid 2020 by Canadian historian Mark Sanagan, arguing that al-Qassam’s death in November 1935 sparked the great Palestinian rebellion of 1936-1939 (SANAGAN, 2020).

(BIN YUSUF, 1990).<sup>80</sup> As indicated on their official website, “in the middle of 1991, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades became known as the armed branch of Hamas”, named after the “pioneer mujahid who was martyred in 1935 near Jenin” ([www.qassam.ps](http://www.qassam.ps)).<sup>81</sup>

From an early stage on, Hamas leaders were preoccupied in explaining why the Islamic current of Palestinian nationalism returned some three decades after the foundation of Fatah, and some 25 years after the foundation of the PLO. Hamas’ leaders adopted a somewhat apologetic explanation, which nevertheless carries a substantial truth to it, that Hamas did not appear *ex nihilo* out of nothing, but was rather a continuation of a long and ongoing process rooted in the formative experience of the PNM during the British Mandate, in the early establishment of MB’s chapter in Palestine during the 1930s-1940s, and in the country’s long and magnificent Islamic history (BIN YUSUF, 1990; AL-MAQADMEH, 1994).

Hamas emerged abruptly during the first weeks of the first Intifada – the popular Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation that erupted in Gaza December 1987. However, a key to Hamas’ success was the wide range of institutions by the Islamic Center (*al-Mujama`*), and the MB societies before it, both of which focused on *da’wa*, social welfare and education. The Hamas 1988 charter states that “the Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the wings [chapters] of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine” (Hamas Charter 1988, Chapter 1, article 2).<sup>82</sup> When Hamas was founded in 1988, it saw itself as a direct continuation of these early manifestations of Islamic Palestinian religious-nationalism and armed resistance. As Tareq Baconi asserts, Hamas’ founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (1937-2004) “was instrumental in linking Hamas’s founding in 1987 with this legacy of jihad from the 1920s [...]” (BACONI, 2018, p. 4).<sup>83</sup> As Yassin’s biographer Atef Adwan indicates, Yassin’s youth was engulfed by

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<sup>80</sup> Originally published in 1989, Bin Yusuf’s book is an attempt to re-write Hamas’ history as a movement continuously carrying the banner of Jihad, as part of an attempt to hold back the criticism voiced by PLO members that Hamas is an opportunist movement trying to ride on the waves of the intifada.

<sup>81</sup> In the brigade’s English website the spelling is “Ezzedein al-Qassam”.

<sup>82</sup> Hamas 1988 Charter was first disseminated in Arabic (HAMAS, 1988) In this dissertation I have used the English translation of the charter which appears the annex of in Mishal and Sela’s book (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 175-199).

<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, Hamas emerged in 1987 from the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. Its founders were religious people, yet the grounds on which the movement grew were not the struggle over the holy city of Jerusalem but rather the hardships of life in the Gaza refugee camps under military occupation.

the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine and he joined the movement during the early 1950s (ADWAN, 1991, p. 7-8).

### **The Muslim Brothers in Palestine**

Since Sheikh Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in 1928 in Ismailia, Egypt, the MB became (one of) the most influential and widespread transnational Islamic association, with branches in many Arab and Muslim countries (HATINA et al. (eds.), 2012). From an early stage, the MB had a special interest in Palestine. According to Palestinian scholar Abd Al-Fattah El-Awaisi, al-Banna's link with Palestine began even before he established the MB, in 1927 when he was only twenty-one years old (EL-AWAISI, 1991, p. 225):

*he sent a message to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council of the city, Hajj Amin al-Husayni. His message was an expression of his abiding concern for Islamic fraternity and of his desire to strengthen it by taking every opportunity to maintain contact with Arab and Islamic elements.<sup>84</sup>*

Awaisi is a Palestinian-Muslim national-religious scholar and the founder of ISRA (the Academy for Islamic Jerusalem Studies),<sup>85</sup> the abbreviation of which refers to the Prophet's Mohammed's nocturnal Journey to Jerusalem depicted in the Quran 17:1 known as *al-'Isrā' wal-Mi'rāj*, الإسراء والمعراج, the night journey and the ascension to the heaven. Awaisi discusses "Islam and the Palestine Question" from the perspective of the MB. Faced with the Zionist threat to Palestine, Awaisi asserts, the MB considered all Jews to be Zionists, ruling that all Muslims are obligate to oppose a Jewish state at all costs, including by force. Awaisi also notes that the MB interpreted history according to a Quranic teaching that sees the Jews as the traditional enemies of Islam. Due to Palestine's special sanctity in Islam, all Muslims should fight over it. Thus, the MB, originally focusing on *da'wa* for spreading their ideology across the Arab world, advocated in this case for armed struggle in order to liberate Palestine.

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<sup>84</sup> El-Awaisi's Ph.D thesis (1988, the University of Exeter, UK unpublished), is titled "The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question, 1936-1947" (Awaisi published it in 1998 as a book in I.B Tauris publishing house titled "The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question, 1928-47") which deals further with the attitude of al-Banna and the MB to the Palestine question.

<sup>85</sup> isra.org.uk

Following their call, the MB send volunteers to Palestine in 1947 to fight against the Jews (EL-AWAISI, 1991; EL-AWAISI, 1998).

Following al-Banna and the MB's early interest in Palestine, the first official branch of the MB society in Palestine was opened in the mid-1940s in Jerusalem. By 1948 there were about twenty-five MB branches in Palestine with a total of between twelve and twenty thousand active brothers (BACONI, 2018, p. 8). After the 1948 war Israel shut down all the MB branches in the areas under its control.

At the same period and throughout the 1950s, new MB chapters appeared all over the Jordanian controlled WB: the volunteers sent by MB in Egypt to fight in the 1948 War established in 1949 MB societies in Hebron and Bethlehem, anchoring the movement's foothold in the southern WB.

During these years, the MB built a sophisticated structure and mechanisms of membership with distinct social characteristics (COHEN, 1982). Israeli scholar Amnon Cohen, who surveyed the political parties in the WB under the Jordanian regime during the nineteen years between the wars of 1948 and 1967, demonstrates in the chapter dedicated to the MB how the society established itself institutionally, opening clubs, initiating Islamic committees, sport events and leisure activity. The main activity was religious training and courses given on a regular basis. In order to distribute their ideological goods, the MB in the WB and Gaza established a wide variety of publication, most importantly newspapers such as *al-kifah al-Islami* (the Islamic struggle), from daily to monthly journals, but also printed announcement calling for religious piety, political slogans or calls for Jihad, all carrying visual symbols and Quranic verses. The third type of publications were books and booklets written by MB members disseminated during the 1950s and 1960s (COHEN, 1982). The Brothers in the WB held connections with other chapters of the MB around the world, especially in Egypt. In short, reading through Cohen, Mitchell and al-Husayni's early accounts of the MB in Palestine, we can draw a coherent picture of an Islamic society, promoting its religious ideology through education and working on institutionalization and politicization as much as possible under the changing restrictions of the Jordanian and Egyptian regimes (HUSAINI, 1956; MITCHELL, 1969; COHEN, 1982).

## Emergence of the PLO

Following the 1948 Nakba, the PNM disseminated, and its old elite scattered and marginalized. A new post-Nakba PNM was emerging in diaspora, represented mainly by the Fatah, secretly founded in 1959. Established in 1964 by the Arab League and headed by Ahmad Shuqayri (1908-1980), the PLO was an umbrella organization for several Palestinian nationalist groups.<sup>86</sup> The PLO's inauguration ceremony, which took place in Jordanian Jerusalem overlooking the al-Aqsa Mosque, introduced the Palestinian National Covenant (*al-Mithaq al-Watani al-Filastini*, amended in 1968). It was a secularist and nationalist document, which stressed armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine, with only but a hint of religion and no reference to Islam whatsoever.

The covenant rather carried a pan-Arab scent.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, this tendency was curtailed shortly after, when Fatah became the strongest body in the PLO. Under the leadership of Chairman Yasser Arafat, Fatah introduced an emphasis on Palestinian particularism, insisting on independent action and decision-making, free from Arab intervention. Throughout the next decades the Fatah-led PLO headed the PNM. The October 1974 Arab League summit held in Rabat, Morocco, unanimously defined the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" (الممثل الشرعي (الوحيد للشعب الفلسطيني)).<sup>88</sup> Shortly after the summit, in late November 1974, the UN recognized the PLO's representation of the Palestinian people. This was a significant achievement for the PNM on the international arena, but internally, it also made it clear that there is no legitimate Palestinian political representation outside the Fatah led PLO. This was the case all throughout the 1970s-1980s, until Hamas came along.

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<sup>86</sup> PLO stand for the Palestine Liberation Organization (Arabic: منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية, *Munazzamat at-Taḥrīr al-Filastīniyyah*).

<sup>87</sup> For the text of the amended Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council July 1-17, 1968, see for example [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/plocov.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp). Article 16 of the covenant is the only place in which religion is mentioned: "The liberation of Palestine, from a spiritual point of view, will provide the Holy Land with an atmosphere of safety and tranquility, which in turn will safeguard the country's religious sanctuaries and guarantee freedom of worship and of visit to all, without discrimination of race, color, language, or religion. Accordingly, the people of Palestine look to all spiritual forces in the world for support."

<sup>88</sup> For more information on the Rabat Summit Conference, see the U.S Library of Congress: <http://countrystudies.us/jordan/16.htm>.

Despite the distinctive secularity of the PLO, it should be stressed that the background of many of its members was religious. The most prominent among the funders of Fatah, Yasser Arafat and Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad 1935-1988), were both affiliated with the MB in Gaza and Egypt during the late 1940s and the early 1950s. Thus, when they established the Fatah, they brought with them an Islamic baggage. The first chairman of the PLO, their rival Ahmad al-Shuqeyri, was the son of Sheikh As'ad al-Shuqeyri (1860-1940) from Acre. Sheikh As'ad was a graduate of al-Azhar, a senior religious figure in Ottoman administration and a representative of his region in the Ottoman parliament in 1908-1914. All throughout the British Mandate Sheikh As'ad al-Shuqeyri was a prominent Palestinian religious figure, albeit an opponent of the Mufti Hajj Amin on both national and religious grounds (KUPFERSCHMIDT, 1987; ABDUL HADI (ed.), 2011). These facts are worth mentioning to demonstrate the religious background of what is considered by many the secular expression of the new (post 1948) PNM (ZELKOVIZ, 2012). Yasser Arafat, the father of this new Palestinian movement, was by no means a secular man, all throughout his life he used religious symbols and rhetoric in text, context and subtext (MARZAN, 2016).

#### Literature on Hamas

Hamas, officially founded in 1988, is the major movement representing Palestinian Islamic religious-nationalism. Its Arabic name حماس means “enthusiasm” and is also an acronym of *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah* (حركة المقاومة الاسلامية) meaning “the Islamic Resistance Movement”. Despite Hamas’ significant influence on both the Palestinian and Israeli societies, on the conflict and the peace process between them, and on the regional and international relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, it seems that the movement is still not well understood by the public.

From the early 1990s, several Palestinian works in Arabic about Hamas were published, either by Hamas members or by scholars observing the moment (ADWAN, 1991; AL-MAQADMEH, 1994). Since Hamas’ victory in the January 2006 Palestinian elections, and its subsequent transformation from a militant and dissident organization to a de facto ruling government, there is a rise in academic literature on

the movement, mostly centered on political aspects and on the peace process.<sup>89</sup> After this turn of events, more publications by Hamas leaders and Hamas affiliated research institutes also appeared, mostly serving Hamas' political quest for international legitimacy (MOHSEN, 2017; GHUSHEH, 2008; AL-ZAHAR, 2010).

Hamas has generally been dealt with by scholars as part of the phenomenon of political Islam, in comparison to other radical Islamic movements, or within the Palestinian context in comparison to the Fatah and the PLO. Richard Davis, an American scholar and a former policy director at the White House, wrote his 2014 PhD dissertation about Hamas (reprinted as a book in 2016), studying the relationship between Hamas, popular support and the use of violence over time (DAVIS, 2014, p. 44). Davis divides the existing political science and historical academic literature on Hamas into three central arguments, frequently bound together in the sources: "1) an explanatory history of the group as an Islamic resistance movement and/or a social movement; 2) an armed group inciting violence against Israel; and 3) a civil society movement that gets its strength through the *da'awa* (social welfare program for the host population)." Another book on Hamas governance of the Gaza Strip (BRENNER, 2017) counters this analysis by noting that the scholarly literature on Islamists in power focuses on two *ideal types*. The religious and democratic traits are the two pivotal standards by which academics assess Islamists in governance. Simply phrased, the religious traits deal with "how 'Islamic' Islamists actually behave after coming to power". As for the extent of the liberal democratic traits, the idea is to see "how 'democratic' – or non-democratic – Islamists in power turn out to be" (BRENNER, 2017, p. 13-14).

Two other scholars, Paola Caridi and Sara Roy, emphasize Hamas' grassroots element through the movements civil society and welfare systems, as an organization rooted in society (CARIDI, 2012; ROY, 2011). Caridi argues that Hamas' organizational identity is anchored in popular support. After the Second Intifada, she claims, "people had grown tired of the violence" and therefore Hamas would be remiss to continue the violence after the end of the Second Intifada during the fall of 2005 (CARIDI, 2012, p. 34). Similarly, Roy argues that Hamas emphasizes welfare programs and civic

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<sup>89</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography see the bibliographic list of the updated version of the "Lexicon of Hamas Movement" published in Hebrew by the Israeli Defense Ministry (AVIAD, 2014).



restoration, not political violence (ROY, 2011, p. 15), claiming that the group's goals cannot ignore changing environmental conditions for different audiences (DAVIS, 2014, p. 45). That Hamas is more than an Islamist terror group is also stressed in Mishal and Sela's important book on Hamas: Hamas is essentially a social and political organization (MISHAL et al., 2000, p. viii, 1-12). A survey of Hamas' various branches of activity can be found in Signoles' short book in french (SIGNOLES, 2006). Mishal and Sela also dealt with the gap between Hamas rigid ideology and its institutional and political pragmatism and even flexibility.

Unlike more typical radical Islamic violent organization such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ),<sup>90</sup> Hamas draws its strength from its sophisticated *da'awa* activity, meaning the ensemble of its educational, welfare, charity, religious and ideological activities and calling (CHEHAB, 2007; ROY, 2011; SCHANZER, 2008; LEVITT, 2006; MILTON-EDWARDS et al., 2010; YOUSEF, 2010). As the Hamas- and MB-affiliated Palestinian scholar Azam Tamimi asserts, this entire mechanism is aimed at promoting the Islamization of the Palestinian population (TAMIMI, 2011). Khaled Hroub, another Palestinian academic, notes that Hamas strategically engages with international stakeholders, therefore seeking legitimacy through pragmatism (HROUB, 2002, p. 190,199). Palestinian journalist Zaki Chehab locates the actions and strategy of Hamas' leadership in the contexts of the quest for political power (CHEHAB, 2007). American scholar Jonathan Schanzer add to this struggle of power the inner Palestinian conflict, drawing a dichotomy between Hamas and Fatah as representing radical Islam and Palestinian nationalism, respectively (SCHANZER, 2008, p. 9). Agnes Pavlowsky analyzes the relations between Hamas, the PLO and Israel and the rise of Hamas in the Palestinian society (PAVLOWSKY, 2000). While scholars have already demonstrated that Fatah and Palestinian nationalism in general are not completely a secular ideology (GERBER, 2008; PORATH, 1974; KHALIDI, 1997; ZELKOVIZ, 2012; STEINBERG, 2016, p. 246), this dissertation further weakens the dichotomy between (political) Islam and Palestinian nationalism by arguing that Hamas holds a more Islamic version of Palestinian nationalism.

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<sup>90</sup> A recent history of the PIJ was published recently by Erik Skare a researcher at the Center for International Studies (CERI) at Sciences Po Paris (SKARE, 2021).

Israeli scholar Matti Steinberg explains the shift within Hamas, from a typical pan-Islamist MB charity association to a militant organization advocating particular Palestinian nationalism. According to Steinberg, Hamas reconciles between Islamic universalism and national particularism (STEINBERG, 2016, p. 263):

*The need to express Palestinian national identity explains the shift in organization and thought [...] to a political-military movement called Hamas [...] Inspired by the general wave of Islamic revivalism, its emergence in the Palestinian arena had mainly local roots.*

Shortly after Steinberg's book was published,<sup>91</sup> in May 2017, Hamas released an official paper entitled: "Document of General Principles and Policies" (hereinafter: Hamas' Document 2017)<sup>92</sup>, redefining the movement's goals and identity for the first time since the publication of Hamas' charter (or covenant) in August 1988. Both these documents will be dealt with below as the gap between them tells, in a nutshell, the story of the shift Hamas made from the margins to the center and embodies the process by which it became an established and formal institution.

The Islamic Center (*al-Mujama' al-Islami*) that preceded Hamas was more of a social-religious group. Hamas, which emerged from the popular uprising of the First Intifada (1987-1991/3) was a resistance movement that raised the banner of Jihad and sanctified violence "as an extension of moral authority" in their struggle to liberate Palestine (GUNNING, 2009; DAVIS, 2014). In this respect it was common to define Hamas as a terrorist organization (LEVITT, 2006; YOUSEF, 2010),<sup>93</sup> annulling the

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<sup>91</sup> Steinberg's 2016 comprehensive book on modern Palestinian nationhood summarizes his long career in studying the Palestinian issue as an academic and as an Israeli intelligence officer (STEINBERG, 2016). Parts of this work were published in Steinberg's earlier work including in his PhD titled (in Hebrew) "Major trends in Palestinian national thinking", approved by the Hebrew University in 2003. Steinberg's advisor Yehoshafat Harkabi is an Israeli academic who headed as a General the IDF's intelligence corps in the 1950s. Steinberg belongs to a group of Israeli scholars studying the Palestinian issue by combining academic research and Israeli (military or other) intelligence. Scholars of similar background hold a variety of academic and political approaches and also differ in their integrity, i.e. in the level of objectivity or awareness to their own bias. In this respect Steinberg is considered to be a critical thinker and to my opinion, despite his background he is among the more balanced Israeli scholars on the Israeli-Palestinian issue in general.

<sup>92</sup> Officially launched in May 2017, The Islamic Resistance Movement "Hamas": A Document of General Principles and Policies, an English translation is available on Hamas' website: <http://hamas.ps/en/post/678/a-document-of-general-principles-and-policies>

<sup>93</sup> Mosab Hassan Yousef is exceptional in this respect since he was himself part of Hamas. He was born in 1978 as the son of Sheikh Hassan Yousef, a prominent Hamas leader in the West Bank. Growing up in the cradle of Hamas, Yousef (the son) became an Israeli informant in the late 1990s and later on fled from the West Bank. In 2010 he published his autobiography "Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices".

separation between its political, social, and military components by using its *da'awa* activity to recruit for violence. The American-French anthropologist Scott Atran claimed that Hamas is completely devoted to the liberation of entire historical Palestine (regaining all the lands lost in 1948), as it is delineated in the 1988 charter (ATLAN, 2011). Elsewhere, Atran and his colleagues argue that Hamas, like other Islamic movements, is a non-rational actor which place sacred values “at the heart of deep-seated political disputes” (ATLAN et al., 2007, p. 1040). While it is clear that Hamas used violence against Israel, what is disputed here is whether the group emphasizes violence over welfare, governance and civic restoration (LEVITT, 2006; DAVIS, 2014; ROY, 2011).

As Davis mentions, several scholars study Hamas’ methodology of violence, demonstrating the process by which young men are recruited, indoctrinated, provided with weapons and logistics in order to become suicide bombers (DAVIS, 2014, p. 46; CHEHAB, 2007; MERARI, 2010), noting that Hamas can restrain its violent activity when it suits its political interests.

Both Khaled Hroub and Matti Steinberg mention that Hamas made the transition from attacking only soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories to attacking civilians inside Israel after the Hebron Massacre<sup>94</sup> under the credo of reciprocity (الرد بالمثل – *al-rad bil-mithl*) (HROUB, 2002; STEINBERG, 2016).

Israeli psychologist and terror specialist Ariel Merari who studied Hamas’ violent activity, asserted that the movement depends on popular support and will not act against Palestinian popular feelings (MERARI, 2005). Merari later asserted that Hamas was more sensitive to Palestinian public opinion than other radical Palestinian factions, asserting that “the community’s attitude to suicide attacks has a strong influence on the volume of suicide attacks generated by community members” (MERARI, 2010, p. 168).

Some scholars took the middle path in recognizing the duality inside Hamas between the bullet and the ballot (MILTON-EDWARDS et al., 2010, p. 230-259). Palestinian-British intellectual Yezid Sayigh points to a dichotomy between Hamas running a national campaign platform of ‘law and order’ while being committed to

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<sup>94</sup>In February 1994, Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Muslims Palestinian worshipers inside the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of Patriarchs and wounded many others

violent resistance against Israel ([SAYIGH, 2011, p. 11,25](#)). Other Israeli and Palestinian scholars draw a different portrait of Hamas as a more pragmatic movement, in constant flux and power brokering ([MISHAL et al., 2006](#); [BACONI, 2018](#); [ELDAR, 2012](#)). Mishal and Sela argue that Hamas uses controlled violence only to serve its political needs. Hamas' leader Khaled Mashal declared in a 2007 rally (after Hamas' electoral victory) in Damascus that "Land is only liberated by the gun", demonstrating the "hard-line Hamas commitment to armed struggle as the only source of Palestinian power in any negotiations with Israel" ([MCGEOUGH, 2009, p. 412](#)).

In recent years, a new trend in the literature appeared, depicting Hamas as a movement in change, from revolutionary movement of militant Islam, defined as a terrorist organization by Israel, the EU, the USA and the UN, to a political actor dealing with governance and seeking legitimacy ([SELA, 2015](#); [BRENNER, 2017](#); [BACONI, 2018](#)). This approach is backed by studies published by Hamas itself ([MOHSEN, 2017](#)) and official documents such as the May 2017 document, representing the organization's shift from a marginal opposition to social and political hegemony.

#### Institutions

##### **The Islamic center**

The Islamic Center (*al-Mujama`*), established in 1973 and formally legalized in 1978. It was the key institution from which Hamas emerged and on which it was built. Hamas' institutionalization can be recounted through the story of its founder, yet another formative charismatic Palestinian leader. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (1937-2004) was a paraplegic (almost quadriplegic, nearly blind, and confined to a wheelchair), a refugee from al-Jorah village near Ashkelon, and a teacher from Al-Shati refugee camp on the northern coast of the Gaza Strip. Even though Yassin lacked any formal religious education, he became the (almost) undisputed leader of the MB in Gaza, founded the Islamic Center and later on became the founder and leader of Hamas. In this sense, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin is the father of the new strong religious-nationalism in Palestine.

The MB could thrive in Gaza in 1952 due to their role in the Free Officers Revolution in Egypt and young Yassin became a devoted follower, officially joining the MB in 1955 at the local branch of the Refugee Camp where he lived. In 1968 Yassin became the head of the MB in Gaza ([AVIAD, 2014, p. 151](#); [ADWAN, 1991](#)). The

disconnection between Egypt and the Gaza Strip following the 1967 war enabled more independence for the MB Palestine branch, led by a younger generation of leaders whose views were shaped by the events of 1967. From his small mosque at the Shati Camp in Gaza Yassin quietly but systematically worked to restore and build the MB's institutions in Gaza, gathering around him a group of followers in the quest to Islamize Palestinian society. Following the 1967 war, Yassin, by then already a charismatic Palestinian leader, founded a core group of activists which whom he founded later the Islamic Center. In 1976 the Islamic Association (*al-Jam'iyya al-islamiyya* الجمعية الإسلامية) was founded and became one of the center's main instruments, functioning as a framework for religious and communal activities, with branches all over the GS (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 19-20). Yassin appointed his right-hand Khalil al-Quqa (1947-2005) as the association's first director, who later became one of the future founders of Hamas (AVIAD, 2014, p. 151). In 1973, the institutionalization process of the MB in Gaza further progressed with the creation of the Islamic Center, an evolution of the Islamic Association, on whose foundation Hamas would be built fifteen years later (BACONI, 2018, p. 36; CARIDI, 2012, p. 69-83).

Similar to the Jewish concept of *teshuva* (תשובה, repentance in Judaism), the Islamic concept of *taubah* (توبة, repentance, penitence, contrition; penance)<sup>95</sup> was the center's main goal. The center worked to re-Islamize the local population and re-shape society according to the religious values of the MB and the rejection of Western culture and "inadequate" patterns of behavior that Palestinians adopted from their friction with Israel (AVIAD, 2014, p. 176). After six years of activity without a permit, the Islamic center was officially registered in 1979 by the Israeli Military authorities as a voluntary social, religious, cultural and health association, its mission being to provide welfare for the needy.

Shortly after, the association opened seven regional branches in the Gaza Strip headed by some of the future founding backbone of Hamas: Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi (1947-2004) in Khan Yunis, Khalil al-Quqa in Shati and Abd al-Fattah Dukhan (born in 1936) in Nuseirat camp. Each branch opened committees for education, health and sport; founded many mosques, kindergartens sport clubs, clinics; gave scholarships to

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<sup>95</sup> According to Hans Wehr Arabic-English Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (1994).

students; and resolved conflicts among rivaling clans while bypassing the local judiciary authorities. This *da'wa* (summon) invocation was sheikh Yassin's life work.

This kind of Islamic awakening was part of the MB activity of Islamic awakening through social, cultural, and educational work. However, along with this nonviolent activity, encouraged by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, both the Islamic Center in Gaza and the Islamic Movement in Israel (IMII) attempted separately and almost simultaneously to establish a violent underground. The founders of the IMII, especially Sheikh Abdullah Nimr Darwish (1948 – 2017) established in 1979 *Usrat-al-Jihad* (the family of Jihad), promoting an Islamic state via violent struggle. The organization, inspired by Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, was crushed by Israel in 1981 and its members incarcerated (REKHESS, 2000). In the early 1980s, the Islamic center, after taking control over the Islamic University established in Gaza in 1978, gained more confidence and political power. In 1983, Yassin established a clandestine military wing called *al-mujahidun al-filastiniyyun* (the Palestinian jihadists) and started gathering arms and recruit cells to prepare for a future struggle against Israel. This movement was the prototype of Hamas. In June 1984, Israeli security forces reviled the underground and arrested several men for holding illegal arms, among others Sheikh Yassin himself, Abdul Rahman Tamraaz (born 1946) and Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh. They were sentenced to 8-12 years in prison and Yassin got 13 years (AVIAD, 2014, p. 175-176; CHEHAB, 2007, p. 21). In 1985 both Sheikh Yassin and Sheikh Abdallah Nimr Darwish were released in the framework of the Jibril Agreement, a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC), in which Israel released 1,150 prisoners in exchange for three Israeli soldiers. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the internal conditions were ripe, so it seems, for Palestinian political Islam to bear arms. But this wasn't the case for external conditions, which became favorable only at the time of the first intifada.

About a decade after the MB established itself in Palestine, they developed jihadist tendencies, i.e. Islamic militarism. The first attempts of Jihad against Israel were premature and rapidly suppressed. Only after the eruption of the intifada in December 1987, was the time ripe for Hamas to emerge. These early expressions of Palestinian jihadist undergrounds were part of the larger trend of radical Islam organizations that emerged during the 1970s out of the MB such as the Egyptian *takfir*

*wal-hijra* (excommunication and emigration) and later the Egyptian Islamic Jihad that assassinated Egypt's president Anwar Sadat in 1981. Another tie to these larger connections can be found in a pamphlet of Hamas published in 1990 dedicated to Abdallah Azzam (1941-1989) a Palestinian who was one of the pioneers of the modern global jihad and the founder of Al-Qaeda alongside Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri (BIN YUSUF, 1990).

At the same period, the MB produced many offshoots, including the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which was founded in 1981 in Gaza by Fathi Shiqaqi (1951-1995). The PIJ remained a marginal and small militant-terrorist organization, which lacked the wide base of support that Hamas acquired through its *da'wa* mechanism and the building of social, political, and institutional power (SKARE, 2021). PIJ militants executed violent attacks against Israelis since the early 1980s and played an active role in the eruption and escalation of the First Intifada (1987-1991/3). It issued bombings against Israelis during the 1990s as part of the struggle against the Oslo Process and was very active in issuing suicide attacks during the Second Intifada (2000-2005),<sup>96</sup> killing hundreds of Israeli citizens and soldiers. PIJ was the first to pose an Islamic alternative to the post 1948 secular Palestinian nationalism. Yet PIJ's alternative focused completely on violence as the sole way through which to achieve an Islamic Palestinian theocratic state. Hamas on the other hand, albeit carrying out more violent attacks than PIJ (in total numbers, not in relevance to the organizations' size), was rooted in Palestinian society and focused on Islamic *da'wa*, preaching and education, welfare and social work and political engagement, posing an overall cultural, social and political Islamic alternative to the secular PNM.

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<sup>96</sup> A prominent attack issued by PIJ took place in a bus station in HaSharon Junction (commonly known as Beit Lid Junction) on the 22/01/1995, using two suicide bombers, who detonated themselves in the same place successively killing 22 people, all of them soldiers except for 1 civilian. The attack shook the Israeli public and came at a time when the First Intifada was waning. It marked the beginning of the Palestinian Islamist efforts to hinder the Oslo Process through terror. Several months after the attack Israel assassinated PIJ's leader Fathi Shikaki in Malta. Another well-known PIJ attack was the Maxim restaurant suicide bombing in Haifa on 04/10/2003 during the Second Intifada. 28-year-old Hanadi Jaradat, a Palestinian women and law student exploded herself in a restaurant killing 21 and injuring about 60. Two entire families of five were killed, among them four children age 11, 9, 4, and a two months baby.

### **A National-Religious University**

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s the Islamic Center was in a process of building its institutional power. One example was when in 1979 Islamic activists tried to take control from the communists over the Red Crescent association in Gaza ([CARIDI, 2012](#)).<sup>97</sup> At this stage, motivated by regional developments (such as the Islamic revolution in Iran and the weakening of the Fatah-PLO following the 1982 war in Lebanon), the *Mujama`* started to run for elections of several professional unions and institutions in Gaza (such as the chambers of commerce, the union of doctors, engineers etc.). The manifest expression of Palestinian-Islamic institutional power building was the *Mujama`*'s takeover of the Islamic University in Gaza (IUG), which became its main power base.

The PLO founded the IUG in 1978 with Arab funding.<sup>98</sup> Sheikh Yassin, already a prominent Islamic figure in Gaza, played a role in the foundation of the university. However according to a report by Israeli Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center (IICC) written in 2010 (when the IUG was already a known Hamas' stronghold), the claim that Yassin himself founded the university is erroneous (IICC report 28/04/2010). At first, the IUG was funded mainly by the PLO-Jordanian fund of the 1978 Bagdad Summit but as Jordan-PLO relations drifted apart the university's budget was halted. Ibrahim Ghusheh, a Palestinian senior political figure of the MB in Jordan and later co-founder of Hamas political committee in diaspora recounts that in the meanwhile the Islamic Center in Gaza strengthened its ties with the Islamic movement in Jordan, which agreed to fill the budgetary deficit ([GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 137](#)). Under Israeli rule, the MB chapters in the Palestinian territories received increased alms and

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<sup>97</sup> After their unsuccessful attempts to take over the Red Crescent organization, in January 1980 Islamists burned their offices in Gaza. The Gaza branch of the Red Crescent had been founded and managed by Haidar Abdel-Shafi (1919-2007), a prominent Palestinian physician and political figure affiliated with the PLO more left-oriented wing.

<sup>98</sup> On the background of the Camp-David accords and the peace accord between Israel and Egypt, the 9th Arab summit assembled in Bagdad, Cairo's traditional rival in the Arab world, in November 1978. The summit's goal was to consolidate an agreed Arab position regarding the peace agreement (Egypt was banned from the Arab League and did not participate in the summit). One of the decisions taken in the summit was to establish an Arab fund that would assist the factors confronting Israel, such as Jordan and the PLO, in an overall annual sum of 360 million dollars of Arab money. This sum motivated the PLO and Jordan to rebuild their relations and to cooperate. This money enabled the establishment of many institutions in the Palestinian territories, among them also the IUG ([MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 23-24](#)). For more information on the 1978 Bagdad summit see Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS) 1978.



remittances from the Palestinian diaspora as well as from Islamic groups from the Arab Gulf states and from Jordan (BACONI, 2018, p. 17). These funds enabled Yassin to take over the IUG.

By 1983, most of university's board of trustees were members of the MB in Jordan and Muhammad Saqr was appointed as IUG's president (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 24). Saqr, a MB activist from Jordan, headed the most important higher education institution in the GS for two years before Israel deported him. During Saqr's time in office, staff and faculty members who did not accept the Islamic Center's hegemony were removed, and the board of trustees became mostly Islamist (AVIAD, 2014, p. 177). In parallel the *Mujama*'s student "Islamic block" defeated the PLO's united list and won the majority of votes in the elections to the student union in January 1983 (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 24). With future Hamas leaders Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahar (born in 1945) and Dr. Abed al-Aziz Rantisi joining its staff, the IUG became the Islamic Center's most important institution, a hub for education, indoctrination, and intellectual development. The IUG was also a hub to recruit activists and to build and train leadership (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 137), and was to become a base for Hamas' future political power.

#### **Hamas as an institution.**

In contrast with RZ, which is a sector owning a variety of institutions, Hamas is itself an institution, with its own structure, hierarchy, and explicit goals formulated in official documents.

#### **1988 charter**

The first of these documents is the Hamas covenant, in Arabic *Mithaq Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* or simply *Al-Mithaq*. This charter, Hamas' founding document, was published in August 1988 (for a description of the events leading to the publication, see below section "Crystallization of Hamas"). The charter, containing 36 articles, was printed and distributed widely in the GS, the WB, Jordan and Kuwait. The charter became Hamas' platform, introducing the movement, outlining its mission, values, and goals. It opens with several quotes that appear before the introduction to the main text. One of these quotes, of Imam Hasan al-Banna (founder of the MB), argues *that* "Israel will rise and will remain firm until Islam eliminates it as it had

*eliminated what was before" (HAMAS, 1988)*. This quote frames at the outset the entire documents and Hamas' approach altogether under the concept of "resistance". The charter's first article asserts that *"the basis of the Islamic Resistance Movement is Islam"*.

The second articles anchors Hamas as *"a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Palestine"*. Hamas is thus part of the global Islamic trend, which aspires to establish an Islamic society and political order in all domains of life: *"politics and economics, education and society, jurisdiction and law, exhortation and teaching, communication and art, the seen and the unseen, and in all the other spheres of life"* (Mithaq Hamas, 1988). The particular national Palestinian identity appears only in the sixth article, asserting that Hamas is a *"distinct Palestinian movement."* According to Baconi, *"through its charter, the brotherhood's Palestinianization culminated in Hamas's emergence as both an Islamic and a nationalist party"* (BACONI, 2018, p. 21). Nevertheless, in the charter Islam, religion and resistance are clearly the independent variables for Hamas, while Palestinian nationalism is a dependent variable. As the text and structure of the charter indicates, while Hamas is a distinct Palestinian movement, it is first an Islamic organization. Article 8 reflects the notion of *Islamic Resistance* with the Motto of Jihad (Mithaq Hamas, 1988):

*God is its goal;  
The messenger is its Leader.  
The Quran is its Constitution.  
Jihad is its methodology, and  
Death for the sake of God is its most coveted desire.*

Scholars have scrutinized Hamas' 1988 charter as an exemplary Islamist document. There are several scholarly translations and analyses of the charter, but no official translation available.<sup>99</sup> The Hamas Charter is an Islamist document filled with quotations from the Quran, Hadith and classic Muslim scholars, modern ideologists of political Islam and Jihadists. At the same time the charter "blatantly appropriated the PLO's national values [...] cast in Islamic terminology and the Islamic belief system"

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<sup>99</sup> For a French translation of Hamas' charter see Jean-François Legrain's 1991 book « Les voix du soulèvement palestinien 1987-1988 » (Cairo, CEDEJ). In this dissertation I have worked directly with the Arabic source of the charter (HAMAS, 1988). For quotations I consulted the translations of Hroub (HROUB, 2002) and of Mishal and Sela (MISHAL et al., 2006). Several translations are available online in (among other languages) English, French and Hebrew.

(MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 43). The charter stresses Hamas' deep religiosity and devotion to the Islamic faith and values. Tension arises between the universal and cosmic Islamic element (articles 5, 7) and the Palestinian particularism described in the charter as Uniqueness and Independence (article 6).

However, the equation is clear, in paraphrase of the slogan of political Islam: for the Palestinian issue "Islam is the Solution". As indicated in the charter, "*when faith is lost, there is no security*" (article 6). The Palestinian issue is an Islamic one, Palestinian nationalism as it appears in the charter, is Islamic. The only solution for Palestine is resistance: "*there is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by Jihad*" (article 13, which deals with peaceful solutions). Jihad here is clearly holy war,<sup>100</sup> and in the case of Palestine it is an "*individual obligation for every Muslim*". This assertion is based on the Islamic concept of individual duty (*fard 'ain* فرض عين) in contradiction to the traditional approach to Jihad (as a holy war) as a collective duty of the Islamic community (*fard kifaya* فرض كفاية) or of the political authorities (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 30). Hamas' goal of an Islamic society and state (article 9) cannot be achieved without the liberation of all of Palestine, which is defined as an Islamic *waqf* (religious endowment)<sup>101</sup> that cannot be compromised (article 11, also see Reiter 2007). Article 12 indicates that according to Hamas, "*nationalism is part and parcel of its religious creed*".

The charter is bluntly anti-Jewish, echoing anti-Semitic notions (see Part 3 of this dissertation for a related discussion). Unlike the PLO's 1964 national charter, which tried to separate anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism, Hamas 1988 compared Israel to Nazi Germany ("*the Nazism of the Jews*" article 20) and mentioned manifest anti-

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<sup>100</sup> For a comprehensive survey on the development of the concept of Jihad in Islam see both articles of Ella Landau-Tasserion and Menachem Milson in compilation from 2010 titled "War and Peace" published in Hebrew by the Zalman Shazar Center.

<sup>101</sup> An Islamic Waqf is a religious endowment of a mortmain. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam: "in Islamic law, the act of founding a charitable trust, and, hence the trust itself [...] (in French often rendered as *habous*). The essential elements are that a person, with the intention of committing a pious deed, declares part of his or her property to be henceforth unalienable (*habs, tahbīs*) and designates persons or public utilities as beneficiaries of its yields [...]" (see entry: "Wakf" in BEARMAN et al. (eds.), 2006). Yitzhak Reiter points out that though since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Waqf is generally declining in the Islamic world as part of the process of modernization, in contrast the Islamic Waqf institute in Jerusalem has been experiencing a revival since 1967. Under the Israeli rule the Waqf enjoys an exaggerated image of wealth, power and sanctity. The Islamic Waqf in Jerusalem is funded by the State of Jordan and controls educational and religious services and manages the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Jewish conspiracies inspired by the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and from Nazi and Soviet propaganda.<sup>102</sup> Anti-colonial and an anti-Western also appear in the Charter. This overt antisemitism will disappear in Hamas' 2017 document, as part of the shift and Hamas' effort in adopting international norms.

We take the charter here as a primary source since it is a milestone in the process of development and change that stands in the heart of the argument. Over a period of thirty years, from the 1988 charter to the 2017 document, we will show how Hamas shifted from pan-Islamism to particular Palestinian nationalism. This shift occurred in parallel with the process of politicization, which came on the account of Hamas' revolutionary element. Such politicization, so it seems, is a prerequisite to becoming a central and hegemonic actor in the PNM. Already the 1988 charter was by itself a step away from the MB's pan-Islamism toward a particular Palestinian identity.

### **Structure**

Hamas Politburo is designated by a body called the Shura council, made up of elected members from the four 'regional' councils: Gaza, the West Bank, the diaspora, and prisoners in Israeli jails. These regional councils appoint their own 'regional' Politburos for each area etc.<sup>103</sup> At first, the Shuras were dominated by religious clerks. However, as time passed, they also included political and social figures.

The Shura Council's structure demonstrates Hamas' rooting in society. For instance, in the GS Shura Council, Gaza City has three representatives, Khan Younis two, Rafah two, the northern strip one and the center, where four refugee camps cluster, also one. Within each district, smaller parcels are delineated into large areas, each large area into smaller areas, then into "strongholds", and each stronghold to the mosques within it. For each mosque within the small areas a family is designated and receives responsibility over it and over Hamas' activity within that community. A member of the family serves on the small area's committee, and the committee chairperson is sent as the representative to the council of the larger area.

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<sup>102</sup> Article 22, titled "the powers that support the enemy", is a classic anti-Semitic text. American-Jewish historian Jeffrey Herf elaborated on the anti-Semitic motives in Hamas' charter: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/08/01/why-they-fight-hamas-too-little-known-fascist-charter/>.

<sup>103</sup> [https://www.ecfr.eu/mapping\\_palestinian\\_politics/detail/shura\\_council](https://www.ecfr.eu/mapping_palestinian_politics/detail/shura_council)

## Political Platforms: from “Salvation” to “Change and Reform”

Hamas was political from the beginning in the sense that it was first created as a revolutionary social movement, but it evolved through the years to become more and more a movement managing conservative or mainstream politics. As this work claims, this shift can be witnessed through the institutions of the movement. The first step in this shift from the social to the political, was the creation of a political party at all: though this first attempt faded without much success, it indicated the first inklings of the movement to participate in the political game. Ten years later, a newer and more modern party was established which tried to appeal to voters beyond the traditional support base of the movement. This shows a further shift from mere political participation to an actual claim for political power.

In preparation for the 1996 first PA elections, a political party – The National Islamic Salvation Party (*hizb al-khalas al-watani al-islami* حزب الخلاص الوطني الفلسطيني) was launched by proponents of political participation within Hamas in November 1995, and published the ideological principles of the new movement. However, the hard-liners had the upper hand, Hamas did not take part in the elections and the party’s influence faded.

In the 2006 elections, Hamas ran under the banner of the “Change and Reform” block (*kutlat a-taghyeer waal-islah* كتلة التغيير والاصلاح). The parliamentary block actually operated as Hamas’ political party, with its own administration, website and social media accounts ([www.islah.ps/new2/](http://www.islah.ps/new2/)). The supreme elections committee in Gaza headed by Mahmoud al-Zahar drafted the “Change and Reform” political platform. Upon its publication in 2006, the Change and Reform’s political platform was the most important Hamas document since the 1988 charter. In his analysis of the document Khaled Hroub asserted (HROUB, 2006, p. 9):

*The fourteen-page Electoral Platform for Change and Reform constitutes without a doubt the broadest vision that Hamas has ever presented concerning all aspects of Palestinian life.*

The seventeen articles of the platform cover a wide spectrum of topics, some completely new to Hamas. The platform opens with the movement’s principles,

before covering other issues such as: internal politics, external relations, administrative reforms and fighting corruption. The platform continues, relating to legislative policy and reforming the judiciary; public freedoms and citizen rights; education policy; religious guidance and preaching; social policy; media and culture policies; women, children and family issues; youth issues; housing policy; health and environment policy; agriculture policy; economic, financial and fiscal policies; labor issues; and transport and border crossing (HROUB, 2006; CHANGE AND REFORM PARTY). We will see in the section "The change and reform political platform" how this document reflects the evolution of Hamas in comparison to the 1988 charter. We will now recount the emergence of Hamas from the institutions which preceded it, drawing from their rootedness and pervasiveness in society.

#### Birth and rise of Hamas

##### **The crystallization of Hamas**

The appearance of Hamas on the stage in 1987-1988 was the first step in creating a new kind of Islamic Palestinian religious-nationalism, which aimed at replacing "traditional" and "secular" Palestinian nationalism of the PLO. Shortly after the Hamas charter was released in August 1988, Anas Abd al-Rahman compared it with the 1964 Palestinian National Charter, describing the former as a founding document, which replaces the latter (ABD AL-RAHMAN, 1989). Hamas, as its name indicates (the Islamic **Resistance** Movement) and in line with the militancy of the first Intifada, emphasized resistance to Israel. Following the eruption on the Intifada in December 1987, Yassin decided it was time to fulfil his suppressed militant tendencies. By June 1989, Hamas, together with the PIJ, was already outlawed by Israel, banned as a terror group and forced to go underground.

In contrast, the *Mujama`* was not a clandestine body, it operated freely under the Israeli law. Thus, while Egypt suppressed the MB, they could act freely under Israeli military law. From Israel's perspective the Islamic Center's welfare activity was actually welcomed. It eased some of the hardships Palestinians faced and lowered costs and the pressures from the IDF's civil administration in the Gaza Strip's poorest and most crowded refugee camps. Moreover, these religious charities were non-violent and seemed at first as a harmless alternative to the armed struggle of the PNM

led by Fatah-PLO, similar to the village Leagues of the early 1980s.<sup>104</sup> Israeli officials preferred the Palestinian focus on religion rather than on nationalism and resistance. For the secular elites in Israel at the time, so it seems, nationalism was synonymous with secularism and separating it from religion was natural. But Palestinians MB activists did not separate Islam from Palestinian nationalism (and this can possibly be said of some of Fatah's top leadership as well).

In the poor and overpopulated refugee camps of Gaza Strip, the oppression was harsher than in other places and the urgency to participate in Palestinian national resistance was bubbling. It comes as no surprise that Palestinian Islamists, whose leadership comes from families of refugees from 1948, would incline towards the national cause of liberation more than to a universalist Islamic cause. Tareq Baconi, a British-Palestinian analyst and academic who studied Hamas, calls this the "Palestinianization" of the MB in Palestine ([BACONI, 2018, p. 19](#)).

Twenty years after Israel occupied the Territories, 1988 was a decisive year, a turning point for the PNM and the PLO ([SHEMESH, 1999](#)). The intifada bore its political fruits. In July 1988, Jordan disengaged from the Israeli controlled West Bank, renouncing its prior annexation of that territory. This paved the road to the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in November and in the longer term to the peace process and the Oslo Accords. In-between, in August 1988 Hamas declared its presence by disseminating its charter throughout the Palestinian territories and diaspora, claiming its place in the landmark events of the period. One writer, Mosab Hassan Yousef, son of one of Hamas' co-founders Sheikh Hassan Yousef, dates the establishment of Hamas back to 1986, in a secret meeting in Hebron. Yousef argues that the meeting included Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, Muhammad Jamal al-Natsheh from Hebron, Jamal Mansour from Nablus, his own father Sheikh Hassan Yousef, Mahmud Muslih from Ramallah, Jamil Hamami from Jerusalem and Ayman Abu Taha from Gaza ([YOUSEF, 2010, p. 19-20](#)). Baconi and Hroub, like most writers, both date Hamas' establishment to the outbreak of the intifada ([BACONI, 2018; HROUB, 2002, p. 36](#)). In any case, as it

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<sup>104</sup> The village councils of Leagues (*rawabit al-qura*) was an initiative encouraged by Israel in collaboration with local Palestinian figures hostile to the PNM, most notable among whom is the former minister in Jordan Mustafa Dudin from Dura, a Palestinian city southwest of Hebron. For more information on this episode and its failure see H. Cohen ([COHEN, 2014](#)).

seems, Hamas was ready to go before its official launching date (December 1987), and only waited for the opportunity to burst to public awareness.

Ibrahim Ghushesh points out in his memoirs that the decision to establish Hamas was made already in 1983 in a conference held by the MB in Jordan on the Palestinian issue (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 137). According to Ghushesh the MB in Jordan decided to start a pro-active resistance in Palestine in parallel to the MB's wider agenda of Islamizing Arab societies first, based on the teachings of al-Banna and Qutb (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 133). Ghushesh describes the MB's approach to the Palestinian issue in three stages (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 137-138): 1) First, the approach of Jihad, with MB members actively participating in the 1948 war to liberate Palestine. Upon their return, the fighters were nonetheless still persecuted by the Arab regimes. 2) In the two decades following the humiliating defeat of 1948, the MB changed their approach to that of establishing first an Islamic state, with the idea that once established such a state will be in a position to take up Jihad against Israel. Such a doctrine was "predominantly crystalized by the thought of Sayyid Qutb, who emphasized the building up of a Muslim society that would lead to the formation of an Islamic state" (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 138). Ghushesh compares this approach to the prevailing ideologies in the Arab world at the time, such as Nasser's pan Arabism, the Ba'ath Party, socialists and nationalists, which waged military coups to Arab countries in order to establish a political base for the implementation of their ideology. 3) Since the MB (and other Islamic movements) failed to establish an Islamic state, the 1983 conference marked the transition to the third stage – popular resistance in Palestine in parallel to the efforts for establishing an Arab Islamic state. According to Ghushesh, this phase culminated in the establishment of Hamas. The 1983 conference was led by Jordanian MB's General-Guide Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman al-Khalifa, and prominent Palestinian MB members from the territories were present such as Abed al-Fatah Hassan Dukhan from the GS (born in 1936, in 2007 elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council) and Hassan al-Qiq (1940-2006), an academic from the WB. Ghushesh recounts that it was there and then that the MB decided to take a more pro-active approach on Palestine. On the ground, the MB in Jordan decided to finance the MB establishment in the WG and GS.



In 1983, the same year as the conference in Jordan, Yassin started to gather arms. Yassin and his men, who were imprisoned by Israel in 1984, were released in 1985 and immediately continued their preparations to organize and launch armed attacks against Israeli targets, mainly in the territories occupied in 1967. The secret infrastructure of the 1983 *mujahidun al-filastiniyyun* did not disappear, and in 1987-1988 served the establishment of Hamas' violent activity. In this sense, Hamas represents a new stage in both philosophy and methodology of the MB in Palestine and of Palestinians in the MB (GHUSHEH, 2008).

In 1983 the MB in Jordan (the Brotherhood in *bilad al-Sham*) launched the "Palestinian Apparatus", a body focusing on Palestine, in parallel to Yassin's 1983 jihadist organization which waited to "launch resistance at an opportune time", preparing the infrastructure for the intifada (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 138-139). A critical reading of this source might show an attempt to shape memory in retrospective, giving Hamas and the MB the credit for generating the intifada, similar to the claim that sheikh al-Qassam's martyrdom in 1935 provoked the 1936 revolt. It could be partially true, as one more piece of the puzzle, but the motivation seems to be claiming a place for Hamas in the national ethos. Maybe it also reflects a need by Hamas founders to claim primacy over Palestinian Islamic resistance from the PIJ, established by Shiqaqi in the early 1980s. But even though the PIJ had been established before Hamas, the latter was part of Palestinian society and national movement, while PIJ remains merely a small and clandestine militant group.

As we have seen, then, Hamas was in the process of crystallization throughout the 1980s. During the second half of the 1980s it moved to a new stage of operation, which was officially launched during the dramatic events of the First Intifada. Yet Hamas' leadership consolidated prior to its official launching. The Islamic Center for example, managed and coordinated the entire apparatus of the MB in Palestine, and over the course of two decades dramatically increased the number of mosques controlled by the MB in Palestine, in the WB through the Jordanian controlled waqf administration and in Gaza Strip through the Islamic University (TZIDKIYAHU, 2014). These mosques served as a base for all other activity, from soup kitchens to kindergartens, but mainly for ideological consolidation and recruitment.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1987, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin gathered a group of men at his home at Al-Shati refugee camp to discuss the events that had erupted earlier that day in the neighboring refugee camp Jabalia, in the north of the Gaza Strip. It was the beginning of what we now call the first Palestinian Intifada, a popular uprising against the Israeli occupation, a landmark in the Palestinian history and a watershed line in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>105</sup> By December 14, these men published a leaflet hailing the intifada and declaring that “Islam is the solution and the alternative” to the Palestinian struggle (BACONI, 2018, p. 3; HROUB, 2002, p. 265-266). Soon enough Yassin realized that the intifada was the opportunity they had waited for to leverage all the clandestine preparations of the past years and to create an organization that would eventually “raise the banner of God over every inch of Palestine” (BACONI, 2018, p. 3; HAMAS, 1988 article 6). On the ground, Hamas was incorporated into the MB’s various existing charity, social, religious and political institutions that already existed, mainly under the framework of the Islamic Center. As Hamas introductory memorandum indicates:

*The movement announced itself to the world in a public communique distributed in the Gaza Strip on 12 December 1987 and in the West Bank on 14 December 1987. It declared the beginning of a new stage in the struggle of the Palestinian people against the Zionist occupation, that is, the stage of the blessed popular intifada.*<sup>106</sup>

By January 1988 the leaflets already carried the name HAMAS (حماس), an Arabic acronym for *harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya* (حركة المقاومة الاسلامية, Islamic Resistance Movement), also composing an Arabic word which translates as “zeal”. In August 1988, Hamas issued its founding document - the Hamas covenant.

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<sup>105</sup> For an Israeli perspective on the first intifada see Schiff and Yaari’s detailed account written during the uprising, describing it as “Israel’s third front”, and analyzing the political problems it caused Israel (SCHIFF et al., 1990). The contemporary Palestinian perspectives on the intifada reflected in numerous leaflets published by the various Palestinian actors. A collection of Palestinian and international academic perspective on the intifada can be found in Jamal Nassar and Roger Heacock’s compilation, including an early account of the Islamic Movement and the Intifada, surveying both the PIJ and HAMAS (pp. 175-189) by Jean-François Legrain (NASSAR et al. (eds.), 1990).

<sup>106</sup> Translated by Khaled Hroub and brought as an annex in his book on Hamas (HROUB, 2002, p. 292).

### **Raising dropped banners - Hamas**

Hamas' development and rise are closely linked to the changes that occurred to the Fatah led PLO. Throughout the 1980s the Fatah-PLO underwent a slow but consistent shift from armed resistance to diplomacy.<sup>107</sup> Hamas' rise as an armed resistance movement can be seen as neatly filling the gap, taking up the arms dropped by the PLO to continue the fight.

The breakout of the intifada can be seen as a point of rupture in the process of diplomatization of the PNM, but it actually did not sway the PLO from this course. In fact, from the PLO's perspective, the international peace conference held in Madrid in October 1991 represented the political fruits of the intifada (TZIDKIYAHU, 2012).

In November 1988, the Palestinians declared independence. The declaration was originally to be announced in al-Aqsa Mosque by Faisal Husayni, but he was arrested by the Israeli police the day before, so it was instead announced by Arafat in Algiers (TZIDKIYAHU, 2012).<sup>108</sup> The declaration of independence was proclaimed to the PLO's leadership gathered in Algiers, and referred to the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, i.e. only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This meant a de facto acceptance of the UN Resolution 181 from 1947 known as the Partition Plan for Palestine. This also meant, albeit indirectly, that the PLO recognized the State of Israel and was willing to compromise and establish a state on 22% of historic Palestine. It also signaled that the Fatah led PLO was willing to forsake armed struggle, though it had up to that point been a sacred value of the PNM.<sup>109</sup> A letter Arafat sent to Rabin on September 9, 1993, as part of the Israeli-Palestinian mutual recognition that preceded the official signing ceremony (held in the White House on Sep. 13), states in fact that:

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<sup>107</sup> Arafat started this process already in 1974 following the October 1973 Israeli-Arab war (SHEMESH, 1999).

<sup>108</sup> Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, proclaimed by Yasser Arafat and adopted by the Palestinian National Council (PNC, the PLO's legislative body) in Algiers on 15/11/1988. It was translated to English alongside an accompanying Political Communiqué by Palestinian diplomat to the UN Riyad Mansour and is available online: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Palestinian\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Independence](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Palestinian_Declaration_of_Independence).

<sup>109</sup> Many Palestinian and Israeli officials describe this Palestinian willingness as nothing more than a plot, part of the PLO's Ten Point Program from the PNC's 12<sup>th</sup> meeting in Cairo in 1974. Nevertheless, in my opinion the PLO's actions and decisions from the late 1980s onwards indicated differently.

*the PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist, and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid [...]*

In contrast, Hamas' charter - which came about three months before Arafat's declaration of independence - read as we saw that "Jihad for the liberation of Palestine is obligatory": it is not one tool in the toolbox but the only acceptable strategy. In 1989 Anas Abd al-Rahman announced that a new stage in the PNM's struggle had begun, in which the new Hamas covenant replaces the old national charter of the PLO (ABD AL-RAHMAN, 1989). This dramatic strategic shift in PLO's strategy thus enabled Hamas to forge its distinct political identity while labelling itself as the true bearer of the original Palestinian national core values, and the PLO's reconciliatory tendencies as a deviation from these values. While the PLO had forsaken armed struggle, Hamas, as its contra, would pursue through military means the liberation of the entire country (demanding Israel's abolishment) and create a Muslim rule over it. As Balconi describes it, "Almost seamlessly, Islamic nationalism rose to carry the mantle forward" (BACONI, 2018, p. 24). In light of the PLO's changes of goals and its willingness to a territorial compromise, Hamas, by itself became the (only and) most significant opposition to the PLO, a real alternative and the carriers of the original Palestinian message.

### **The Rise of Hamas**

By 1989 Israel declared Hamas a terror organization and began arresting its members and leaders, including Sheikh Yassin. Despite the crackdown, the movement continued to grow, largely thanks to steps taken by its "outside" members. Hamas' "outside" was composed of members residing outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip, who established in 1992 the Political Bureau which forged ties and alliances with regional powers such as Syria and Iran (GHUSHEH, 2008).<sup>110</sup> The Bureau has since been

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<sup>110</sup> Ibrahim Ghushesh was one of the founders of Hamas political committee in diaspora. In his autobiography, he recounts in details the story of the founding of Hamas' "Outside" operations. The book was first published in Arabic in 2008 by the Beirut based al-Zaytouna Centre under the title *al-*

central to the financial, military and diplomatic activity of the movement. The Outside allowed Hamas a global reach despite the severe restrictions on its activity “inside” (i.e. in the territories controlled by Israel) and the imprisonment of its members by Israel. As Sela explains, “Hamas adopted further compartmentalized and hierarchical structure, both geographically and functionally, in order to protect itself from total collapse in case of partial exposure by Israel” (SELA, 2015, p. 45).

A few years into the Intifada, Hamas consolidated its previously disjoint military cells into a single armed wing – the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades – rooting its contemporary activity in the first organized Islamic-Palestinian national-religious resistance in the 1930s. This positioned Hamas as another link in the continuous chain of Palestinian resistance. Israel’s repeated attacks compelled Hamas to separate between the Brigades and the movement’s civic and political functions and leadership. This separation created an inherent tension between the military and political wings of the movement.

Hamas continued to gain momentum and strength in the early 1990s. The continuous rise in Hamas’ popularity can be explained by its structural flexibility and aforementioned adaptations. Another significant factor was the active participation of Hamas members in the first intifada. In this regard, the violent clash that occurred on Monday October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1990 in Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade, in which Israeli police killed 17 Palestinian-Muslims in the al-Aqsa Mosque’s esplanade, strengthened Hamas in more than one way. First, this event, the bloodiest in the first Intifada, carried a deep religious significance. It occurred in the country’s holiest place for Jews and Muslims alike during a Jewish religious holiday and in reaction to a provocation by a radical Jewish group – the Temple Mount Faithful. In this sense the event contributed to the overall religionization of Intifada. Second, in retaliation over this event Hamas supporters launched a wave of knife-attacks, which escalated the violence of the Intifada, giving Hamas an opportunity to dictate and generate a dynamic of radicalization.

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*Mi’dhanah al-Hamra’: Sirah Dhatiyah* and translated to English in 2013 as “The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghusheh (the Red Minaret is the name of a Mosque and a street in Jerusalem’s Old City, where Ghusheh was born in 1936).

Another factor in Hamas' rise was financial. The movement began to receive significant funding from the Arab Gulf states after it condemned Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990. Yasser Arafat supported Saddam's invasion in return for his hardline against Israel. This position resulted in diplomatic and financial losses for the PLO. Hamas' authentic objection to the Iraqi invasion was also the wise choice in the regional politics. The wealthy Gulf States, which severely opposed the invasion, diverted the findings allocated to the Palestinian cause from the PLO to Hamas. Another implication of Arafat's pro-Saddam position which affected Hamas was the expulsion of all Palestinian from Kuwait, which forced Hamas to move the headquarters of its "outside's" political bureau to Jordan. This move, as Ghushah explains, in fact strengthened Hamas since it was brought closer to the Jordanian chapter of the MB ([GHUSHEH, 2008](#)).

In its actions, Israel too contributed to Hamas' rise. In the winter of 1992 Israel deported 415 members of Hamas (and some PIJ) to South Lebanon. The mass deportation came in response to the kidnapping and murder of the Israeli policeman Nissim Toledano by Hamas militants, but was obviously a wider attempt to deal with the new and rising Palestinian power. The affair backfired on Israel when Lebanon refused to take them in. The four hundred men were stuck on a freezing snowy hill outside the village of Marj al-Zuhur, north of the Israeli controlled Security Belt in South Lebanon (occupied and held by Israel during 1982-2000). The deportees build a tent-camp called "Jerusalem – The Return" and immediately became a media sensation which internationally embarrassed Israel.<sup>111</sup> This forced exile lasted about a year, the snow turned to sweltering heat as the deportees watched Arafat and Rabin shake hands on the lawn of the White House. By December 1993, almost all deportees returned home in what was perceived as Hamas' victory over Israel. During their year in exile, the names and stories of the deportees became known to the world. Among the deportees were key figures in Hamas such as its founder and leader of the interior 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rantisi, his successor Ismail Haniyeh, the current chairman of Hamas'

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<sup>111</sup> Israeli diplomat Yigal Palmor admitted in an interview to Al-Jazeera that the mass deportation backfired and embarrassed Israel. See Al-Jazeera special interactive report on the deportees (no date, see online: <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/palestineremix/deportees.html#/21>). The report focuses on Nawaf al-Takruri, the author of the book on suicide attacks quoted above, who was one of the deportees.

Political Bureau, Haniyeh's deputy Saleh al-Arouri and many other future key figures in Hamas.

### War, Violence and Peace

In this section we shall see Hamas' relation to violence and war, both as strategic tools to achieve political ends and as a religious imperative of Jihad during both intifadas. We will also recount its categorical opposition to peace as offered in the Oslo agreement.

### **The Maqadmeh Doctrine – A Recipe for Hegemony**

Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh (1952-2003) was a Palestinian dentist from Gaza and a senior Hamas leader, who stood at the conjunction of the movement's military and political wings.<sup>112</sup> Al-Maqadmeh became one of Hamas' main ideologists until his assassination in Gaza. A fierce opponent to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, al-Maqadmeh laid out his doctrine in several books he wrote in prison, building Hamas' strategy to impede the peace process, weaken the Palestinian authority and bring Hamas to political hegemony. Al-Maqadmeh merits particular attention here, not only due to his prominent role in Hamas' rise to power, but also because he formulated his strategy so eloquently. In retro perspective, it seems that history played along with this doctrine. Another interesting point regarding al-Maqadmeh is that his diehard militarism seems to stand in contradiction to the general direction of Hamas towards politicization, as reflected in the work of another Hamas' ideologist Jamal Mansour (presented below). However, Hamas' shift and rise to hegemony lies in the measured duality between violence on the one hand, and politicization and democracy on the other hand, between al-Maqadmeh and Mansour.

Al-Maqadmeh's background is similar to that many other Hamas leaders (and Islamists in general). Born in the Jabalia camp (north of the GS) to a family of refugees from 1948, a dentist and x-ray technician by profession, al-Maqadmeh joined the MB movement during his studies in Egypt. Upon his return to the GS during the 1970s,

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<sup>112</sup> Al-Maqadmeh's basic biographic details appear in many of Hamas's affiliated websites. Articles about him are published every year on the day of his assassination. See for example the editorial on Hamas' news website [www.palinfo.com](http://www.palinfo.com) from 08/03/2020: "Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh, 17 years to the martyrdom of the physician and thinker" (إبراهيم المقادمة.. 17 عامًا على استشهاد الطبيب والمفكر). See also his personal page on Hamas official website under the section "our martyrs" ([hamas.ps/ar/martyr/458/](http://hamas.ps/ar/martyr/458/)-إبراهيم-المقادمة). Al-Maqadmeh is especially revered by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, as can be seen in a video clip posted on the brigade's official website in 2017: <https://www.alqassam.net/arabic/videos/index/1011>.

alongside his medical work (while getting married and fathering seven children), he became politically active and joined the ranks of the MB in the GS, entering Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's close circle. Al-Maqadmeh helped expend the MB's infrastructure in the GS and was involved in erecting its military wing to wage Jihad against Israel. Arrested together with Yassin in 1984 for holding a prominent position in *al-mujahidun al-filastiniyyun*, Israeli court-martial sentenced al-Maqadmeh to eight years in prison. Serving his term until 1992, al-Maqadmeh did not take part in the first Intifada nor in the foundation of Hamas. Nevertheless, while in jail he gained the status of an important religious and political Islamist thinker thanks to his writing. His most important book, published in 1994, is entitled "Milestones for the Liberation of Palestine" (*Ma'alim fi al-Tariq ila Tahrir Filastin*). The title is a clear homage to the famous 1964 essay of MB ideologist Sayyid Qutb entitled "Milestones", and al-Maqadmeh opens his book by quoting Qutb about the meaning of dedicating one's life to an ideal greater than oneself (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994).

Qutb's "Milestones" became an outstanding manifest of Radical Islam and of political Islamic fundamentalism (QUTB, 1964). It delineates the way to an Islamic society, defining everything "not Islamic" as *Jahiliyyah* (the age of ignorance before Islam).<sup>113</sup> Qutb calls for a revolution that will re-establish Islamic dominance by fighting against the various expressions of modernism such as the French revolution, Western democracy and Gamal Abd al-Nasser's Pan Arabism. Qutb distinguishes between the "slavery" (عُبُودِيَّة) of one man ruling another, and (divine) "sovereignty" (الْحَاكِمِيَّة or الْحَاكِمِيَّة لِلَّهِ), which is the rule of God. Qutb borrows these terms from Abul A'la Maududi (1903-1979), an Indian-Pakistani Islamist thinker,<sup>114</sup> considered by some scholars to be "the most systematic thinker" of modern political Islam (SMITH, 1957, p. 233-234; SIVAN, 1990). Qutb calls to go beyond da'wa, to launch a violent Jihad, taking up arms against the heretic *Jahiliyyah* regimes. Al-Maqadmeh, as a prominent Hamas ideologist, clearly anchors himself in the wider sphere of modern radical,

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<sup>113</sup> *Jahiliyyah* (جاهلية) literally means "ignorance", it is a classic Islamic term referring to the pre-Islamic period in Arabia as the "age of ignorance".

<sup>114</sup> Maududi founded in 1941 in British India the Jamaat-e-Islami movement, the largest and most influential Islamic organization in Asia adhering to the MB's modern and revolutionary understanding of Islam and politics.



fundamentalist and revolutionary Islamic thought, from his particular Palestinian standpoint.

Al-Maqadmeh (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994; ADWAN, 2004) presents in his book both an overall Islamic perspective on the Palestinian issue, encompassing history, theology and politics, and at the same time a practical guide for the liberation and Islamization of Palestine. After his release from jail al-Maqadmeh became a popular lecturer of Islamic theology in GIU. His outspoken and harsh criticism against the peace process and the Oslo Accords fiercely attacked the Palestinian National Authority, reflecting the traditional MB's approach of targeting the Arab regimes first. In 1994, due to his criticism against the PLO, al-Maqadmeh was fired from the hospital. In 1996, following Hamas' bombings, he was arrested by the PA and accused of inner-Palestinian subversive revolutionary intentions. Al-Maqadmeh offered (what he called) an Islamic perspective on the Oslo Accords,<sup>115</sup> completely negating the peace process as a continuation of the colonialist Jewish-Christian plot against Islam. According to him, the peaceful terminology is nothing more than an attempt to anesthetize the Islamic world and the agreement must be opposed by all means (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994). In "Milestones", al-Maqadmeh presents a strict fundamentalist approach, framing the conflict with Israel in an all-encompassing Islamic context, seeing the Jews as timeless and cosmic enemies of Islam and the Jihad against them as an obligation and a Palestinian calling, the front line of the Arab and Islamic world (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994). In the end of his 1994 book on the peace process al-Maqadmeh concludes: "[...] no doubt the hostility between the Jews and the Muslims will not end, and this despicable peace will not be accomplished" (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994).

In his book on Hamas, Israeli journalist Shlomi Eldar explains the confusion in the ranks of the PA regarding Hamas' violence throughout the 1990s. The heads of the Palestinian Authority's security forces, especially the head of the PA's Preventive Security Force (PSF) in Gaza Mohammed Dahlan, were convinced that Hamas'

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<sup>115</sup> Al-Maqadmeh's 1994 book on the matter is titled "Gaza-Jericho Agreement – an Islamic perspective" (in Arabic). The Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (also "Cairo Agreement") was signed on 04/05/1994 by Rabin and Arafat. The agreement launched the Oslo Accords by finalizing the founding of the PA.

bombings in Israel were not only an expression of Jihad against Israel. They were a deliberate attack on the peace process, aimed at delegitimizing the PA itself (ELDAR, 2012, p. 73). According to Eldar, in a closed forum of Hamas activists in Jabalia refugee camp Al-Maqadmeh said (ELDAR, 2012, p. 73):

*If we fight against the PA we will lose, they will destroy us. If we'll hit the Israelis, Israel will attack the PA and in this way the agreement will collapse altogether.*

The logic behind the al-Maqadmeh doctrine was simple, explains Eldar. In a direct face-off against Israel or the PA, Hamas will surely lose. However, by attacking Israel, Hamas will force it to retaliate against the PA, holding Fatah responsible, sabotaging the bilateral relations and collapse the already shaken base on which the Oslo Accords were established (ELDAR, 2012, p. 73). Reality, so it seems, aligned with this approach. Indeed Hamas did attack Israel, which retaliated against the PA, leading to the collapse of the peace process.

After repeated incarcerations, the PA eventually released al-Maqadmeh from prison in 1999. During the first years of the second intifada, al-Maqadmeh held a prominent role in both Hamas' top leadership and in the movement's military wing (AVIAD, 2014; ADWAN, 2004). In March 2003, after a series of Hamas attacks which killed 17 Israelis, Israel decided to assassinate Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh (AVIAD, 2014, p. 198-199). Both the PA and Hamas' intelligence services warned Al-Maqadmeh about Israel's intentions. Nevertheless, he refused to hide. On the morning of 08/03/2003 al-Maqadmeh had a planned lecture at the GIU. Hundreds of anxious students cramped in anticipation inside the lecture hall waiting to hear him. However, he never got there. An Israeli airstrike hit his car with a Hellfire missile 300 meters from his house, killing al-Maqadmeh on his way to the lecture.

On April 30, a suicide bomber of Pakistani origin exploded himself in Tel Aviv killing 3 civilians. The following year, during the al-Maqadmeh's commemoration ceremony, Hamas announced that using foreign suicide bombers was a symbol of al-Maqadmeh's status as an all-Islamic scholar and a sign of Islamic solidarity. During an eight-day military campaign in Gaza in November 2012, Hamas launched for the first time long-range missiles towards the center of Israel. These missiles, called M-75,

were named after al-Maqadmeh, expressed once again the high importance he received in Hamas' hierarchy.

### **Jihad**

Since its appearance in late 1987, Hamas strived to escalate violence and portrayed itself as the true and only carrier of the armed struggle. Al-Maqadmeh's ideology both reflected and generated Hamas' violence. Based on such ideas numerous attacks were carried out by Hamas' militants throughout the 1990s. Armed Jihad was indeed an inherent value of Hamas from the beginning. Nevertheless, Hamas escalated its violence repeatedly in return to Israeli aggressions, sometimes reacting to anti-Muslim violence perpetrated by Jewish national-religious extremists in the shared holy site in Jerusalem and Hebron, sometimes avenging the assassinations of Hamas' leaders by Israel. The first wave of knife attacks which started in October 1990 following the killing of 17 Muslims in Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (the al-Aqsa Mosque), was launched by Hamas supporters.<sup>116</sup> Starting in 1994, Hamas launched a wave of deadly suicide attacks in Israel in retaliation to the Goldstein massacre – the killing of 29 Muslims worshipers by a Jewish national-religious extremist in the country's second holiest Mosque, on 25/02/1994, during the *fajr* (dawn) prayer of a Ramadan Friday morning.

The PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Accords in September 1993. Goldstein's mass murder was an attempt to halt the accords, just when the process was set into

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<sup>116</sup> In October 8, 1990, during the Jewish Holiday of Sukkot (the festival of Tabernacles), a group called the "TM Faithful" (TMF), Jewish Temple activists advocating the construction of the Third Temple, intended to hold a symbolic ceremony laying down the corner stone for the third Temple. This ceremonial gesture provoked the fears of the Arab-Palestinian Muslim community and many came that morning to the site to protest. Clashes erupted during which the police killed seventeen Muslim protesters and wounded about fifty-three (Kamma, 1991, pp. 3-4). This event is referred to as "the TM Riots of October (or Sukkot) 1990" and is commemorated by Palestinians as "the (first) al-Aqsa Massacre (majzarat al-'aqsa)", the fallen are remembered for posterity as the Martyrs of al-Aqsa (shuhad'a al-'aqsa). On October 21st, 19 years old Amer Said Salah Abu Sirhan from the WB stabbed to death three Israelis in Jerusalem. After his arrest Abu Sirhan declared that he perpetrated his attack in retaliation of the "al-Aqsa massacre". Unlike previous stabbing attacks perpetrated by Palestinians (1973, 1983) Abu Sirhan's stabbing started a wave of stabbing attacks that characterized the intifada from that point onward. Abu Sirhan was sentenced for life. While in prison he had a daughter which he named Hamas (Palinfo 15/10/2011). Abu Sirhan is known as "the one who launch the knifing revolt" (mufajar thawrat al-sakakyn). This title signifies the beginning of a new pattern of Palestinian violence which cast terror in Israel. It was the first concentrated wave of what will be known later as the "lone wolf terrorism", in which political or ideological violence is executed not by terrorist cell and organizations but by any lone individual who identifies with a certain agenda.

motion and the PA was being built. Goldstein's attack eventually achieved its goal by catalyzing two processes that were taking place: a change in Hamas' strategy, and the radicalization of Yigal Amir, which would eventually lead him to assassinate Israeli Prime Minister Rabin. Let us for now focus on the first of these. Matti Steinberg, an Israeli academic and longtime adviser to the elite of the Israeli intelligence, asserts that Hamas was the first Palestinian movement to launch indiscriminate suicide attacks against civilian targets within Israel ([STEINBERG, 2016, p. 328](#)).

The first suicide bombing inside Israel took place in Afula on 06/04/1994, shortly before the signing of the Cairo Agreement, killing eight Israelis and injuring 55. According to Steinberg, it was a clear indication of "Hamas's shift from suicide attacks aimed at military targets in the West Bank and Gaza to attacks on civilians within the Green Line", which was according to Steinberg "a direct consequence of the Goldstein massacre" ([STEINBERG, 2016, p. 328](#)). The massacre happened in a critical moment, when Hamas leaders were discussing the issue of suicide attacks. As Steinberg notes, the historical context of this event was important: it was the advance of the peace process in 1994 that brought Hamas strategists to consider broadening their targets beyond the IDF and settlers in the WB, and to target Israeli civilians inside Israel ([STEINBERG, 2016, p. 228-238](#)).

According to Steinberg, the Goldstein Massacre thus determined the outcome of that debate within Hamas. In the two years that followed, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades' commander in the WB Yahya Ayyash (1966-1996) launched a series of bombings inside Israel, aiming to claim a high price from the Israeli public in retaliation for unusual acts, creating a "balance of terror" with Israel. In accordance with al-Maqadmeh's doctrine, these attacks weakened the legitimacy of the PA and damaged the ongoing negotiation with Israel. Hamas, through its use of violence, built itself throughout the 1990s as an alternative to the reconciliatory tendencies of the PA, led by Fatah and the PLO.

Though Hamas was not the first to use suicide bombing, it became a leading pioneer in using this terrorist tactic. Suicide attacks by Islamists had already taken been launched in the 1980s by the Shi'ite Hezbollah in Lebanon ([HATINA, 2014, p. 90](#)). In the Islamic terminology, such attacks are called "martyrdom operation" and are considered acts of sacrifice (استشهاد, *'istishad*), in which the perpetrator is called *shahid*

(شهيد), a martyr which sacrifices his life for the sake of Islam (HATINA, 2014).<sup>117</sup> This form of self-sacrifice terror was recruited by the Palestinian national struggle. It was used by secular organizations since the 1980s (though not for human bombs) in launching attacks in which the perpetrators had little chance to survive.

Steinberg describes this as an act of “secular sacrifice” (STEINBERG, 2016, p. 211). In both secular and religious forms of nationalism, the religious concept of afterlife is replaced (or expanded) by the national commemoration of the dead. As Rogers Brubaker asserts in his analysis of religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena, patriotic and national heroes, who sacrifice themselves for the community, are the equivalent of prophets and messiah-saviors. Commemoration for posterity “in which their legendary deeds live on, is the equivalent of the afterlife” (BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 3-4). As discussed in Part 1, this is, according to Anthony Smith, the religious quality of nationalism that explains the durability and emotional potency of national identities and the “scope, depth, and intensity of the feelings and loyalties that nations and nationalism so often evoke” (SMITH, 2003, p. 4-5, 15, 26, 40-42; BRUBAKER, 2012, p. 3-4).

In the Palestinian arena, PIJ predated Hamas in contemplating suicide attacks from an Islamic perspective, issuing a pamphlet as early as June 1988 (two months before Hamas’ Charter was published), discussing for the first time religious justification of suicide attacks (STEINBERG, 2016, p. 335; HATINA, 2014, p. 103). However, Hamas was the first to launch suicide attacks against Israel, in 1993 in the WB and from 1994 onwards inside Israel. Hamas’ violence was presented at first as “a response in kind” to the Hebron massacre, attempting to mitigate criticism following Israel’s collective punitive measures against the Palestinians following the attacks (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 69).<sup>118</sup> Between the years 1993-1997 Hamas’ military wing – Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, was the leading organization executing suicide attacks in Israel. Fatwas published in Hamas’ mouthpiece *Filastin al-Muslima* from June 1995

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<sup>117</sup> For Hamas’ perception of martyrdom, see pages 117-122 in Hatina’s book. It is common to bestow the noun martyr (shahid) to any Palestinian killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even if the circumstances are “secular”.

<sup>118</sup> Response in kind (الرد بالمثل) is an Islamic term meaning to react and retaliate in the same manner by which you were attacked. As we shall see scholars like Qaradawi and later on Rizqa (in a different context) refer to suicide attacks as a necessity.

provided the first religious justification. These attacks provoked a discussion amongst senior religious authorities in the Arabic and Islamic Sunni world. Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Sheikh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bin Baz (1911-1999) questioned the legitimacy of suicide bombings, discussing and arguing the matter with other pillars of authority in contemporary Sunni Islam. The rector of al-Azhar University Sheikh Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Tantawi issued a fatwā, which argued that suicide attacks killing innocent and unarmed civilians are “evil,” but are allowed if executed as self-sacrifice in a legitimate jihad while fighting a terrorist enemy (al-Safir, 01/04/1966). In 1997 Hamas issued a book on the matter, issued in Damascus by Hamas senior Dr. Nawwaf al-Takruri, titled “The Sacrifice Operations on the Religious Jurisdiction Balance” (*al-‘Amaliyyat al-‘Istishhadiyya fi al-Mizan al-Fiqhi*), reviewing fatwas supporting suicide attacks issued in the Arab press shortly after the bombings (TAKRURI, 1997, p. 83-101).<sup>119</sup>

During the Second Intifada, when suicide attacks became more common, Bin Baz continued to oppose the attacks, distinguishing between *‘istishhad* as an act of sacrifice and *‘intihar* (انتحار), suicide, which is strictly forbidden in Islam.<sup>120</sup> Another Islamic scholar, sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi, justified Palestinian suicide attacks against Israel. Al-Qaradawi (born 1926) is an Egyptian scholar based in Qatar. Some scholars define him as one of the most influential Islamic scholars in the world today. He is an exceptionally productive and active theologian, and is considered to be the supreme authority of the MB and the spiritual mentor that reshaped the *Wasatiyya* (centrist philosophy) and Salafism schools within Sunni Islam (POLKA, 2019).

Shortly before the signing of Oslo II Accord in September 1995 regarding the transfer of responsibilities and territory to the PA, a debate sparked between Bin Baz,

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<sup>119</sup> This book is also mentioned by scholars (STEINBERG, 2016, p. 328-329; MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 76, 211).

<sup>120</sup> Sagi Polka, an Israeli expert on Islamic thought and particularly on the centrist philosophy – *wasatiyya* and the work of al-Qaradāwī – analyzes the debate regarding the legal status of *istishhad* operations in Sunni Islam, focusing on the difference between an act of suicide as self-killing (*intihār*), forbidden in Islam and martyrdom (*istishhād*). The banning of the former is based on the Quranic verse saying “do not contribute to your destruction with your own hands”, Quran 2:195. Polka reveals another layer of the discussion, regarding the killing of innocent civilians in such attacks, Muslim and non-Muslims alike. Polka goes on to explain the legal and religious justifications of both Hamas and al-Qa’ida for such acts (POLKA, 2019, p. 242-247).

who in the 1990s ruled in favored of signing a peace treaty with Israel<sup>121</sup>, and al-Qaradawi, who severely opposed it.<sup>122</sup> Unsurprising as it may be, we see a correlation between opposing the peace process and supporting suicide attacks. Al-Qaradawi's support of suicide bombing against Israel is based on classical Quranic commentators and Islamic scholars, allowing special means in order to deliver deadly blows to the enemy (POLKA, 2019, p. 243):

*Al-Qaradāwī ruled that acts of istishhād in Palestine, performed by Palestinian resistance groups against the Zionist occupation, are not to be considered criminal acts of terrorism, even if they result in civilian casualties. To the contrary, he argues, they are the most sublime form of jihad for Allah, acts that come under the definition of "licit terrorization" (al-irhāb al-mashrū'), which the Qur'ān commands in Q8:60: "to frighten off God's enemies and yours."*

The Islamic debate regarding suicide attacks resurfaces among Sunnite Islamic scholars during the Second Intifada (2000-2005), when suicide bombing become more common. During that period, Fatah founds al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, adopting Hamas' Islamic terminology and methods.

Goldstein's massacre poured with religious significance.<sup>123</sup> A bloody attack committed in a shared (contested) holy space during a holy time, Purim (Festival of Lots) and Ramadan, generated political violence from the two opposing ends of the spectrum, by both Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalists, whose political goal was the same – to halt the Oslo Accords. Hamas' suicide bombings destabilized the security and derailed the peace process. These attacks came in several waves throughout the 1990s and shifted Israeli public opinion against the peace

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<sup>121</sup> Bin Baz's support of the peace process in the 1990s can be seen as a prelude to the Arab Peace Initiative (also known as the Saudi Initiative) launched in 2002 in Beirut by Saudi crown prince at the time (and Saudi king between 2005-2015) Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (1924-2015), with the backing of the Saudi religious authorities.

<sup>122</sup> Israeli scholar Yitzhak Reiter documented and analyzed this debate (REITER, 2011, p. 120-134) (Reiter, War Peace International Relations in Islam: Muslim Scholars on Peace Accords With Israel, 2011, pp. 120-134). The Egyptian Imam Gad al-Haq Ali Gad al-Haq (1917-1996), head of al-Azhar Islamic university from 1982 to 1996, predated Bin Baz in religiously justifying the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in a fatwa issued in 1979.

<sup>123</sup> this point was also noted by Mark Juergensmeyer in his work on RN (JUERGENSMEYER, 1996, p. 2).

process. Alongside the assassination of Rabin in November 1995 by a Jewish national-religious extremist, they eventually generated a political turnover in Israel.

The second wave of Hamas' political violence hit Israel in February-March 1996. Four consecutive suicide attacks killed 59 Israelis.<sup>124</sup> The attacks came in retaliation for Israel's assassination of Yahya Ayyash, the leader of the WB battalion of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, in January. They took place shortly before the dramatic elections that followed the Rabin assassination, and shook Israeli society with such an impact that they shifted the political balance and caused a dramatic political turnover. Benjamin Netanyahu's first term as Prime Minister began. He was a fierce political opponent of Rabin and severely objected to the Oslo Process. From a comparative perspective it seems despite some differences<sup>125</sup> on both sides, radical religious-nationalists used terror in ways that served the opposition to the peace process, and "together" they achieved their goal. This indirect dialogue between Jewish-Israeli and Muslim-Palestinian religious-nationalists halted the peace process and brought the religious-nationalism in both societies more dominance in their respective societies.

In September 1996, four months after Netanyahu's electoral victory (May 29, 1996), a wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence erupted due to tensions around Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade. Israeli soldiers and Palestinian policemen exchanged fire for the first time since the Palestinian Authority's police force was founded as part of the Oslo Accords. It resulted in more than a hundred casualties, marking with blood the collapse of the peace process. These events were triggered by a specific chain of events around the HE's Western Wall tunnel and are thus remembered as Western Wall Tunnel riots (in Arabic *habbat al-nafaq*, the Tunnel Uprising). They started at the

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<sup>124</sup> On Sunday morning, February 25, 1996, a suicide bomber blew himself up inside bus number 18 in Jerusalem's city center, killing 26 Israelis. That morning I was on my way to high school with my sister, and we passed by the burned skeleton of the exploded bus (we used to take bus no. 18 to school every day). That same day another woman was killed in another bombing in Ashkelon and three dozens injured. On the next Sunday morning, March 3, nineteen Israelis were killed in yet another a bombing inside bus no. 18 in Jerusalem (the repeating effect amplified the public's fear, which I remember very well as an Israeli Jerusalemite teenager regularly using public transportation). The next day 13 Israelis were killed in a bombing in Tel Aviv's city center. Hamas killed 59 Israelis within eight days, in the center of Israel's biggest cities.

<sup>125</sup> While Israeli-Jewish terror was more marginal, the Israeli institutional violence by the army was strong



end of the Judaism's holiest day *Yom Kippur* (Atonement) on 23/09/1996 and lasted until the eve of Sukkot on September 27. After these events the IMII, the MB's branch inside the State of Israel, entered the equation, leading the Palestinian Islamic consolidation around al-Aqsa Mosque in a series of projects that took place between the years 1996-1999 and up to the eruption of al-Aqsa Intifada. The IMII remained an important actor in al-Aqsa Mosque ever since, representing Palestinian religious-nationalism and the Islamic factor.

It took just over four more years of gradual escalation for the al-Aqsa Intifada to erupt in October 2000, in Jerusalem's HE. Today we know that events in holy times and places and the continuous erosion of the status quo in the holy sites heralded the beginning of the end of the Oslo Accords and paved the road to the al-Aqsa Intifada and the rise of Israeli and Palestinian religious-nationalism to political hegemony.

We saw that Hamas was determined to hurt the peace process through violence and terror bore its fruits. Nonetheless, at the same time, from the early 1990s Hamas had been walking the line between rigid Islamism, revolution and Jihadist resistance to politics, flexibility and pragmatism. In his memoirs, while recounting the period of the early 1990s Ibrahim Ghushah focuses on resistance and violence, such as the suicide attacks in retaliation of the Goldstein Massacre in 1994 and the assassination of Ayyash in 1996 (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 191,195). Yet he neglects to mention that at the time Hamas' political Bureau, which he was a part of, offered a truce with Israel (Statement 16/03/1994, Ghushah to al-Sabil, London, quoted by Reuters 19/04/1994, al-Nahar, East Jerusalem, 15/05/1995). The statement was based on an outline delineated by Sheikh Yassin even before the Oslo Accords, at about the same time as the Madrid peace talks of October 1991. At the time, Yassin mentioned Hamas' willingness to accept a Palestinian State in the WB and the GS, its willingness to consider international supervision in the territories once Israel withdrew, and finally Hamas' rejection of political negotiations with Israel as long as the occupation continued (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 85-86; ELDAR, 2012, p. 149-150). As it seems, from an early phase, and while Hamas attacked the peace process head-on, it was also willing to consider truce with Israel under certain conditions. Such an armistice would be temporary, for 20 or 30 years, and would constitute a phase in the larger plan of liberation, leaving the final decisions to the generations to come. Hamas also used

Islamic terminology such as *hudna* (or *muhadana*), a temporary truce and not *salam* or *sulh* which means a final peace agreement (REITER, 2011, p. 135-142).

### **Hamas' Objection to Oslo -**

From the very beginning of the peace talks in Madrid and Washington, Hamas strongly opposed the peace process, accusing the PLO and Fatah of selling out on Palestine and on Islamic values. This position did not wither all through the Oslo negotiations, and eventually the failure of the peace talks contributed to Hamas' domestic reputation. Hamas thus emerged in the early 1990s – in the first five years of its existence - as both a political force standing in proud opposition to an unsuccessful compromise-seeking PLO, and as a military force increasingly escalating its operations. Hamas' Jihad against the Oslo peace process was waged both on the military violent front and on the political level.

The Bush administration initiated and led the Israeli-Arab negotiations starting in Madrid in October 1991, attempting to reshape the Middle East after the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Saddam Hussein in Kuwait by a US-led international coalition. Despite Israel's objection to the participation of official PLO representatives, several delegates were de facto PLO representatives. This rather covert participation of the PLO was unprecedented in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas strongly objected to Madrid and campaigned against it.

The 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords, which received international and domestic support, was a high point for Arafat, Fatah, and the PLO (and soon the PA) and a low point for Hamas, which expressed clear and full rejection of the process. This dramatic turn of events did not however lead to the organization's waning. The crisis pumped new blood in its veins. Hamas carried out armed attacks to actively object to Oslo and derail the process as laid out in al-Maquadmeh's doctrine.

Hamas' use of violence harmed its international standing, yet strengthened it internally in Palestinian society. PIJ, its main jihadist "competitor", continuously attacked Israeli targets and Hamas could not allow itself to lag behind Suicide bombings, explained by Islamists as a 'response in kind', and the Israeli retaliations, targeted assassination of Hamas and PIJ seniors alongside and continued construction of settlements provided Hamas with continuous pretexts for more attacks, presenting

them as defensive acts. The attacks were explained as a duty to protect the Palestinians by claiming high cost from Israel for the occupation (SELA, 2015, p. 39). This hardline approach by Hamas affirmed in turn the hardline approach of the religious nationalists from the other side – the religious-Zionists, who were the fiercest opponents to the peace process in Israeli society.

In the initial stages of its formation, the PA did not turn strongly against Hamas. Was Arafat concerned about domestic unity, or did he want to use Hamas' violence against Israel during the peace process? In any case, except for a brief moment in the second half of the 1990s Arafat never seriously dealt with the challenge of Hamas. He most probably did not fully estimate the extent of the threat Hamas posed to the PLO's hegemony, and did not understand that harnessing Hamas' violence against Israel was "riding the tiger".

Between September 1995 and January 1996 Hamas refrained from military actions inside Israel, as it was negotiating with Fatah on a total halt of operations in return for incorporating Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades into the Palestinian security apparatus. In December 1995, ahead of the first PA elections, Hamas agreed to temporarily refrain from carrying out attacks from areas under PA control. As Avraham Sela noted, during this period Hamas proved its ability to enforce cease-fire and control over its military wing (SELA, 2015, p. 39-40). The cease-fire ended with the retaliation over the Israeli assassination of Yahya Ayyash in January 1996. This retaliation, as we saw above, carried far going political implications, catalyzing a political turnover in Israel and the collapse of the peace process.

### **As Violence Grows so does Hamas' Power**

During the Second Intifada Hamas military wing, the Brigades of the Martyr Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (*Katā'ib al-shahīd 'izz al-dīn al-qassām*) gained prestige for hurting and terrorizing Israel extensively using horrid suicide attacks. Some field commanders of Fatah felt they had to meet up to these standards. Fatah's militia, *al-Tanzim*, raised the Islamic banner and formed their own military wing called al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (*Katā'ib Shuhadā' al-'Aqṣā*), imitating the Hamas religious language and

symbols.<sup>126</sup> At times the two militias carried out attacks together. This was yet another step in the religionization of the national conflict and the nationalization of religion. It weakened Fatah and brought Hamas closer to the hegemonic position it would achieve shortly after the Intifada.

Six years after the signing of Oslo, the people living in Gaza were poorer, their freedom of movement and employment opportunities narrowed. They felt the “process” but did not get to taste the fruits of “peace”. The demand for Hamas’ charitable activity was even higher than before, and it provided basic services neglected by the PA, despite Arafat’s promises and the huge sums of money donated by foreign governments. Thus, when the Second Intifada erupted Hamas’ military wing was weakened due to Israeli and PA’s arrests, but its da’wa activity was still strong. In accordance with al-Maqadmeh’s doctrine, the Israeli retaliations against Palestinians violence during the Second Intifada weakened the PA and strengthened Hamas.<sup>127</sup> As the second Intifada unfolded, the PA released many of Hamas’ prisoners. As the PA institutions were being bombed and shelled by Israel Hamas could operate more freely.

Hamas’ popularity rose during the Intifada when the cannons of violence were roaring. Hamas’ armed wing led the armed resistance against Israel, using suicide bombings terror and rockets launched from the GS. Israel retaliated with targeted killings against Hamas’ leadership. Fatah lost the primacy of leading the armed struggle against Israel to Hamas, losing popularity. Israel destroyed much of the PA’s infrastructure and symbols of power, like Yasser Arafat International Airport in Dahaniya (at the southwest of the GS near the Egyptian border) in December 2001 and January 2002. Thus, the PA could not provide services, let alone protection, to the people. However, Hamas’ civil infrastructure remained largely intact.

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<sup>126</sup> This dynamic of religionization and radicalization throughout the second intifada stands in the center of Ido Zelkovitz’s book 2012 about the Fatah, religion and armed struggle ([ZELKOVITZ, 2012](#)).

<sup>127</sup> For example, when Israel prevented Gazan daily workers from entering its territory and earning a basic living they went to receive food and support from Hamas’ Da’awa. Israel’s military actions in the heart of Palestinian cities undermined the PA and its security mechanisms. The destruction and death Palestinians faced were now broadcast live on Al-Jazeera and other channels to Muslims in the Middle East and around the world, and donation to Hamas grew. The donors wanted to support the resistance but also to alleviate suffering. This was particularly meaningful in the post-9/11 world of “the clash of civilizations”. Israeli air force bombed the Gaza Central Prison a number of times throughout the intifada, setting free yet more Hamas prisoners.

We see a pattern here: in its actions Israel weakens the Palestinian national mainstream (Fatah-PLO) and reinforces the religious stream, only this time the religious is also national (Hamas). In 1993, Palestinian Islamists reached an electoral ceiling of maximum 40% of the votes. The only way for this ceiling to break was for the PA to fail and disappoint the people (ZILBERMAN, 1993). With the outburst of the second Intifada, seven years after Oslo, Palestinian criticism against the PA's corruption soared. Immense donations to the nascent soon-to-be-state PA evaporated because of corruption, while Hamas presented an alternative of rectitude and religious piety.

#### From movement to government

Throughout the previous section we saw how Hamas' use of violence enabled it to rise to prominence and gain the popularity that the old elites were losing - opposing the Oslo agreements and raising the banner of armed struggle. We shall now see how the movement negotiated the turn to political action and evolved from a revolutionary movement into a government.

#### **Political Negation or Indirect Engagement**

Hamas boycotted the PA's first elections in 1996 for the PA Chairmanship and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), since it did not accept the framework of Oslo and the political structures that stemmed from it. In addition, Hamas' leadership knew it was not ready for political participation, both on the electoral and structural levels. Thus, boycotting was the wisest choice on all levels: ideologically and politically, enabling Hamas to further distinguish itself from the PA and the peace process and to remain an external alternative to it.

Oslo created a new Palestinian elite, composed of the old guard from Tunis and the Fatah-PLO members from inside the territories, which enjoyed the delights of political power and an improved socioeconomic status. This stood in stark contradiction to the simple lifestyle of Hamas members and leaders, living in shanty homes in refugee camps. This gap alongside the harsh treatment Hamas members received at times from the PA's security apparatus cultivated hatred and separatism. Bolstered by these public sentiments, in November 1995, Hamas announced the

establishment of a political party, The National Islamic Salvation Party (*hizb al-khalas al-watani al-islami*). Because he perceived this as serving his interests, since it signaled a Hamas acceptance of the Oslo framework, PLO and PA chairman Yasser Arafat approved the party's participation in the PA elections shortly afterwards. The party included some well-known Islamist figures from the GS. Fakhri 'Abd al-Latif, the party's spokesperson, told Arafat that the party was not part of any existing political body, yet he did not hide their connection with Hamas, stating the two bodies are "based on the same principles, although they were structurally independent". 'Abd al-Latif further stated that the party's Political Bureau included Hamas members (al-Nahar 24/11/1995, 17/12/1995).

In the meanwhile, internal objection within the ranks of Hamas prevented the Salvation Party from officially announcing its participation. Beyond the ideological resentment to Oslo, the party had insufficient time to prepare for the upcoming elections. In a rally in GS for the movement's eighth anniversary (December 1995), it was officially announced that Hamas would not take part in the "Oslo elections", arguing that the accord would not "guarantee the Palestinian rights for sovereignty and a state" (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 144). At the same time, Hamas promised to prevent civil war (*fitna*) and to engage in dialogue with the PA. In December 1995 Hamas convened with the PA in Cairo, reiterating its negation of the elections (GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 195). However, this time it did so with an acknowledgement that some of the candidates do identify with Hamas, implicitly referring to the candidates of the Salvation Party (al-Quds 17, 20/12/1995). But as time passed, it became clear that the Salvation Party wouldn't take part in the elections after all.

As Mishal and Sela analyze, the elections were designed to benefit Arafat, and Hamas' "outside" leadership strongly rejected the participation of an Islamic party (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 145; GHUSHEH, 2008, p. 194-196). Despite the ideological shades of this decision, it was clear that Hamas' "outside" leadership feared that participation in the PA would strengthen the "inside" on their account, somewhat reminding the "inside-outside" dynamics of Fatah and the PLO. This similarity reflects the problematics of diaspora-homeland politics in the Palestinian condition. Moreover, as Mishal and Sela noted, the participation of an Islamic party in the elections in which Arafat and Fatah were expected to achieve a decisive victory, would

only expose Hamas's weakness and reduce its public influence (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. 145).

Abstaining from the PA's elections meant refusing to cooperate with the PA in a way that could damage Hamas. Participation could legitimize Oslo and damage Hamas as well. Eventually, Hamas decided to encourage its members to vote in the elections and support the candidates identified with Hamas—but as individuals, not as members of a party. In the same vein, Hamas encouraged its members to join the PA's executive offices, but not to accept any position with political significance. In both cases, Hamas's chance of scoring gains without paying a symbolic price seemed possible, and the likelihood of consent by Hamas leaders both from "inside" and "outside" was high. This demonstrates Hamas' political creativity and ability to design sophisticated solutions to complex and sticky situations. It insisted on its principles and displayed its steady ideological stance, and at the same time promoted tactical political advancement.

The Salvation Party was eventually officially founded only two months after the elections, in March 1996. The names of the party members and the party's political platform, published in Arabic together with notes from the first general meeting,<sup>128</sup> reflect greater openness than Hamas' Charter though its Political Bureau included well-known Hamas' members.<sup>129</sup>

In a prelude to the 2006 political shift, the Salvation Party accepted political pluralism, conducted according to legal political means, and respected human rights (al-Quds 22/03/1996). Eventually, for various reasons Hamas' Party faded into oblivion without leaving its mark on Palestinian politics. Nevertheless, this experience laid the ground for Hamas' future political engagement based on practical, symbolic and organizational considerations. Hamas demonstrated flexibility when faced with a tricky situation.

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<sup>128</sup> The political platform of The National Islamic Salvation Party can be found in Arabic in the Israeli National Library (published in 1997), catalogue number 990038856180205171.

<sup>129</sup> When the party was launched, two of its members were imprisoned, Ismail abu Shannab by Israel and Ahmad Bahr by the PA.

### Jamal Mansour's Doctrine

The ideological roots of Hamas' shift from violence and revolution to politics and hegemony are grounded in the writings of the late 1990s of Sheikh Jamal Mansour from Nablus. Mansour (1960-2001) was Hamas' spokesperson and represented the movement in dialogue with the PA. He also focused on da'wa activity and preaching. In his writings, he laid down an ideological path of political engagement. As a Hamas ideologist, Mansour wrote in 1996 on Palestinian political parties and in 1999 on the "Palestinian Democratic Transformation: an Islamic Perspective". In his last book Mansour stated that "there is no such thing in Islam as theocracy, which declares it represents the will of *Allah* on Earth [...]" (MANSOUR, 1999). Yusuf Rizqa leans on Mansour in explaining the movement's future shift:

*the Umma can exercise its role in evaluation of impeachment [...]  
the first Muslim caliph had clearly declared that he was under the law and  
the will of the Ummah, saying, "Obey me as long as I obey Allah with you,  
but if I disobey Him then I shall command no obedience from you" (RIZQA,  
2017, p. 70).*

Seven years before Hamas engaged in political activity through the PA's elections, Mansour wrote that the Palestinian Basic Law,<sup>130</sup> one of the two pillars of the PA's rule (the second being charismatic leadership), constitutes an acceptable basis for a political system that covers most of the requirements for a democracy (MANSOUR, 1999, p. 24). According to Mansour, the state of law is "the state where the actions and affairs of government are subject to specific rules and regulations" (MANSOUR, 1999, p. 9). Mansour also stated that "the rule is an acceptable principle that is in line with the spirit of Islam" (MANSOUR, 1999, p. 9).

Mansour started an inner discussion on democracy in Hamas, using Islamic terminology and connecting between "democracy" as a term carrying a foreign, Western, colonial, and secular baggage and the Islamic traditional term *Shura* (MANSOUR, 1999). According to Mansour shura is the cornerstone of the mechanism

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<sup>130</sup> A collection of various proposals and amendments to the Basic Law of Palestine is available online: <https://www.palestinianbasiclaw.org/>



of governance in Islam, which guarantees the nation's participation in the government. Mansour explains that the Shura (consultation) draws its authority from the Sharia, and this was the mechanism in formative golden age of Islam (until governance was transferred through inheritance with the Umayyad dynasty in the second half of the seventh century). Later on the Shura was reduced to a social mechanism (MANSOUR, 1999).

On July 31, 2001, Israel assassinated Mansour in retaliation to a deadly bombing in Tel Aviv two months earlier.<sup>131</sup> The timing of Mansour's assassination shortly after the beginning of the second intifada, may symbolize the victory of Maqadmeh's Jihadist doctrine over Mansour's political vocation. Yet Mansour's ideas lived on, and eventually, once the fighting was over, received precedence.

### **2000-2005 The Second Intifada: Losing Life, Gaining Power**

In 1999, after Netanyahu's first term as Prime Minister, a turnover in the Israeli politics brought the labor party to power, this time headed by the most decorated soldier in the Israeli Army, Ehud Barak. Barak promised to retreat from the Israeli controlled "Security Belt" in South Lebanon (which he did, unilaterally, in May 2000) and to sign the final status accord with the Palestinians. US President Bill Clinton hosted Arafat and Barak in Camp David. Both sides came to the negotiations with a lot of frustration. The Israelis argued that the PA was corrupt, inefficient and that it did not fight terror and incitement. The Palestinians argued that since the Oslo accords Israel doubled the number of settlers in the West Bank and that they did not get the freedom and independence they wanted. With these conditions, Barak laid down a

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<sup>131</sup> The bombing was ascribed to Hamas' military wing but no direct connection to Mansour was ever published. Mansour was killed together with another Hamas leader Sheikh Jamal Salim, co-founder and vice president of the Palestinian Islamic Scholars Society. Mansour and Salim were killed by Israel in Mansour's office. Four other Hamas members and two children were also killed in the attack. According to Israeli Journalist Shlomi Eldar Israel claimed that the Hamas headquarter in Nablus was planning attacks against Israel (ELDAR, 2012, p. 50). Ten days after the assassination, on August 9, 2001, a Palestinian suicide bomber detonated himself in a restaurant in the center of Jerusalem killing 15 Israelis, among them 7 children, and injuring 140. An announcement by Hamas' military wing declared the attack was retaliation for the assassination of Mansour and Salim (ELDAR, 2012, p. 50; BACONI, 2018, p. 46).

proposal for a final agreement, that in retrospect seems premature and naïve (TZIDKIYAHU, 2012, p. 126). As part of the deal, Barak offered Arafat shared sovereignty over Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade. In response, Arafat denied that the Jewish Temple ever existed in Jerusalem (REITER, 2008, p. 37-38).<sup>132</sup> This dialogue marked the end of the Camp David Summit as a failure.

On July 22, 2000, the very day that Arafat declined the Israeli proposal in Camp David, Sheikh 'Ikrima Şabrī issued a *fatwā* asserting that all of Palestine is Holy Muslim *Waqf* land and that it is therefore forbidden (*harām*) to give up any part of it (REITER, 2007). When issuing the fatwa Sabri served as the Chief *Muftī* of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories. Sabri's official *fatwā* joined to Arafat's denial of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem at Camp David. Şabrī's *fatwā* clung on to an older decree by Hajj Amin al-Husayni from the 1930s, but on the ground, at the time it was issued, it ratified the Hamas' covenant from 1988, whose article 11 asserts:

*[...] the land of Palestine is an Islamic waqf for the benefit of Muslims throughout the generations and until the Day of Resurrection. It is forbidden to abandon it or part of it or to renounce it or part of it [...]*

In the long run, Arafat's attempt to deal with Hamas' Islamic opposition by adopting Islamic terminology to compete with it on Islamic grounds backfired; it ratified Hamas' original position, proving that they were right and that Fatah was wrong all along. Consequently, any future compromise will be marked by this religious prohibition and Hamas' positions won legitimacy from the PLO's top religious authorities. Whether or not Sabri meant it, issuing this decree served Hamas and the MB's approach. This *fatwā* was thus a significant step in Hamas' move from the margins to the center of the Palestinian national-religious discourse.

On the Israeli side, Barak's proposal to divide the sovereignty on the Temple Mount was perceived as a withdrawal from the maximalist demand, undermining the

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<sup>132</sup> Arafat added that if the Temple ever existed, it was situated in Hadhramaut near the Gulf of Aden. Arafat was probably referring to Kamal Salibi's 1985 book *The Bible Came from Arabia* (London, Jonathan Cape 1985). Salibi, who was an emeritus professor in the American University in Beirut and the director of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies in Amman, argued that the Biblical founding myth of the Israelites and the kingdom of King David, the Temple and Jerusalem took place in Yemen, south of the Arabian Peninsula. Salibi's theory was adopted by Yasser Arafat and he repeated it on several public occasions to negate the Israeli historical-religious claims (REITER, 2008, p. 37-38).

sanctity of Jerusalem for the Jews and of Zion for Zionism. In response Ariel Sharon, then head of the Israeli opposition, decided to demonstrate the Israeli sovereignty on the Holy Esplanade by conducting an official visit to the site on the eve of a Jewish holiday. Sharon was known to be a completely secular man. Using his sharp political sense Sharon understood the potential involved in mobilizing such a fundamental national-religious symbol. It could very well be that loyal to the Zionist revisionist tradition, Sharon saw the Mount as a founding national symbol. The Palestinians perceived Sharon's visit as a provocation by an especially hawkish Israeli leader. Moreover, for the Palestinians Sharon was notorious as the butcher from Sabra and Shatila, for his responsibility as Minister of Defense in the massacre that took place in Beirut in 1982.

Frustrated by the political deadlock, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories were bubbling with despair; all that was needed was a trigger to set off the mayhem, and this is exactly what Sharon's visit to al-Aqsa was (TZIDKIYAHU, 2012, p. 126). Again, like in the 1920s, in October 1990 and September 1996, an event that takes place in Jerusalem's HE during a religious holiday, triggers violence that changes the rules of the game. It requires effort to ignore the religious significance that generates violence and moves this conflict from phase to phase. Thousands of casualties on both sides from 2000 to 2005 changed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the geopolitical reality in Israel and Palestine. Both Palestinians and Israelis call the second intifada *Intifādat al-'Aqṣā*, i.e. the Intifada of al-Aqsa, after Sharon's visit that triggered the events. Five months after the intifada started, in yet another political turnover, Sharon won the elections and became the Prime Minister.

### **From Charisma to Hierarchy**

One manifest characteristic of social movements that develop political influence is the shift from the single founding charismatic leader to "a hierarchic structure of representative institutions and rational political decision-making" (SELA, 2015, p. 31).<sup>133</sup> Scholar of the contemporary Middle East Avraham Sela, who wrote

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<sup>133</sup> Max Weber (1864-1920) presented a tripartite classification of authority: 1) traditional; 2) legal/rational and 3) charismatic. Weber laid down the theoretical infrastructure to the sociology of charismatic authority and the general characteristics of charisma and charismatic leadership in several

extensively about Hamas, argues that such a change enables a transformation “from revolutionary to reformist strategies based on pragmatic calculations” (SELA, 2015, p. 31). Sela lays down this theoretical assumption in an article from 2015, in which he compares Hamas and Hezbollah as two Islamic movements which have undergone this shift. Sela tests this theoretical assumption on these two popular Islamic movements - which both identify with jihad as a core element in their ideology of resistance to an alien power - by scrutinizing their political trajectories. While the comparison to Hezbollah is interesting and insightful on its own, for this dissertation it is enough to relate only to Sela’s (principal) focus on Hamas.

It is reasonable to assume that the shift in Hamas’ organizational behavior from revolution and resistance to politics, as well as its rise to political power at the expense of Fatah in the 2006 elections are, among other reasons, due to the death of the founding leaders of both movements in the preceding years. Arafat was the founding father of the renewed Palestinian National Movement, he co-founded and led the Fatah movement and was the longtime chairman of the PLO. Arafat’s charisma, autocratic style of ruling and high popularity was a barrier to Hamas’ political rise. His death in 2004 and succession by the somewhat dull character Mahmoud Abbas, weakened Fatah and the PA and enabled the rise of Hamas’ opposition. On the other hand, Yassin's death in 2004, whose style of rule resembled that of an MB religious clerk, enabled reforming and politicizing of the movement. Shortly after the death of Yassin and Arafat, the Second Intifada ended (in 2005) and Hamas achieved a historical victory in the 2006 PLC elections.

Following the assassinations of Hamas’ top leadership, the movement’s shura Council reached a critical decision and offered Israel a deal, whereby Hamas would stop the suicide bombings and Israel would stop targeted assassinations against the movement’s leaders. In doing so, they leaned on Yassin’s principle that “it is permissible to hold a *hudna* (a truce) while the enemy is strong and the Muslims need

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essays: “the Three Types of Legitimate Rule” (1922, in English 1958), *Politics as a Vocation* (1919). See (GERTH et al. (eds.), 2009).

to regain their strength, on condition that the *hudna* will not last more than 10 years” (ELDAR, 2012, p. 63). As Mishal and Sela explain (MISHAL et al., 2006, p. viii):

*Given the hostile environment in which Hamas operates—military confrontation with Israel, political competition with the PLO, and, more recently, shaky coexistence with the Palestinian Authority—the question is not how closely Hamas adheres to its official dogma, but how and to what extent Hamas is able to justify political conduct that sometimes deviates from its declared doctrine without running the risk of discontent or internal dispute among its followers.*

Sharon agreed to the secret deal, which lasted for six months until a local initiative of Hamas militants from the Qawasmeh clan in Hebron launched an attack, killing 16 Israelis in Beersheva on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2004. Nevertheless, in the heat of the Intifada in 2004, Hamas’ military wing complied and demonstrated an ability, albeit limited, to restrain its fire, leaning on the Islamic concept of *sabr*, which according to the Encyclopedia of Islam is literally translated as perseverance, endurance and persistence. Another significant shift that followed Yassin’s (and al-Rantisi’s) assassination was that the center of importance moved once again to Hamas’ outside political and bureaucratic leadership, at the time based in Damascus. Yassin’s leadership was undisputed, and he did not leave detailed instructions regarding his succession. Because the Shura council’s members were scattered geographically and formed a heterogeneous group, the power struggles around the process of choosing a new leader made Hamas more decentralized and turned it into a more hierarchical and bureaucratic movement.

### **Israel’s Disengagement from Gaza**

On the summer of 2005, Israel unilaterally disengaged from the GS. In late August and early September 2005, the Israeli Army removed 21 settlements, relocating about 8000 settlers from the GS. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, formerly one of the architects of the Israeli settlement project, executed the disengagement from Gaza.<sup>134</sup> This dramatic step echoed strongly in both Israeli and Palestinian societies

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<sup>134</sup> Will be explained further in the next chapter.

and changed the Israeli-Palestinian geopolitical arena. As we shall see, religious-Zionism in Israel was shaken by the eviction, which led it to change its political behavior and strive for hegemony. The same can be said for Hamas.

Early in 2005, Hamas was still weakened from Israeli assassinations of its leadership and the long years of fighting. While it is tempting to focus on the religious debate on suicide bombings, which continued from the 1990s into the Second Intifada, the internal focus within Hamas was elsewhere. Instead of preparing attacks in retaliation to Yassin and al-Rantisi's assassinations, Hamas prepared to enter the political game. Suicide attacks, which gave Hamas its fame and domestic popularity, came to a halt as Israel prepared to withdraw from Gaza.

The unilateral Israeli disengagement entailed new opportunities for Hamas. Hamas worked to construct public opinion, portraying the disengagement as an accomplishment of the movement, a result of Hamas' efforts during the Second Intifada. The new reality meant that no direct fighting between the military wing in Gaza and the Israeli army or settlers could take place. In such a state of affairs, Hamas recalculated its route, finding the answer in politics. It was time to replace resistance through Jihad with the ballot box, and to take up government seats.

Days after the disengagement, Hamas organized a massive and tightly controlled rally in the large building of the former synagogue of the GS evicted settlement Neveh Dekalim. The rally was a public demonstration of strength for Hamas, portraits of its assassinated leaders Yassin, al-Rantisi, Shehade, al-Maqadmeh and others hanging from the synagogue balconies. Buses brought people to the event from all across the GS, Hamas showed it was prepared to cut the ribbon of the disengagement and to take on Gaza. The main speaker was Ismail Haniyeh, in an inauguration speech that labeled him as a potential electoral asset for Hamas and its next leader (ELDAR, 2012, p. 137-138).

### **The 2006 elections**

Hamas participated in the PA's second national elections, held on 25/01/2006, and won a majority of seats in the PLC. According to the Palestinian Central Election Commission (PCEC) Hamas' "Change and Reform" list won 74 parliamentary seats out of 132. Fatah came in second with only 45 seats (CEC report, Final Results). It was a

revolution in Palestinian politics: for the first time since Fatah took control over the PLO, it was no longer the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People”. An Islamic opposition external to the PLO won the elections and the voice of the people. As for Hamas, after its victory in the elections it became part and parcel of the Palestinian National Movement, its existence a simple fact of life. In the words of Khaled Hroub, a leading expert on Hamas:

*Since its emergence in the late 1980s, perhaps the most important turning point in Hamas’s political life has been its unexpected victory in the January 2006 Palestinian Council (PC) elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Overnight, it was transformed from an opposition movement that had no part in the “national” governing structure to a party called upon to govern.* (HROUB, 2006, p. 6)

The willingness of Hamas to participate in PA politics can be understood on the background of several developments. First, while in 1996 the elections for the new institutions were the direct result of the Oslo agreement and were taking place alongside peace talks with Israel, which Hamas strongly objected to, a decade later the negotiations and in part the PA had already collapsed. Second, Hamas’ success in the 2004 municipal elections indicated that this time it may have much stronger popular support, and so the risk taking could result in highly valuable rewards. Third, Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip created new opportunities in the movement’s stronghold and was a signal that advancements could be made not through negotiations but through the use of force.

Three types of Palestinian election campaigns took place during 2004-2006. Local elections (for the first time under the PA), of which four out of five planned rounds took place between December 2004 and December 2005 (the fifth round was canceled after Hamas’ victory in January 2006). Hamas gained impressive results in the local elections, which many see as a prelude to Hamas’ victory in the PLC elections of January 2006. Presidential elections took place on January 9, 2005, boycotted by Hamas, who announced its decision to do so in December. Finally, general elections took place in January 2006.

According to Hroub, Hamas abstained from the presidential elections following the death of Arafat, since it “believed it would be illogical to present a candidate for the presidency of a body and indeed an entire system completely dominated by its traditional rival, Fatah” (HROUB, 2006, p. 7). Yet Hamas also knew how to leverage its gradual growth in political power, as reflected in its remarkable success in the municipal elections in the previous years. On March 12, 2005 the Hamas spokesperson in Nablus, the Palestinian academic Mohammed Ghazal, announced in a press conference that Hamas intend to participate in the next PLC elections.<sup>135</sup> The next day, according to a Hamas official, “the movement began to meticulously plan its campaign” (HROUB, 2006, p. 7).

A week later, in the framework of the Cairo Declaration, Hamas, together with Fatah, declared a truce with Israel, who reaffirmed the already existing agreement between Hamas and Israel from 2004 (in Arabic *tahdiya* تهديئة, Cairo Declaration 19/03/2005, article 2). In an interview in Egypt Khaled Mashal, chief of Hamas' outside politburo at the time, said that the unilateral and temporary ceasefire was aimed at achieving internal goals inside the Palestinian arena (regarding the Fatah-PLO duel), and towards international legitimacy, understanding that terror against civilians is unacceptable in the international arena and demonstrating discipline and control over the movement's military wing. Mashal still pays lip service to the armed struggle, stating that if needed the Islamic Resistance Movement will not hesitate to take up its arms and end the *tahdi'a* (al-Ahram 30/03/2005). But more importantly Mashal affirms, maybe for the first time, that Hamas could accept a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders, even if only as an interim solution.

It seems that despite the internal debate within Hamas regarding political participation, and despite the “inside-outside” split, Hamas calculated its path, wisely

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<sup>135</sup> Ghazal's declaration can be found online in the Arab press, for example in the website of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA 12/03/2005 Arabic). A report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) published shortly before the PLC elections quotes al-Ghazal (interviewed in September 2005) suggesting that Ghazal was selected to deliver the declaration “so to demonstrate that even though opposition to participation had been highest among cadres in the Nablus region, debate was finished and – in the best traditions of democratic centralism – the movement now stood united behind the decision reached by the leadership” (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, 2006, p. 5 n. 25)



regulating its use of violence and political participation in light of its goal – strengthening its institutional power. At the same time, Hamas’ abstaining from proposing a presidential candidate also demonstrated that the movement, despite its quest for political power, was not prepared to lead the PNM. According to Shlomi Eldar, Hamas maximalist estimation was to gain 35%-40% of the votes to the PLC (ELDAR, 2012, p. 152), and it did not even consider a possible victory.

According to the election law of the Palestinian Authority, in addition to the national lists elected under the proportional representation system, there are also district elections in which individual candidates are elected under the majority system. Hamas placed many of their well-known leaders as candidates in the district elections, where they were widely known. This was a wise move, taking advantage of the fact that Fatah had placed multiple candidates in many of the regions, who were all rather antagonistic toward one another. While Fatah ran an uncoordinated campaign full of internal rivalries, Hamas had a clear and strategic campaign which simply worked.

The movement emerged on the ground as an alternative to the PA’s corruption, chaos and failure to realize its political agenda. Riyad al-Maliki, PFLP member and former PA minister and spokesperson, noted already after the first round of local elections that despite the majority of municipalities taken by Fatah candidates, Hamas’ managed to take over some of Fatah’s traditional municipalities and won in the big cities and towns (ELDAR, 2012, p. 144). This indicated a deeper change in the Palestinian political system (al-Maliki 02/01/2005). Indeed, some Palestinian journalists, like Abd al-Bari Atwan, saw Hamas’ victory as the most important political message facing the Palestinian people (Atwan 09/05/2005). Due to the evident growth in Hamas’ power, Atwan questioned the validity of Abbas’ mandate and of the current PLC, arguing that the majority of the Palestinians in the WB and GS actually support Hamas.

### **The change and reform platform**

In order to maximize its electoral potential in the 2006 election, Hamas created a new entity, titled “Change and Reform”. The idea was to soften the image of the party and attract more voters. It was easier for those not traditionally supporting

Hamas to vote for “Change and Reform” than for the “Islamic Resistance Movement”. The title chosen stressed the difference between the corrupted and failing PA and the new, clean and energetic force of Hamas coming to make a change in the current reality. According to Mahmoud al-Zahar, Hamas co-founder and senior in the GS leadership, the name was aimed exactly towards the revulsion of many Palestinians from the Fatah and the PA, enabling them to express their protestation through the ballot. While the voters might not delve into the meanings behind this name, the words change and reform stemmed directly from the teachings of MB founder Hasan al-Banna. Al-Banna preached for the healing of the deviant Islamic society through teaching, preaching, social and community work, in order to change society from below and from there gradually reach up to the state’s bases of power. Al-Banna’s revolutionary successor Sayyid Qutb preached to change and reform the entire Arab-Muslim society, entirely governed by westernized and heretic leaders. Thus, the name “change and reform” carries a double meaning that served Hamas’ goals (ELDAR, 2012, p. 153).

Ismail Haniyeh was placed at the top of the list. Muhammad Abu Tir, a Hamas hawk from East-Jerusalem was placed second despite his relative anonymity at the time (he will later become a minor celebrity), demonstrating the special place of Jerusalem on Hamas’ agenda. Al-Zahar on the other hand was placed in the ninth place despite, or maybe because of his fame and seniority in Hamas. Hamas co-founder Abd al-Fattah Dukhan from GS closed the top ten on the list.

The charter of “Change and Reform” testified to the dramatic shift and politicization of Hamas. In fact, this seventeen-article document de facto replaced Hamas charter.<sup>136</sup> After the publication of the platform Hamas officials started to diminish the charter in their declarations and to talk about the possibility of changing it. On September 2005, Mohammad Ghazal from Nablus was quoted saying that Hamas could one day amend a charter calling for the destruction of Israel, and hold negotiations with the Jewish state. He added that "the charter is not the Quran, [...]

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<sup>136</sup> The Arabic version of the platform is available on the party’s website: <http://islah.ps/new2/?news=128>; a Hebrew translation of the platform is available in Eldar’s book on Hamas (ELDAR, 2012, p. 350-364), Hroub analyzes the document and provides English translation of long excerpt from it (HROUB, 2006).

historically, we believe all Palestine belongs to Palestinians, but we're talking now about reality, about political solutions [...] the realities are different." (YNET/ Reuters 21/09/2005). The platform's preamble explains why, after previously negating Oslo and boycotting the elections, this time Hamas does decide to run:

*Compelled by our conviction that we are defending one of the greatest parts of Islam; and by our duty to reform the Palestinian reality and alleviate the suffering of our people, reinforcing their steadfastness and shielding them from corruption, as well as by our hope to strengthen national unity and Palestinian internal affairs, we have decided to take part in the Palestinian legislative elections of 2006.*

*The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) believes that its participation in the legislative elections at this time and in the current situation confronting the Palestine cause falls within its comprehensive program for the liberation of Palestine, the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Participation in these elections will be a means of supporting the resistance and the intifada program, which the Palestinian people have approved as its strategic option to end the occupation.*

*Change and Reform will endeavor to build an advanced Palestinian civil society based on political pluralism and the rotation of power. The political system of this society and its reformist and political agenda will be oriented toward achieving Palestinian national rights. In all this, we take into account the presence of the oppressive occupation and its ugly imprint on our land and people and its flagrant interventions in the details of the Palestinian life.*

*Presenting the platform of our list stems from our commitment to our steadfast masses who see in our course the effective alternative, and see in our movement the promising hope for a better future, God willing, and see in this list the sincere leadership for a better tomorrow.*

*Allah the Almighty said: "This is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it –*

*‘This is what He commands you to do, so that you may refrain from wrongdoing.’ (Quran 6:153)<sup>137</sup>*

Though Oslo is not mentioned in the preamble, it is clear this passage wishes to distinguish between Hamas’ continuous rejection of Oslo and its decision to participate in the elections. To further stress this point, explicitly referring to Oslo, at the end of the document:

*The al-Aqsa intifada has created new realities on the ground. It has made the Oslo program a thing of the past. All parties, including the Zionist occupiers, now refer to the demise of Oslo. Our people today are more united, more aware, and stronger than before. Hamas is entering these elections after having succeeded, with God’s help, in affirming its line of resistance and in ingraining it deep in the hearts of our people.*

*Brothers and sisters: this is our program, which we put before you, sharing with you, hand in hand, our ambition. We do not claim to be able to work miracles, or to have a magic wand. But together we will keep trying to realize our national project with its great aims [...] one free and capable nation.*

In accordance with Hroub, it is useful to delve into the article “our principles”:

*The Change and Reform List adopts a set of principles stemming from the Islamic tradition that we embrace. We see these principles as agreed upon not only by our Palestinian people, but also by our Arab and Islamic nation as a whole. These principles are:*

- 1. True Islam with its civilized achievements and political, economic, social, and legal aspects is our frame of reference and our way of life.*

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<sup>137</sup> English translation based on Hroub (2006) with my own alterations, Quranic verse from Abdel Haleem’s translation (Oxford 2005). Whenever Hroub’s translation indicates “Change and Reform”, Eldar’s Hebrew translation and the current Arabic version in the party’s website indicate “Hamas”. I chose to use both alternately.

2. *Historic Palestine is part of the Arab and Islamic land and its ownership by the Palestinian people is a right that does not diminish over time. No military or legal measures will change that right.*
3. *The Palestinian people, wherever they reside, constitute a single and united people and form an integral part of the Arab and Muslim nation. "This nation of yours is one single community and I am your Lord, so serve Me." (Quran 21:92).<sup>138</sup>*
4. *Our Palestinian people are still living a phase of national liberation, and thus they have the right to strive to recover their own rights and end the occupation using all means, including armed struggle. We have to make all our resources available to support our people and defeat the occupation and establish a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.*
5. *The right of return of all Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their land and properties, and the right to self-determination and all other national rights, are inalienable and cannot be bargained away for any political concessions.*
6. *Resistance in all its forms is the natural right of the Palestinian People, to end the occupation and establish the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.*
7. *Reinforcing and protecting Palestinian national unity is one of the priorities of the Palestinian national action. We adopt dialogue to wisely solve internal disagreements. Internal fighting and all forms of use of force should be banned within the inner Palestinian framework.*
8. *Political freedom, pluralism and the right to vote in the ballot box and peaceful power transition guarantee the organizational framework of Palestinian political work. They also guarantee reforms, battling corruption and the construction of advanced Palestinian civil society.*

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<sup>138</sup> Quranic translation based on Abdel Haleem, while I decide to translate the word *umma* أُمَّة, originally referring to all the Muslims, as "nation" (in accordance with Uri Rubin's Hebrew translation) and not like Haleem's English translation "community".

9. *The issue of the prisoners is at the top of the Palestinian agenda and an essential part of the fulfillment of national sovereignty. The movement will its utmost efforts to set the prisoners free.*<sup>139</sup>

The principles segment opens with a token for Islam, almost a lip service when compared with the overall absence of religion from the text. Nevertheless, it constitutes the party's first principle, and immediately afterwards comes particular Palestinian nationalism. If in the 1988 charter Islam and religion ruled the entire text and Palestinian nationalism was first mentioned only in article six, in 2006 Hamas is clearly a religious-national Islamic-Palestinian movement, moving particular Palestinian nationalism to the second principle after Islam.

As we shall see, in the May 2017 Hamas document "General Principles and Policies" this tendency went one step further towards Palestinian nationalism. Article 3 portrays an organic (even romantic and primordial) concept of the Palestinian people and nation portrayed in anthropomorphic terms of humanization (one nation, one body etc.). The platform then pays a necessary lip service to the armed struggle, before delving into civil issues and democratic discourse about pluralism. In addition, this segment of the platform presents strictness regarding the basic Palestinian political principles (right of return, prisoners) alongside willingness to accept a two-state solution. It also mentions the issue of national unity, against a civil war with the PA and Fatah, which will erupt nonetheless eighteen months after the elections.

In the platform as a whole, the weight given to civic aspect of governance is incomparably larger than the weight given to military and resistance (resistance is mentioned only twice in the beginning and end of the document, both quoted above, as if to fulfil an old obligation). The emphasis is clearly on domestic issues, governance and reforms. In the spirit of Jamal Mansour, there is much emphasis on pluralism as a

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<sup>139</sup> Hroub's version is of another version of the text, maybe an earlier one. In his translation are only seven articles, edited differently and the text of article eight doesn't appear at all, instead it says: "We uphold the indigenous and inalienable rights of our people to our land, Jerusalem, our holy places, our water resources, borders, and a fully sovereign independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital" ([HROUB, 2006, p. 10](#)). I preferred to lean on the Arabic source as it appears in the party's website, which also marches to Eldar's translation. Hroub additional text, assuming it was originally part of the platform, talks about infrastructural resources alongside autochthony and political rights.

prerequisite for a civic outlook and national unity based on consensus –based on political parties. Compared with the 1988 charter, the politicization tendency becomes clear. The platform’s emphasis on governance, reforms and war on corruption is meant as a signal foreign governments and Western financial institutions. The same can be said about the stress given to proper conduct, democracy, separation of powers and judicial independence. Moreover, public freedoms and citizen rights and liberties are stressed all throughout the document. Hamas, so it seems, was well aware of the criticism it aroused. In fact, Khaled Mashal himself, not an enthusiast of political engagement “inside”, referred on March 2005 explicitly to both international norms and expectations and to the Palestinian public opinion, explaining Hamas’ apparent decrease in expressions of armed resistance (al-Ahram 30/03/2005). Hamas also faced in this document new spheres of activity, not addressed previously by the movement, such as youth and young adults, employment, housing, health and environment and sport clubs. These fields, adequate for a movement that is striving for national politics, pushed religion and resistance to the margins, at least on paper.<sup>140</sup> The quantity and quality of Islamic references found in the document, are generally acceptable in the general Arab political language and are not an indication of Islamism. The platform was almost a secular and bureaucratic document, nevertheless it ends with a wink to the traditional base of Hamas:

*When you cast your ballot, remember your responsibility before God. You bear responsibility for choosing your representative to the legislative council. When this representative decides on issues pertaining to religion, the homeland, and the future, he represents you, so make the right choice that will please God and His Messenger (peace be upon him), who said: “The best whom you should employ is the strong and the honest.” Yes, make the right choice, that you may please God and your people, God willing. Islam is the solution, and it is our path for change and reform.*

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<sup>140</sup> According to Khaled Hroub’s analysis of the platform, all the religious expression in the platform combined amount to about one and a half pages out of fourteen pages all together, including five Quranic quotes (HROUB, 2006, p. 13).

When a revolutionarily movement grows in influence and popularity it is faced with the pragmatic consideration of whether to transform itself and risk losing its revolutionary characteristics (SELA, 2015). This question of pragmatic politics for revolutionary or extremist groups is particularly interesting in the case of Hamas because it places extremist religious principles, manifested in the idea of jihad, at the center of its ideology. The social science literature commonly considers Islamic movements as being strict and dogmatic and hence politically rigid and unchanging (SELA, 2015). This is all the more so when movements employ violence and are perceived as terror organizations.

### **The unexpected victory: a challenge for both sides**

Hamas' political participation and success in 2006-2007 is the most significant shift in the movement's activity since its foundation two decades earlier. Hamas' attempts in 2006-2007 to establish a national unity government eventually failed. In 2007, it violently took control of the Gaza Strip, and has ruled over it ever since. Hamas, which began in Gaza as an Islamic movement that did not partake in politics, not only had a political party now, but also a government.

As mentioned previously, Hamas electoral victory on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006 caught everyone by surprise, including the movement's leadership. They aimed for a significant bloc in parliament, not for a majority. Ambivalent about their own victory, Hamas' leadership aspired for a power sharing arrangement within a coalition government, knowing that it was not ready to govern on its own just yet. Examining Hamas' draft program for a coalition government, and its cabinet platform, presented by Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh in a speech on 27 March 2006 before the newly elected parliament, indicates that just like the political platform published in the fall, the emphasis was on state building, with nuances regarding resistance and willingness to accept the two-state solution. All three document, as noted by Hroub who paid particular attention to their sectarian content, promote a progressive discourse and de-emphasize religion (HROUB, 2006, p. 6).

Defeated Fatah leaders announced shortly after the elections that they would not join Hamas' government. They preferred to let Hamas sink on its own in the



quicksand of the political power game. Hamas, deprived of the “oppositional purity” it long enjoyed, realized how difficult it was to make such a sharp turn at high speed. The challenge that faced Hamas was great: to transform itself within a few months from a movement sending suicide bombers into the heart of civilian centers armed with a radical Islamic world view, into a politically engaged moderate Islamic movement that merits the trust of secular and religious Palestinians and of the international community. A Hamas government headed by Ismail Haniyeh was established. The hope of Fatah was that if Hamas was to take on full responsibility, it would quickly fail to carry out the multiple duties of a Palestinian government accountable for providing all the basic needs of the people and negotiating with Israel on a wide host of issues, from the opening of the checkpoints to the provision of water and electricity. It was expected that Hamas would both fail miserably as well as harm its own reputation as an organization that unlike Fatah does not negotiate and compromise with the Zionist enemy.

Palestinian intelligentsia and political elite thought they could control Hamas by luring it into politics, taking the sting from its radical approach, yet not giving it enough power to rule. Palestinian academic Khalil Shiqaqi, head of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah (and brother of Fathi Shiqaqi founder of PIJ) published an article in the New York Times less than a week after Sheikh Yassin’s assassination back in 2004. In his article Shiqaqi called to “Stop Hamas With a Vote” (NYT 26/03/2004), referring to the politicization catch of the revolutionary movement, and stating that one of the most effective ways to stop Hamas “[...] would be to hold Palestinian elections before the Israeli withdrawal” from GS. It is relevant to quote Shiqaqi here in length:

*[...] More important, holding elections would renew the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority, providing it with the political will to project leadership at a time when its existence is at stake. With legitimacy comes the ability to lead and take risks. The authority's crackdown on Islamist militants in March 1996, for example, would not have happened had the authority's leadership not gained legitimacy two months earlier in the first Palestinian elections.*

*In addition, elections would provide Hamas and the nationalist warlords with the opportunity to translate their popularity into parliamentary seats. The integration of these forces into the political system would make it possible for the new government to enforce existing laws against vigilante violence and to collect illegal arms. Finally, elections could provide Palestinians with the means to find their way back to democracy and good governance. No single person, no matter how authoritarian, would again be able to concentrate so much power in his hands.*

*The elections could be based on the constitutional amendments ratified by the Palestinian Legislative Council in March 2003, which are intended to shift power from the office of the president to those of the cabinet and prime minister. The new elections would most likely strip the old guard of much of its power and give rise to young guard nationalists -- a condition for rehabilitating the Palestinian Authority and weakening Islamist opposition.*

*Polls conducted since the 1996 elections, show that the new parliament would be shared by three forces: the mainstream Fatah nationalists are projected to win up to 40 percent of the seats (compared to the 75 percent they now hold); independent nationalists and moderate Islamists a quarter of the seats; and members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad the rest.*

Shiqaqi calls to “cage” Hamas in democracy by luring the movement into the elections, gaining both the decentralization of power and wakening Fatah in the post Arafat era, and harnessing Hamas to the political game while assuring it won’t have the majority to lead but will be obliged by the norms and laws of the PA. Based on Shiqaqi’s polls, seniors in the PA and the USA fell in love with this theory. Going over some of the discussions held by Israeli, Palestinian and American officials in the months prior to the elections, based on the “Palestine Papers”, a collection of authentic documents leaked from the office of PLO’s chief negotiator Saeb Erekat

(1955-2020),<sup>141</sup> gives a glimpse to their speculations, anxieties and plans regarding Hamas' participation in politics. On April 21, 2005, Erekat and his adviser Habib Hazzan met Sharon's adviser Dov Weissglas and the Israeli diplomat and Arabist Shalom Tourjman. In the meeting, the Israelis expressed concern regarding the strengthening of Hamas, and the Palestinians kept calming them down and at the same time asked the Israeli side to strengthen Fatah and coordinate the disengagement from Gaza with the PA and its president Abu Mazen. Shortly after the disengagement from GS, on September 22, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, her deputy Robert Zoellick and diplomat David Welch told a Palestinian delegation that the Israelis feared Hamas' electoral achievement. Salam Fayyad, at the time the PA's Finance Minister (and future PM) of the Palestinian unity government, responded: "Hamas will not make it. Ideology is not accepted by the vast majority of the Palestinians" (sic, meeting minutes). But the signs were on the wall, for those willing to see them. The International Crises Group report quoted above, published days before the elections, foresaw Hamas' electoral achievement with accuracy (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, 2006). The report even provided practical recommendations to all parties involved, the PA, Hamas, Israeli government, the USA and the EU.

In 2006, a senior Hamas official Ahmad Yousef Yousef tried to promote a *hudna* between Hamas and Israel with the help of European mediators.<sup>142</sup> In September 2007, he presented Hamas as a barrier to extremism (hinting to PIJ and al-Qaida) and called to allow Hamas into the political process, in order to encourage pragmatic ideas and political tools within the movement (REITER, 2011).

According to Israeli journalist Shlomi Eldar, originally the party's platform included a proposition for a ceasefire (*hudna*) with Israel (ELDAR, 2012, p. 157). Based on past suggestions of Ahmad Yassin himself, it included a 20-year-long ceasefire in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the WB (including East Jerusalem) and GS,

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<sup>141</sup> "The story behind the Palestine papers" (the Guardian 24/01/2011); to search the Palestine Papers see: <https://www.aljazeera.com/palestinepapers/>

<sup>142</sup> The text of the agreement was brought fully in Arabic by al-Watan in 23/12/2006: <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2006/12/23/68052.html>.

a solution to the refugee problem (without specific outlines), and the release of all prisoners from Israeli jails. When "Change and Reform" published its platform in the fall of 2005, a ceasefire with Israel was already enforced by all sides in January that year (MOHSEN, 2017, p. 54). This ceasefire introduced a new term in the Palestinian political dictionary, a *tahdi'a* (تَهْدِيَةٌ), Arabic for calming, pacification or appeasement (in any case the opposite of escalation), and not a *hudna* (هُدْنَةٌ), which means in Arabic an armistice truce or even peace.<sup>143</sup> This appeasement was an inner-Palestinian *hudna*, in which most Palestinian wings agreed to stop or diminish their violence against Israel in order to enable the latter to retreat from GS in the summer. A *tahdi'a*, unlike the *hudna*, is a unilateral action conditioned in advance in a non-formal understanding that Israel will cease assassinating the leaders of the different Palestinian wings (REITER, 2011). The proposition to integrate the *hudna* into the platform enjoyed a majority support; nevertheless, it was eventually not included eventually due to Khaled Mash'al's objection (ELDAR, 2012, p. 155-160). At this stage, Mash'al and the outside leadership held a more uncompromising position, continuing the traditional inside-outside tension. However in the post-Yassin era, in which Hamas will become part of the government, sources indicate a gradual and consistent change in Mash'al's position regarding his readiness to compromise, which would culminate in the May 2017 Hamas document "General Principles and Policies", described as the Movement's new charter.

### **Ruling over the Gaza Strip**

It seems that every time Hamas speaks about democracy and political participation, violence erupts. The Second Intifada had erupted about eighteen months after Jamal Mansour published his book advocating Hamas to adopt democratic political norms (MANSOUR, 1999). The Fatah-Hamas 2007 civil war erupted about 18 months after Hamas won the elections based on a civic and political platform. This might point to a double inherent inner tension, first within Hamas between political pragmatists and militant hardliners, and then within the Palestinian political system, indicating the limits of flexibility and demonstrating the inability of Fatah to contain and accommodate the Islamic opposition. In any case, four months

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<sup>143</sup> See the Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (ed. JM Cowan, 1994).

after Fatah and Hamas signed the Mecca Agreement in February 2007 in an attempt to reconcile and form a national unity government;<sup>144</sup> a civil war broke out, leading to extensive casualties and a political split. Since Hamas' victory the GS has been isolated and besieged by Israel and Egypt and the movement has fought four wars with Israel (and multiple rounds of violent clashes in smaller scale).<sup>145</sup> In any case Hamas had its own narrative, describing the June 2007 events in the GS not as a violent coup d'état but as a defensive war, protecting its democratic right. In a rare interview with British politician Ken Livingstone in 2009, Khaled Mashal exposed Hamas' view (New Statesman 17/09/2009):<sup>146</sup>

*[...] The division is compounded by the existence of a Palestinian party that seeks empowerment from those same regional and international parties, including the US and Israel, that wish to see Hamas out of the arena. Soon after its victory in the election of January 2006, every effort was exerted to undermine the ability of Hamas to govern.*

*When these efforts failed, General Keith Dayton, of the United States army, who currently serves as US security co-ordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, was dispatched to Gaza to plot a coup against the Hamas-led national unity government that came out of the Mecca*

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<sup>144</sup> Mahmoud Abbas and Mohammed Dahlan represented the Fatah and the PA, Khaled Mashal and the elected Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh represented Hamas, sponsored and brokered by Saudi King Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz

<sup>145</sup> December 2008-January 2009 called by the IDF Operation Cast Lead (referring to a well-known Hebrew poem on Hanukah) and by Hamas the Battle of *al-Furqan* (the battle of the people of the Quran). The November 2012 war is called by the IDF Operation Pillar of Defense and Hamas called its missile attacks on the south of Israel Operation Stones of Baked Clay (حِجَارَةٌ مِّنْ سِجِّيلٍ), a Quranic term (105:04) describing divine wrath thrown on the enemies of Mecca from the sky. The summer 2014 war is called by the IDF Operation Strong Cliff and by Hamas Operation Eaten Straw (عَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ), again a Quranic reference continuing the previous war, 105:5). All names except the Israeli 2014 name carry religious meaning, be it miraculous Quranic battles against infidels or biblical reference to the Pillar of cloud (Exodus 13:21–22) reflecting the divine protecting over the Israelites. The May 2021 war was called by the IDF operation "Guardian of the walls" by the IDF, and Hamas called it the "Sword of Jerusalem Battle". In the 2014 war an IDF infantry brigade commander Ofer Winter, a graduate of Rabbi Sadan's RZ elitist pre-army preparation year, wrote to his soldiers an official dispatch before invading the GS, saying "History has chosen us to spearhead the fighting against the terrorist 'Gazan' enemy, which abuses, blasphemes and curses the God of Israel". Winter called "the God of Israel" to "make our path successful as we go and stand to fight for the sake of your people of Israel against a foe which curses your name" (Winter's "dispatch to the commander before the battle" 09/07/2014). Winter's description of the operation as a religious war drew a lot of criticism in Israel, demonstrating the limits of the RZ discourse.

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.newstatesman.com/middle-east/2009/09/israel-palestinian-hamas>

*agreement of 2007. The plot prompted Hamas in Gaza to act in self-defence in the events of June 2007. The claim that Hamas carried out a coup is baseless because Hamas was leading the democratically elected government. All it did was act against those who were plotting a coup against it under the command and guidance of General Dayton.<sup>147</sup>*

To verify the historical validity of this story would require obtaining access to confidential documents and possibly to discuss with those in charge on these efforts on the Israeli and Palestinian side, Efraim Sneh and Mohammad Dahlan respectively (and Elliott Abrams on behalf of the Americans). However, the fact that in 2009 Mashal, as chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, explains the GS takeover two years earlier as a defensive act against an anti-democratic act demonstrates the Hamas' need for local, regional and international legitimacy. It also demonstrates that Hamas is a pragmatic player that can regulate its use of politics on the one hand, and of violence on the other hand, according to its political needs at a given time and place. As such, Hamas does not sanctify violence as a sole mean to establish an Islamic state. On the other hand, Hamas does not completely reject violence: like other political players in the region Hamas does a measured use in violence and politics on its quest for power.

Hamas' electoral victory in January 2006 and its takeover of the GS in June 2007, positions the movement as a central actor in the Palestinian sphere. It is no longer a militant organization but a government with an army. Anyone seeking influence in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere cannot ignore Hamas and must take the movement seriously into account. Yet Hamas' government failed to provide the basic needs of its people. The Israeli blockade of the GS impedes the regular functions of Hamas' governance. Nevertheless, since Hamas takeover in the GS, the movement has consistently moved from the margins of Palestinian politics into the driver's seat. This transition from a revolutionary to a political movement calls to memory the transition of other social movements in the past, mainly Fatah and the PLO (KURZ, 2005).

To understand this transition, it is useful to consider Daniel Wajner's argument that social movements which accumulate power reach a point in which in order for

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<sup>147</sup> I heard similar arguments from other reliable source yet could not verify them, due to the clandestine nature of the topic and the fact that such an inquiry is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

them to continue and accumulate more power, resources and influence, they must institutionalize and politicize (WAJNER, 2020). The big question in this process is at what point and to what extent these movements give up violence. In the case of Hamas, we note that during the 1990s it needed to distinguish itself from Fatah, which left the path of armed struggle and turned to political negotiations. At this stage, Hamas used violence to portray itself as the protector of the nation – creating a balance of terror with Israel, for example after the 1994 Goldstein massacre. At the same time, Hamas conducted a tacit dialogue with all other stakeholders, learning the local security regime and adapting accordingly.

While the discourse on Hamas focused mainly on its violent aspects, it was at the outset well established and deeply rooted in Palestinian society through its welfare, social and educational activity (CARIDI, 2012). Towards the 2006 elections Hamas addressed the Palestinian public on the one hand, and the international arena on the other hand, through its partisan political platform. At this stage, after the long and bloody years of the Second Intifada, Hamas also halted its violent activity, demonstrating political control over its military wing. Even if, as some might argue, this was mere Machiavellianism, it nevertheless exemplified Hamas' ability to control its army.

Shortly after the elections, Mashal gave an exclusive interview to the German weekly news magazine Der Spiegel insisting that Hamas is not a terrorist organization but a legitimate “national resistance movement” exercising its legitimate right to resist the Israeli occupation, stating that “now we also have added legitimacy as a result of our election victory. This should serve as the basis for the way the western media treats Hamas” (Spiegel 06/02/2006).<sup>148</sup> Mashal and Hamas leadership realized that there is a moment of opportunity in which they could receive international legitimacy. Israel and the Quartet reacted only with sticks and no carrots,<sup>149</sup> conditioning the continuation of funding in Hamas acceptance of the Oslo Accords,

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<sup>148</sup> The interview was conducted by Der Spiegel editors Susanne Koelbl and Gerhard Spörl (with the help of Kristin Helberg): <https://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/spiegel-interview-with-hamas-leader-khaled-mashaal-our-people-will-never-rest-a-399153.html>. It was translated from the German by Christopher Sultan.

<sup>149</sup> The Diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East comprises of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia.

demanding the movement to renounce terror and to recognize the State of Israel.<sup>150</sup> Hamas was caught between its ideological constraints and the international political norms. Together with the sense of threat to lose its achievement in Gaza, this spurred Hamas' military wing to launch an attack on the PA and take over the GS. Since 2007, Hamas is conducting an ongoing war of attrition, a survival battle against the PA and Israel.

Two main issues that are left on the table ever since are: First, the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation negotiations and the formation of a national unity government in which the two movements will share leadership roles. Second, perhaps more dramatic, signs indicating that Hamas is interested in joining the PLO, maybe even to head the organization.

#### The New Hamas (2007 – 2017)

When the Gaza war of 2008 began, the Hamas leadership in the GS went underground. It was therefore the Damascus-based Mashal and his deputy Musa Abu Marzuq who negotiated a possible ceasefire with Israel via Egyptian mediation. This situation demonstrates how the inside-outside tension within Hama's leadership limited its governance in the GS. Hamas leadership in the GS felt firsthand the impact of Israel's invasion and could sense the public sentiment. The outside leadership was safe in Damascus, thus it was easier for them to present a stricter position based on diehard ideology (ELDAR, 2012, p. 307). This is a classic inside-outside dynamics, which reminds in more than one sense the situation of Fatah before Oslo (KURZ, 2005; TZIDKIYAHU, 2012). Hamas' outside leadership left Damascus following the mass killing in the Syrian civil war, and was now scattered across the region, with Khaled Mashal settled in Qatar, losing by this move the backing of Syria and the financial aid from Iran. This inside-outside dynamics changed when the outside was politically

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<sup>150</sup> ICG report No. 49 from 18/01/2006 (ENTER HAMAS: THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL INTEGRATION) not only foresaw Hamas' electoral achievement but also provided with practical recommendations. The report called (and provided tool) upon the different stakeholder (Hamas, the PA, Israel and members of the Quartet) to act in order to gradually encourage Hamas' politicization, further distancing the movement from violence and promoting a political arrangement.



weakened and entangled, then Khaled Mashal started to voice more moderate positions.

We will show in this section the final stage in the evolution and politicization of Hamas through four text: a 2006 interview of Mashal by the German weekly Der Spiegel, a comprehensive four parts interview of him by the MB's daily newspaper in Jordan *al-Sabil*, a book written by Hamas intellectuals and leaders in 2012, and finally Hamas "new charter" of 2017.

### **Der Spiegel 2006 interview**

In fact, already in 2006 Mashal told the Western press in an interview with the German weekly magazine Der Spiegel (Spiegel 06/02/2006):

*[...] before he was killed in March 2004, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, our spiritual leader, announced that he was willing to consider a long-term ceasefire if Israel would withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza -- to the 1967 borders. But Israel would not accept that. Saudi Arabia took up this proposal at the Arab summit in Beirut in 2002. Once again, Israel ignored it, as did the American government and the international community.*

Throughout the interview, Mashal cautiously walks a thin line between Hamas' rigid ideology and accepting international norms and previous agreements (mainly of course the Oslo Accord), stressing that Hamas was the legal and democratically elected government. In this interview, Mashal struggles to convince the EU and the USA not to cut down on funding to the Palestinians, highlighting Hamas' social projects and the lack of corruption and high level of transparency in the movements political and economic handling. In response to Der Spiegel's question regarding Hamas' vision of an Islamic state Mashal responds that Hamas wants "an independent Palestinian state in a country freed of occupation. We want full sovereignty. We will leave it up to the Palestinian people to decide what that state will look like."

Mashal continues to highlight the local tradition of inter-religious coexistence and the current Christian-Muslim solidarity among Palestinians. When told by Der Spiegel that "Hamas' Islam doesn't seem very liberal" Mashal replies that Hamas wants Islam that is open and tolerant, "without compulsion and hate", quoting Quran 2:256 saying "there is no compulsion in religion", further stating that "religion is a

choice, and so is practicing religion” (Spiegel 06/02/2006). As much as Mashal’s remarks are pleasant to Westerners, Hamas’ senior official in GS Mahmoud al-Zahar expressed a different vision regarding the character of Hamas’ Islamic State in Gaza. In an Arabic interview (Elaph 1-2/10/2005), al-Zahar mentions that if Hamas wins the election it will establish an Islamic State based on the laws of the Sharia. This state, according to al-Zahar, should ban women and men to dance together in public, as this will not serve the national interest. In this Islamic state, continues al-Zahar, the rights of homosexuals and lesbians will be revoked, calling gays “a mentally and morally perverted minority”.

In line with the classic Islamist ideology Al-Zahar sees Western permissiveness and male-female mixing (opposed to strict separation between the genders in religious ultra-conservative societies) and the high number of homosexual persons as corruption of values which in turn corrupts governance (Elaph 1-2/10/2005). According to al-Zahar (who clearly echoes Sayyid Qutb), Western culture has turned the family into a swamp of corruption and distorted values, spreading terminal diseases and abomination in the name of total liberty (permissiveness). In the Islamic state, al-Zahar assures, every Palestinian citizen will be required to behave according to the acceptable Islamic Sharia (i.e. according to Hamas and the MB’s interpretation of Islam). Al-Zahar mentions that even in the PA today the laws of marriage, inheritance and property ownership are based on Islam. Al-Zahar says that Hamas’ Islamic state will not be interested to establish connections with the morally corrupted Christian West. Similarly, al-Zahar expresses hardline and uncompromising opinions on political and security related issues all throughout the interview.

The polyphony within Hamas' leadership reflects the needs and constraints of Hamas to present itself to its Arab-Islamic constituency base as true to its core values, and to the international community as a democratic and pragmatic political actor. One can argue that Hamas discourse is two-faced, that it deceives the West and Israel with its new democratic discourse, and that it is actually an Islamist-extremist party. For this reason, it is important to carefully read what Hamas leaders say in their inner platforms. One can justly argue that when talking to *Der Spiegel* Mashal knowingly adapts his message to a Western ear (similarly one can argue that al-Zahar was talking to his Arab-reading constituency). It is one thing when an Islamist politician delivers

liberal and pragmatic messages of tolerance to the Western press. It is a completely different ballgame to voice such statements in a Jordanian Islamists' newspaper. In the later, every expression of moderation, pragmatism and self-justification are much more important than things told to foreign (Western) press.

### **Al-Sabil 2010 interview**

Indeed, in 2010 Mashal gave an in-depth detailed interview to the MB's daily newspaper in Jordan *al-Sabil* (al-Sabīl 20, 21, 22, 25/07/2010), which was spread over four issues (MASHAL, 2010). Mashal discusses many topics, among them Hamas' political philosophy and its positions regarding Israel and the peace process and also Hamas' policies on the inner-Palestinian, regional-Arab and international arenas. This interview is a surprising and unique primary source since the audience of al-Sabil are not Western liberals but Jordanian Islamists who severely judge any ideological deviation. In the background, in the summer of 2010 Hamas was still coping with military (recovering from the 2008-2009 war with Israel) and political (still learning to govern the GS) challenges. Mashal practically provided a road map to understand Hamas' behavior at the time. From the interview (unlike in some of his enthusiastic speeches) Mashal comes out as a pragmatic, moderate and flexible leader who appeals to the international community, acknowledges Christians and women's rights, attitudes towards the Jews, recognizes the limits of the use of force. Mashal asserts the fundamental place of religion in the live of Hamas, while repeating this message:

*We are not fighting the Zionists because they are Jew [...] but because they are occupiers [...] there is no religious conflict [...] it is rather Israel that is using religious argumentations [...] in their battle against the Palestinians. Even the secular Zionist leaders from the beginning of Zionism explanted religion for political ends [...] thus, our conflict with them uses religion as part of our war against them. However, we fight them because they are occupiers (MASHAL, 2010).*

Mashal expresses his objection to recognizing Israel's legitimacy, but nevertheless the fact that he does not use al-Sabil's supportive platform to lecture on the liberation of Palestine as a holy waqf and to call to deport the Jews back to where they came from, is meaningful.

Israeli analyst Assaf David who analyzed this interview estimated that Hamas could no longer depend on Iran's patronage, faced with the toughening attitudes towards the Islamic republic by the USA and its allies. Against this background, among other reasons, we must understand Hamas' pragmatism and turn to the Arab world (DAVID, 2012). Mashal knew that Israeli and Western intelligence would read this interview with attention, so the interview can also be seen as an indirect appeal to those readers as well. We can assume, then, that Mashal wanted convince them that despite its ideological rigidness, Hamas was the only partner with which a deal could be reached. This interesting argument brings to mind the common Israeli saying that only the political right can sign a peace agreement, and also echoes Fatah's approach in the 1980s (DAVID, 2012; TZIDKIYAHU, 2012).

The three main axes that stem out of this comprehensive interview are A) moderation and pragmatism; B) attitudes towards Israel and the negotiations with it; c) Arab and Palestinian aspects. Throughout the interview Mashal stresses that armed resistance (*muqawama*, which also composes Hamas' name) is a means, not the goal in the service of the ultimate goal of liberation (*al-tahrir*) (MASHAL, 2010, p. 17). Mashal further states that the armed struggle should serve the political goal and must not take over the movement's agenda; that politics is superior to the armed struggle (*muqawama*), which is a considered a sacred value of the PNM and was the basic founding rationale of Hamas (the Islamic resistance Movement). This also implied future compromises. Interestingly, when talking about liberation, Mashal does not use the common term "from the River to the Sea" to describe the entire land of historic Palestine during the British Mandate (from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west). When considering the audience of al-Sabil – the MB in Jordan - it is practically requested to repeat such slogans, yet Mashal bluntly and consistently avoids them throughout the interview. Mashal avoids bombastic declarations and even refuses to draw red lines regarding Israel. According to Mashal, such a definition would harm Hamas' ability for political maneuvers.

Mashal undermines the religious element of the conflict and emphasizes its national aspect instead. Whenever he does quote the Quran or Hadith he does so to justify in principle negotiating with Israel or integrating politics into Hamas' resistance strategy. Mashal quotes verse 8:61, maybe the most manifest Quranic call to peace

saying “But if they incline towards peace, you must also incline towards it”. Mashal counter balances this verse with other, more militant Quranic verses (47:35, 8:61), only to go back again to the same Quranic verse which asserts that if possible, peace is preferable (MASHAL, 2010, p. 18). In the following paragraph, Mashal paraphrases on Clausewitz’s famous aphorism, asserting that “in the field of strategy and conflict management, negotiation (*al-tafāwuḍ* التفاوض) is the continuation of war by other means” (MASHAL, 2010, p. 18).

Mashal is consistent in promoting the politicization of Hamas and advocating its willingness to cooperate with the West based on the universal and humanist message of equality and justice that stem from the Palestinian struggle (MASHAL, 2010, p. 26). On the practical level, Mashal mentions that Hamas’ foreign affairs department was ready to establish relations with the USA and other Western government, more than hinting that tacit contacts already took place. Furthermore, Mashal talks about ethnic and religious tolerance which symbolizes, according to Mashal, the Islamic approach in the region throughout history, specifically emphasizing the Muslim-Christian bond in Palestine (MASHAL, 2010, p. 13-14). Mashal knew that in order to portray Hamas as a legitimate international actor he must undermine its lack of tolerance towards Christians. Eventually, despite his remarks, Hamas did not integrate any Christians into its political institutions.

Mashal criticizes certain aspects of the Arab-Islamic conservative approach towards women. Using harsh and blunt language, Mashal argues that discrimination against women is not anchored in religion but consist of inappropriate cultural norms. This comment was no less than sensational since Mashal tackled deeply rooted norms practiced in most of the Arab countries, including the Palestinian society (MASHAL, 2010, p. 32-34). It is somewhat balanced when Mashal clarifies that he was not asking to allow Western promiscuity, but only to avoid oppression and seclusion. In line with the Western discourse, Mashal calls to give women the place and honor they deserve.

Regarding negotiation with Israel, Mashal introduces two terms, flexibility (*murūna* مُرُونَة) alongside hardness or firmness (*ṣalāba* صَلَابَة). Armed struggle is anchored in religious (*ṣarīf*, i.e. according to the Sharia - the Islamic legal system) and practical explanations according to the situation and circumstances on the ground. Negotiation and armed struggle do not contradict but complete one another. Firmness

teaches Israel the limits of force and improves the Palestinian's position on entering the negotiation. Flexibility awakens a vibrant and deep discourse in the West regarding Hamas, on stopping the boycott and accepting the movement. Flexibility (*murūna*) appears in the text 24 times, while firmness (*ṣalāba*) only once (MASHAL, 2010, p. 43-48). In line with the concept of flexibility Mashal mentions that Hamas' "red lines" should remain solid (without specifying these red lines). We must not move from them, Mashal asserts, and he further warns that these lines must not be bargained between those trying to be more and more radical, probably referring to al-Qaida and the PIJ (MASHAL, 2010, p. 43). Mashal points here to the dynamics of radicalization, an inherent pattern among RN hardliners and the religious-right in general. If we cross our red lines, he warns, we'll cause stagnation and fixation within Hamas. On the other hand we do not want to "dilute" our position and remain spineless, an obvious allusion to the PA (MASHAL, 2010, p. 43). Mashal explains that a delicate balance is required. On the one hand, Mashal believes (and most Arab elites share this conviction) that the Jews (ie. Israel) understand the language of power. On the other hand, it is important to limit radicals that are only interested to fight. A delicate integrated approach of force and diplomacy is required here. And Mashal knows that this is the acceptable approach for most Arab regimes in the region (MASHAL, 2010, p. 44).

"Negotiating with the enemy is, no doubt, allowed from both a religious and logical perspective" (MASHAL, 2010, p. 17). Al-Sabil's editors emphasize this quote, reflecting Mashal's realpolitik approach. At the same time, Mashal admits that Hamas refused to meet with Israeli officials, highlighting Hamas' practical and principle fear of talking with Israel. Practically, Hamas assumed that Israel was not yet willing to pay the required price for peace, and thus it should not allow Israel to enjoy the political fruits of an ongoing negotiation (as if it were engaged in peace making process).

On the principle level, Mashal understands that the balance of power inclines towards Israel and that it is a non-beneficiary starting point for Hamas. Clearly the weaker side in the negotiation will pay more than the strong. Mashal does not lay down as a precondition for negotiation a weak Israel. At the same time, he consistently refuses to recognize Israel and even refuses differentiating between de facto and de jure. Hamas will never recognize Israel, which is an occupying entity, asserted Mashal

(MASHAL, 2010, p. 23). By doing so, Mashal also rejects the conditions of the Quartet, considering them an arrogant and rude Western imposition (MASHAL, 2010, p. 29, 48). Hamas learned from the mistakes of the PLO in the 1990s, and Mashal realizes that recognizing Israel is the strongest Palestinian bargaining chip. Mashal insists on being respected by the international community. Mashal analyzes that Israel's insistence on a Palestinian recognition stems not from arrogance but from a deep anxiety, weakness and low self-confidence. It reflects an Israeli inner understanding that Israel is a foreign body in the heart of the region, rejected by its immediate environment.

The issue of recognition and negotiation is anchored in long term, even metaphysic thinking: Israel is strong now, but time is on our side and eventually Israel is bound to weaken and to become a burden on its allies. At the same time, this is not a messianic idea. Mashal does not want to wait to redemption in the end of days, he is leading a movement that seeks earthly rule, to govern in this world. All he is suggesting is to wait and see in which direction Israel advances. At the same time, Mashal understands that if Israel puts forward a proposition it might embarrass Hamas (it did not happen). Therefore, he mentions that Hamas' proposition for *hudna* with Israel is still valid (MASHAL, 2010, p. 24). He then analyzes that Israel has its own reasons not to accede: 1. Israel wants to dictate and not to be led, 2. It prefers to deal with "easier Palestinians" than Hamas (i.e. the PA), and 3. Israel learns that pressure and extortion bear fruit. Nevertheless, Mashal explains that while being hard on Israel, an agreement with Hamas will receive wide support and popularity amongst the Palestinians. Here Mashal's shows his approachability, he is essentially saying: leave the PA, come talk with Hamas.

Hamas is anchored in the Arab and Muslim world. The PLO and the PA distanced themselves from these "external" circles and sacrificed all their principles to stay in power, turning the Palestinian question into a narrow and particular issue. Hamas is clean of this severe strategic error and Mashal seeks to reconnect the Palestinian cause to the Islamic and Arab circles. According to Mashal, what the PLO-Fatah did by insisting on the independent decision-making (detached of wider Arab considerations) is to weaken the Palestinian position, leaving them to face Israel alone, detached from any strategic or logistic depth.

In other words, Fatah led PLO placed rule (government) before liberation and ended up losing both. For Hamas, says Mashal, governing power was only a means on the way to achieve the ultimate goal of liberation (MASHAL, 2010, p. 37-43). Mashal talks about reawakening the Arab bond to the Palestinian issue, in order to counter-balance the inherent Palestinian weakness in front of Israel. Echoing classical MB positions, Mashal considered Israel to be the spearhead of the Western penetration into the Middle East. To counter this Hamas wishes to reconnect Palestine to its Arab and Islamic strategic depth. Mashal talks about Arab political support and not active participation in the armed struggle.<sup>151</sup> The fact that Israel refused the Saudi Initiative (The Arab Peace Initiative from 2002) indicates the weakness of the Arab countries in front of Israel.

Another interesting aspect is Mashal's call to reform and democratize the PLO, leaving more than a hint of Hamas' interest in becoming a full member of the organization, and maybe even of Mashal's own intentions to head the PLO in future. By joining the PLO, Hamas and other opposition organizations would be able to maintain their purist positions and at the same time join a peace accord with Israel. In this long interview, Mashal provides several other apologetic explanations:

- 1) On the politicization of Hamas, he explains that the alternative was to disconnect from politics and remain left out. On the contrary, thanks to Hamas' politicization, the first MB example of an Islamic State came about.
- 2) On the takeover of the GS from the PA, Mashal again portrays the Gaza 2007 civil war as a defensive act. Hamas fought Palestinian adversaries who refused to recognize the results of the democratic elections. Instead, the PA attempted to overthrow Hamas' elected government by force, with the help of Israel and the USA.

At the same time, Mashal expresses pain and sorrow on the events in Gaza and calls for restraint in the use of force. In-between the lines Mashal

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<sup>151</sup> At this point Mashal knowingly arouses an existing sentiment in the Jordanian elites that lament the Jordanian de jure political disengagement from the WB in 1988. Assaf David does not overrule the possibility that the question of a Jordanian confederation with the WB will arise anew among Jordanian elite (DAVID, 2012).



calls to subjugate Hamas' military wing under the movement's political leadership, and implicitly criticizes certain elements within the military wing.

- 3) On the relations between Hamas and the global MB movement: Hamas was a national Palestinian liberation organization. However, it was rooted historically in the larger Islamic MB movement and had common ground with other Islamic movements throughout the world (MASHAL, 2010, p. 14). This last declaration is of importance as it consisted a significant step away from Hamas' 1988 charter and towards the 2017 new document of principle, which posits Hamas as a Palestinian national movement first, and only afterwards an Islamic organization.

In sum, this in-depth strategic interview reflects the primacy of the national factor over the religious one. Mashal's political and regional analyses make sense: he rightly identifies Israel's moral distress, its need to obtain a position of power in negotiations, its belief that a deal with Hamas has better chances to survive in the Arab street (similar to the security discourse of RZ on the WB), and the Israeli anxiety regarding the future of the state.

Furthermore, Mashal's understanding regarding the need to combine the armed struggle in negotiation was at the time acceptable, more or less, to all the Arab political elite in the Middle East. The interview is not impassioned. At times it is even apologetic regarding Hamas' politicization. Hamas is a movement seeking to govern or at least to hold governmental responsibilities. This requires thinking beyond the militarist aspect onto politics, economy and society. Despite the favorable media platform, Mashal does not talk about liberating Palestine from the river to the sea and does not specify Hamas' red line regarding the right of return (of the refugees from 1948). It is a classical platform to highlight the sanctity of Palestine and Jerusalem, but Mashal does not stress these elements beyond the necessary minimum.

The fact that the interview was held in Arabic on an MB platform radiates pragmatism inwards, not only outwards, even if it stemmed out of an external political distress of Hamas. According to Mashal, Hamas would never officially recognize the legitimacy of the occupying Zionist entity that is called Israel, even if this is Hamas' strongest bargaining chip. On the other hand, Hamas is ready to sign a peace

agreement with Israel, and to acknowledge its military and economic superiority - which entails some form of recognition, but does not amount to comply with the Israeli demand that the Arabs will recognize Israel as a Jewish state (a condition put forward by Netanyahu in 2009).

This interview was a landmark in Hamas' process of change and politicization. It indicates ideological and structural changes in Hamas' internal mechanism and a willingness to integrate in the local, regional and international order by reaching an agreement with Israel. Israeli intelligence agencies most probably analyzed and translated Mashal's interview, but at the time of its publication, in the summer of 2010, the only open source in Hebrew that mentioned the interview was a report by the Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center ([terrorism-info.org.il](http://terrorism-info.org.il) 08/08/2010).<sup>152</sup> This Israeli report falls into all the expected clichés regarding Hamas and completely misses the winds of change, despite the fact that they were not concealed. Its influence on Israeli public discourse and policy making regarding Hamas was between minimal to non-existing.

Regional developments accelerated the process Hamas underwent. Following the Arab Spring, the bloody civil war in Syria and the growing isolation of Iran in the international arena, Hamas had to leave Damascus and turn away from Tehran, choosing the Arab-Qatari axis instead (DAVID, 2012). In July 2013 the Egyptian army overthrew Mohamed Morsi's MB government from power after a one-year rule that greatly benefitted Hamas. This accumulation of regional changes created new constraints that weakened Hamas and accelerated the flexibility of what used to be (or seemed to be) rigid ideological borders. This change was felt by the Palestinian public, which for the first time since Hamas' foundation, criticized its top leadership for voicing views too moderate in their opinion (ELDAR, 2012). In 2011 Mashal met Abbas to negotiate (once more) a Palestinian national unity government and agreed that Hamas would join the PLO and would from here onwards support popular non-armed resistance to Israel (despite efforts, these negotiations eventually failed). A-

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<sup>152</sup> Also available in English: Hamas leader Khaled Mash'al has recently presented Hamas' ideological and strategic alternative to the PA's approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/18053/>

Zahar responded publicly that “this is a severe mistake”, revealing Hamas’ inner disagreements ([ELDAR, 2012, p. 338](#)).

### **Studies of Thoughts & Experience**

In 2014, a year after an intensive discussion regarding the future of Hamas began among its top leadership, a book published by the Beirut based Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations took this trend several steps further.

The 672 pages long book<sup>153</sup> is entitled *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah Hamas: Dirasat fi al-Fikr wa al-Tajrubah* (Islamic Resistance Movement-Hamas: Studies of Thought and Experience ([SALEH, 2015](#))).<sup>154</sup> Written originally in Arabic by senior and distinguished Islamist intellectuals and Hamas’ top leadership, it is an anthology with two main parts. The first part, which has some academic pretension, consists eleven articles written by various Arab and Palestinian experts and academics, all of whom have an Islamist background and specialize in the Palestinian issue. In the second part, the five most senior personalities in Hamas leadership lay down their worldview. The recurring theme in the essays is the “normalization” of Hamas: its transformation into a legitimate political movement ([TZIDKIYAHU, 2018](#)).

Among its chapters, the book includes an article by Yousef Rizqa. Rizqa analyzes in details Hamas’ political ideology, addressing issues such as mosque and state, law and constitution, nationality, secularism, democracy and human rights ([RIZQA, 2017, p. 63-111](#)). In another chapter, Mustafa Abu Sway, a professor of Islam at Al-Quds University and an imam at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, examines Hamas’ conceptualization of the other (see Part 3 of this dissertation). Abu Sway scrutinizes

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<sup>153</sup> The English translation is 706 pages long.

<sup>154</sup> The book is available online at Al-Zaytouna’s website (<https://www.alzaytouna.net>). It was originally published in Arabic and gradually translated to English. I first approached the articles in the Book when they were available only in Arabic. Today the entire book is available in English online as part Hamas’ efforts to change its image in the eyes of the international community, see link: <https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2015/09/07/islamic-resistance-movement-hamas-studies-of-thought-and-experience-is-now-available-for-free-download/>. The book brings together various articles by Palestinian experts and Islamic scholars, but also by several senior Hamas leaders. The book presents Hamas’ political vision and its stance towards Israel, the peace process and the Palestinian factions. It also presents Hamas’ perspective towards political and social reform as well as the Movement’s relations on the Arab, Islamic and international levels. It can be seen as a significant step towards the “Document of General Principals and Policies” published in 2017 by Hamas’, that will be dealt with in the relevant chapter of this study.

Hamas' views of Jews and Judaism, of Zionists and Zionism, and of the State of Israel (ABU SWAY, 2017, p. 113-127). Yet another chapter is authored by Sami Khater, a member of Hamas' Political Bureau, who writes about "Hamas' Vision for Managing the Conflict with the Zionist Enemy" (KHATER, 2017, p. 507-519).

All three clearly draw away from extremism radicalism and anti-Semitism traditionally affiliated with Hamas, revealing in their texts a consistent trend of apologetics and pragmatism. One clear tendency is the attempt to distance the "new Hamas" from the movement's 1988 charter. For instance, according to Rizqa, understanding the above explained difference between human made ideologies and divinely revealed Islam is necessary "if we are to understand Hamas ideological and political vision" (RIZQA, 2017, p. 65). After establishing this axiom, about twelve pages down the article, Rizqa renounces Hamas' Charter as a source of authority, stating that Hamas' current political actions bypass the conditions stated in the 1988 Charter (RIZQA, 2017, p. 81). Rizqa quotes Mashal in saying on Hamas: "we are not advocates of detachment from reality. Our policy is to interact and influence reality" (RIZQA, 2017, p. 81).

Even Hamas' violent resistance and acts of terrorism are presented in the book as a necessary evil, a tool for saving lives (KHATER, 2017, p. 513-514). Khater argues that "martyrdom operation" (i.e. suicide bombings) created a balance of fear with Israel as a counter-measure to the killing of Palestinian civilians, based on the Islamic principle of reciprocity (*al-radd bil-mithl*). While such talk may be uncomfortable for Israeli ears, it marks a significant change in terminology, reframing political violence as an undesirable means, used only when all other alternatives have failed.

Even without dwelling on each chapter, this review of the book's content suffices to notice that it conveys a clear message: Hamas has become a legitimate Palestinian political actor. Hamas is eligible to govern the Palestinians on the national level and it is fit to interact regionally and internationally with any other stakeholder. The entire book, easily accessible and downloadable online in Arabic and in English, is a direct message from Hamas, via al-Zaytouna Center, to the PA and the Fatah led PLO, to the Arab world, to Israel and to the international community. The book's bottom line is simple: Hamas claims to be an integral part of the Palestinian people, an

inseparable part of the national movement and it is asking to enter the club of legitimate politics. Moreover, from the book arises the conclusion that not including Hamas in Palestinian politics and in a future Israeli-Palestinian agreement is doomed to fail. According to al-Zaytouna Center's book description, the available literature on Hamas "is insufficient to clarify all the issues being researched, especially for Western audiences interested in understanding the Palestinian issue, of which Hamas has become a key component in the past decade" (al-Zaytouna.net). In this book Hamas is portraying an ideal model of itself as a moderate and liberal Islamic national movement, inspired by successful modern Islamist political thinkers such as the Tunisian Islamist thinker Rashid al-Ghannushi (and sometimes Hassan Al-Turabi from Sudan). Loyal to the notion that Hamas' particular circumstances (i.e. an illegal movement struggling in a double fight, both against the PA and the Israeli occupation) distinguish it from other political Islam movements, the writers make an effort to anchor their ideas in the writings of seminal writers such as al-Banna and Qutb, and of Hamas ideologists such as al-Maqadmeh, but mainly Jamal Mansour and his ideas about democracy and the rule of law, hinting that for Hamas, the national aspect overcomes the Islamist one.

### **Hamas' New Charter 2017**

On 1st May 2017, Hamas' leadership assembled a festive press conference in the Qatari capital Doha, and officially announced the main points of its new political document, entitled "A Document of General Principles and Policies" (*al-Araby al-Jadeed* 01/05/2017).<sup>155</sup> The document's 42 articles spread over seven pages (eleven pages in the official English translation) and constitute another milestone in Hamas' changing discourse. After the customary praises to Allah and a one-page preamble, as acceptable in many Arab (and not only Islamist) political documents, the first article of the new document reads:<sup>156</sup>

*1. The Islamic Resistance Movement "Hamas" is a Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement. Its goal is to liberate*

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<sup>155</sup> [www.alaraby.co.uk](http://www.alaraby.co.uk) 01/05/2017: "العربي الجديد" ينشر نص وثيقة "حماس" السياسية

<sup>156</sup> See full document in appendix

*Palestine and confront the Zionist project. Its frame of reference is Islam, which determines its principles, objectives and means*

As this article shows, the eminent difference between the 1988 charter and the 2017 document is in the precedence of Palestinian nationalism over Political Islam. In the 1988 charter, Islam, religion and resistance are clearly the independent variables for Hamas, while Palestinian nationalism is a dependent variable (which appears for the first time only in the sixth article). In the 2017 document, the order was turned around: in the new Hamas of 2017 Palestinian nationalism is the independent variable while Islam, religion and resistance became the dependent variables. In the words of Khaled Mashal during the press conference just before presenting the document, it is an “update to Hamas' philosophy of resistance” (Al Araby TV 01/05/2017).<sup>157</sup> Much has changed since Sheikh Ahmad Yassin wrote the 1988 Charter, explains Mashal. In the last four years, he continues, Hamas' leadership has been working on updating the movement's vision, adapting it to the changing reality and to the national, regional, and international norms (Al Araby TV 01/05/2017). In a sense, as Mashal implies, this document is Mashal's political legacy to the movement's new leadership, especially to Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar.

The 2017 document does not mention the 1988 charter at all. Also, while the 1988 charter was called *mīthāq* (ميثاق, covenant), the 2017 document is referred to as *wathīqa* (وثيقة, simply - document). Nevertheless, both documents constitute Hamas' “identity card,” and therefore merit comparison.

The most essential difference between the two documents, from which all other differences derive, is the weight of the Islamic dimension compared with that of Palestinian nationalism. The 1988 charter gives undisputed precedence to the Islamic dimension, giving Palestinian nationalism a secondary position, completely driven from the supremacy of Islam. The new document turns the tables and grants precedence to the Palestinian national component. Already, as quoted above, the first article defined Hamas as a Palestinian national liberation movement, pushing Islam to the background, as a source of inspiration and authority. This is how Hamas was defined in the first article of the charter:

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<sup>157</sup>Broadcasted live and now available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip4IM8C8QOE>.

*The Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is its system. From Islam, it reaches for its ideology, fundamental percepts, and view of life, the world, and humanity. It judges all its actions according to Islam, and it is inspired by Islam to correct its errors.*

While Palestine was defined in religious terms in the 1988 charter, as an Islamic waqf endowed by the Islamic conquest of the seventh century, in the 2017 document Palestine is described as “the land of the Arab Palestinian people, from it they originate, to it they adhere and belong, and about it they reach out and communicate” (HAMAS, 2017).<sup>158</sup> Similarly, the shift in the center of gravity from the religious to the national is witnessed by the definition of the enemy as national: the Zionist occupation, the Zionist entity and “Israel” are all tools of the Zionist project. The document rejects antisemitism altogether and makes a clear distinction between Jews and Judaism as a religion and the “occupation and the Zionist project”: “ Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine” (HAMAS, 2017). Thus, the struggle is not a religious one. The 1988 charter on the other hand, was an anti-Semitic document, which depicted the conflict as an eminently religious and cosmic struggle against the Jews (See also Part 3 of this dissertation). As the last paragraph of the charter’s seventh article indicates:

*The Final Hour will not come until Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims kill them, and until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, and a stone or tree would say: O Muslim, servant of God, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him! But the tree of Gharqad would not say it, for it is the tree of the Jews.*

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<sup>158</sup> It is interesting to mark the resemblance to Israel’s 1948 declaration of independence, a text carrying quintessential national-religious meanings (quoted below in chapter five): “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books [...]” (NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE BODY, 1948). The text also echoes the more secular Palestinian 1988 declaration of independence cited above in this dissertation and the first article of the 1964 Palestinian National Charter (amended in 1968), only more Islamic, less Pan Arab and more particularistic: “Palestine is the homeland of the Arab-Palestinian nation and it is an integral (inseparable) part of the great Arab homeland, and the Palestinian nation is part of the Arab nation”.

Assertions claiming that every Muslim is individually obligated to wage Jihad against Israel (*fard al-ayn*)<sup>159</sup> are plentiful in the 1988 charter. In the 2017 document, one simply cannot find such assertions and call for Jihad. The word Jihad appeared over twenty times in the 1988 charter, but only once (article 23, in the context of legitimate resistance for national liberation) in the 2017 document. Moreover, the document legitimizes both violent and popular forms of resistance to the occupation, thus legitimizing non-violent resistance as well.

While article 2 of the 1988 charter stated that, “the Islamic Resistance Movement is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Palestine”, in the 2017 document there is no mention whatsoever of the Brotherhood, an indication of Hamas’ independent stand and its severance from the mother organization (see also preliminary reports on that matter in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* newspaper, [aawsat.com](http://aawsat.com), 08/03/2017). This disconnection is in line with Hamas’ independent national stand, but is also obviously aimed at pleasing the anti-*Ikhwani* (i.e. brotherhood) Egyptian regime. In any case, it is an indication both of the growing of national tendencies over the pan-Islamic ones, and of an element of realpolitik.

The most important element in Hamas’ 2017 Document of General Principles and Policies is in article 20:

*Hamas believes that no part of the land of Palestine shall be compromised or conceded, irrespective of the causes, the circumstances and the pressures and no matter how long the occupation lasts. Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea. However, without compromising its rejection of the Zionist entity and without relinquishing any Palestinian rights, **Hamas considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4th of June 1967** [my emphasis], with the return of the refugees and the*

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<sup>159</sup> According to the online Oxford Dictionary of Islam (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/>), in Islamic law *Fard al-Ayn* (فرض العين) refers to a legal obligation that must be performed by each individual Muslim. Among these kind of obligations are prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. *Fard al-Ayn* is contrasted with communal obligation (*fard al-kifayah* فرض كفاية). While Jihad in general is a communal obligation in Islam, a defensive jihad (an armed struggle against invaders to Islamic lands) on the other hand is considered an individual obligation - *Fard al-Ayn*.



*displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, to be a formula of national consensus.*

In this article, Hamas clearly accepts the national goal of two states solution. At the same time, it is not a final and complete acceptance.

The article is full of caveats: “[...] no part of the land of Palestine shall be compromised”, Hamas rejects “the Zionist entity” and is unwilling to legitimize it, even not in return to a Palestinian state. Hamas previously rejected the PLO and the PA’s decisions regarding an agreement with Israel, as well as the 2002 “Arab Peace Initiative”, since they contravene Palestinians’ rights, as article 18 of the 2017 document indicates:

*The establishment of “Israel” is entirely illegal and contravenes the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and goes against their will and the will of the Ummah; it is also in violation of human rights that are guaranteed by international conventions, foremost among them is the right to self-determination.*

Nevertheless, Hamas’ document brings forward a willingness to accept the two-state solution, along the 1967 borders. This willingness was anchored in the idea of a *hudna* – a temporary truce – declared by Hamas in 1994 following the Oslo Accords. The content of the new document follows almost word-for-word the original *hudna* proposition as expressed by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin in an interview he gave in 2002 to Hamas’ organ *filastin al-muslima* (FM, 01-09/2001, pp. 20–23). A similar version appeared in the 2006 National Reconciliation Document between Haniyeh (Hamas) and Abbas (Fatah), after Hamas’ electoral victory in the PA elections. In this way Hamas manages to accommodate the seeming contradiction between the 1988 charter and the 2017 documents, by asserting that the final goal of liberating all of Palestine still stand. It enables Hamas to present the acceptance of a state in the 1967 borders, without a real political achievement while continuing the resistance, together with the claim for the return of the refugees, as a step on the way to the final goal – liberating all of Palestine. Thus, Hamas remains devoted to its original goals, presented in national terms.

Hamas' 2017 document reflects a crossroad, which recalls the PLO's dilemma following the Israel-Arab war of October 1973, when they presented their phased plan (also known as PLO ten points plan) in 1974 (Israeli analyst and researcher Matti Steinberg was the first to introduce this comparison in Haaretz 03/05/2017). Yet this comparison highlights the differences: eventually the PLO neglected the final goal and recognized Israel by accepting the Oslo Accord, the Arab Peace Initiative (API) and the Quartet's Road Map. Hamas on the other hand, overrule any agreement - including the API - in the new document. Hamas also puts down phases that will bring it closer to the final goal. Yet, unlike the PLO, Hamas joins religious considerations to the national ones, bounding together Islam and Palestinian nationalism. Thus, according to Steinberg, Hamas' 2017 document is a strategic alternative to the API. This assertion is strengthened by the fact that Hamas published it about a month after the API was reiterated (for the 15<sup>th</sup> time), during the 2017 Arab League Summit held in Amman on 23-29/03/2017. The API poses an existential threat to Hamas, and the movement turns to Israel to remove the API threat, estimating (so far correctly) that the Israeli disregard will eventually bury the API altogether. Hamas anticipates, so it seems, the collapse of the paradigm of a political agreement, posing a national alternative in the form of establishing a Palestinian state without an agreement, and only as an interim phase. For that reason, the document called to reform the PLO (article 29) and the PA (article 31), calling them to reach a shared national accordance in the framework of the document of general principles and policies itself, also paving the grounds for Hamas to integrate into the PLO and the PA. Conditioning such institutional integration will limit the PA/PLO regarding a political compromise. The political approach presented in the document contradicts the 1988 charter, which completely declined political negotiations. This enables Hamas to stick to the policies presented in the document even in the unlikely event of an agreement - possibly including the GS - without "contaminating" itself with direct negotiations with Israel. Hamas, so it seems, is trying to keep all the options open. It will try to integrate itself in a future Palestinian state, if such a state arises, as an opposition, ready to step in in case of a public disappointment.

The major difference in Hamas new approach is, as mentioned above, the precedence of the national Palestinian element over the religious one. This change is rooted in the regional historical circumstances – to safeguard Hamas’ rule in the GS faced with the regional unrest in the Arab world. Another reason is the general weakening of the MB due to the movement’s failure to rule in Egypt. This accumulation of local regional circumstances, Hamas “exile” from Syria and the disrupted relations with Iran, the approach of Egypt’s president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and ISIS’ stronghold in the Sinai Peninsula, alongside the Fatah-Hamas split, made Hamas’ leadership fear a leak of the regional chaos into Palestine. This pushed Hamas to adopt changes regarding its administration and the ways to handle the conflict with Israel, but without completely neglecting its principles. Loyal to the principle of *vox populi* Hamas estimated that most Palestinians are interested in a political agreement based on the principles of the API in case such an arrangement will become possible. Thus, Hamas became more flexible. However, even when stretched, this flexibility has a limit – Hamas cannot actively grant legitimization to the State of Israel.

Hamas’ 2017 Document of General Principles and Policies opposes recognizing the Oslo Accords, and is against recognizing the “Zionist Entity” and security coordination with Israel. At the same time, the document accepts the idea of a Palestinian state along the 1967 lines with Jerusalem as its capital. However, recognition would then be granted de facto by an acceptance of the political agreement, which is an admittance of the Oslo Accords as a given fact.

Highlighting the moderate nature of the movement, is the use of the Arabic word *wasat* (from the root *و.س.ط.*) which echoes the *wasatiyya* (وسطية, literally meaning the middle path), Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s religious doctrine affiliated with the MB. Adopting a “policy of opening up to different states in the world” (سياسة الانفتاح, article 37), associatively reminds of Anwar al-Sadat’s policy of “opening up” to western economies. Hamas accepted a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders as early as 2006,<sup>160</sup> striving for a Palestinian national consensus. Hamas internalized the

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<sup>160</sup> See for example article 1 of the “prisoners’ document”, accepted by Hamas at the time: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2006/5/26/%D9%86%D8%B5-%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%89->

advantages of partnership with other Palestinian wings. Alongside addressing new publics (women, Christians), opening to the world, and becoming institutionally (and to some extent ideologically) independent from the MB, will strengthen Hamas electorally. Together with its abandonment of anti-Semitic discourse, this indicates Hamas' wish to remove itself from the list of terrorist organizations in the world, and to become a legitimate political actor, equal to the PA in any future political agreement. This explains articles 8, 32 and 37 in the new document, which highlight moderation, intendance and openness.

Mashal explains in his presentation the change from the ambiguous and emotional approach of the charter, meant to please the Palestinian collective, to the satisfying, rational and open approach of the document, adapted to the international law and diplomatic community. The document is aimed to the world, to the humanistic discourse and the Zeitgeist, to recruit international, Arab and Islamic support. Like Arafat at the time, Mashal also moved from armed struggle to politics. Both leaders, so it seems, adopted the concept of “heroic flexibility” coined by Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to justify his country’s nuclear deal with the West, to justify their withdrawal from the maximalist vision of liberating all of Palestine, to a practical and national vision of partial liberation.<sup>161</sup> As noted above, Arafat, as the leader of a national movement, also used religious terminology to justify his actions (MARZAN, 2016). Mashal, as a leader of a more religious movement, adopts in the 2017 document national rhetoric. Each leader adopts the discourse of his main (inner Palestinian) rival, reflecting the Zeitgeist and the changes they experienced.

In sum, three decades after Hamas' establishment and fifteen years after the beginning of its rule over the GS, Hamas’ Political Document revised the movement’s character. Comparing the 2017 Political Documents to Hamas’ 1988 Charter reflects the road Hamas made from a revolutionary Islamists resistance movement to a politicized national liberation organization.

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[%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%88%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82](#)

<sup>161</sup> “Ayatollah invokes ‘heroic flexibility’ to justify Iran deal” in the Financial Times 15/07/2015.

From a realpolitik point of view, the 2017 document was born out of Hamas' strategic distress (BACONI, 2018) ([www.regthink.org](http://www.regthink.org), 01/06/2017). Caught up between Fatah and the PIJ, Hamas underwent a process of pacification and politization, bringing about an ongoing dialogue regarding the movement's past, present and future. Nowadays (2021), Hamas is clearly aiming towards continuing this path of political governance on the account of halting what was its biggest asset – Jihad and militant rethoric.

## Chapter 4: Institutionalization and the move toward the Political Center Stage – Religious-Zionism.

*Religious-Zionism is a tangible asset, a real asset. In the end, there are communities, institutions, youth movements, teachers, and graduates. This real public wants someone to represent its way, its values, and its needs with pride. This is what we do with God's help.*

*Bezalel Smotrich, head of the Religious-Zionist Party, Haaretz 19/02/2021*

Religious-Zionism (RZ), the religious faction of the Zionist movement, was institutionally founded in 1902 with the formation of The *Mizrachi* movement (Hebrew: תנועת המזרחי *HaMizrachi*, an acronym for *Merkaz Ruhani* i.e. spiritual center),<sup>162</sup> a religious-Zionist organization and political party. It was an official and integral part of the greater (and generally secular) Zionist movement, established throughout the 1880s and the 1890s (DIECKHOFF, 2003). The ideology of RZ consolidated throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prior to the institutionalization of the Zionist movement, serving as a launching pad for the more secular mainstream Zionism. From its inception, RZ was an outsider in mainstream Zionism because of its religiosity, and at the same time differed from the rest of Jewish orthodoxy in its choice to join the Jewish national revival project, despite its secular character (BEN SASSON, 2020, p. 2).

### Characterization of the Religious-Zionist Sector

Religious-Zionists have a dress code, a political party and other structures and institutions that commonly distinguish them from other sectors and groups in Israeli society. Contemporary scholars writing about RZ tend to stress the divisions within it which blur the sectorial aspect of RZ, saying that there is no longer one RZ but a plurality of Religious-Zionisms (ETTINGER, 2019). Rabbi Eliezer "Eli" Sadan makes a consistent effort to prove otherwise, issuing two detailed reports: "Who are you religious-Zionism?" (2016) and "Religious-Zionism, an 'Identity Card': more that

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<sup>162</sup> Literally the Hebrew word *HaMizrachi* translates as "the eastern", indicating the movement's Eurocentric approach, gazing eastward from Europe towards Zion.

unifies than separates” (2020). In his reports, Sadan characterizes and defines RZ altogether, explaining the separations while stressing the shared and uniting values. Sadan is a graduate of *Mercaz HaRav* and a prominent disciple of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook (RZYH, 1891-1982) and of the ultra-conservative Rabbi Tau. Sadan founded the first pre-army *Mechina* (in plural *mechinot* – a one-year pre-army preparatory program) in 1988 in Eli, a Jewish settlement in the heart of the WB, located between the Palestinian cities Ramallah and Nablus – a significant sectorial educational achievement.<sup>163</sup> In his reports, Sadan present a strong sectorial consciousness (SADAN, 2016, p. 10). According to Sadan, Religious Zionists are:

*People who love to argue about almost everything, they insist not to agree on almost anything, because they are opinionated, involved, and idealistic and are not willing to give up on anything. It is never boring to be a part of religious-Zionism. In any case, they agree on three important matters (SADAN, 2016, p. 35).*

Here Sadan points to three main major axioms shared by all members of RZ (SADAN, 2016, p. 36-37):

- ***Moses is truth and his Torah is truth:*** *we all went out of Egypt as one nation, received the Torah in Sinai from the heavens and we are delighted to have a true Torah to guide our path, build our future and give a deep sense of meaning to our lives [...]*
- ***We believe that the State of Israel is the beginning of flowering of our Redemption:*** *we believe that on 14/05/1948<sup>164</sup> we were reborn as a nation [...]*

*Religious-Zionism is not Zionist in the sense of secular Zionism [...] and it is not religious in the ultraorthodox sense as well.*

- ***We know that for “Free Hatred” we were destroyed and we believe that in Free Love we shall be built,*** *thus we feel a bond and*

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<sup>163</sup> In 2016, Rabbi Sadan was awarded the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement due to his special contribution to society and to the State of Israel.

<sup>164</sup> Sadan uses the Hebrew date: ה' באייר תש"ח.

*responsibility to all parts of the nation, be them secular, ultraorthodox  
or leftists [...]*

RZ self-identity is confirmed on a daily basis by the state's national-religious curriculum, distinguishing RZ schools from other parts of society. As a sector RZ are commonly referred to as religious-Nationalist, or in Hebrew "*kipot srugot*", a term which describes the types of head-covers (*kippa* or *yarmulke*) that RZ men wear, and which are noticeably different from the black skullcap worn by ultra-Orthodox men. The term ultraorthodox, *haredim* in Hebrew, distinguishes between the religious-nationalist, which resemble somewhat modern orthodox Jews, and the anti-modernist and more rigid group of Orthodoxy (itself composed of different subgroups), traditionally considered as anti-nationalists (SAMET, 2005).

It is hard to quantify the NR sector because of its soft borders. According to a survey conducted by the Israeli Democracy Institute on 2014, the RZ sector constitutes 22% of the Israeli population (HERMAN et al., 2014). Sociologist Oz Almog estimates that 10%-13% of the Jews in Israel are RZ (between 600,000-800,000), composing a broad "demographic belt", defining the "limits and dimensions of the NR Population: a small minority whose dimensions are a mystery" (www.peopleil.org, 1 January 2011). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics,<sup>165</sup> 45% of Israelis describe themselves as secular, 25% as traditional, 16% as religious and very religious, and 14% as ultra-Orthodox.<sup>166</sup>

As Israeli journalist Yair Ettinger notes, it seems that in this recent decade RZ is bursting out of its own sectorial boundaries, establishing itself as "the new hegemonic elite" (ETTINGER, 2019, p. 11). According to Ettinger, more people now want to belong to the RZ sector, even if they are not conducting a NR way of life

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<sup>165</sup> *Society in Israel: religion and Self-Definition of Level of Religiosity* (Hebrew), CBS Report no. 10, Jerusalem, June 2018. The report is based on data from 2015-2016. The comprehensive report completely ignores the national-religious sector. The term appears only once, incidentally, when mentioning the Haredi-National group as an exception to the ultraorthodox education system (p. 181). The Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research of the Israeli Democracy Institute, on the other hand, dedicated a comprehensive study to the national religious sector in Israel (HERMAN et al., 2014).

<sup>166</sup> One should bear in mind that there is some difficulty in defining the exact figures of the RZ sector according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), as the national census does not include an RZ category (ZALZBERG, 2013, p. 1).



([ETTINGER, 2019, p. 11](#)). Relating to their growing magnitude within Israeli population, analyst Ofer Zalberg concludes that in recent years this sector gained political power far beyond its sectorial boundaries ([ZALZBERG, 2013, p. 1](#)). Indeed, in the 2013 elections, twenty RZ representatives entered the Knesset, out of 120 MKs in total (one sixth of the seats - before the elections there were only 13). Two national-religious parties, Tkuma and the Jewish Home, united under the label “Jewish Home”, and grew from seven to twelve seats. Moreover, almost all Zionist parties represented in the Knesset include RZ MKs. In Israel’s 33rd government’s cabinet (2013-2015) there were four (out of 22) RZ ministers and four RZ deputy ministers (out of eight). ([ZALZBERG, 2013, p. 1](#)).

RZ is a diverse sector in many aspects, including in their school systems, youth movements, community structures, professional choices, as well as opinions on cultural and religious norms and values such as feminism ([ETTINGER, 2019](#)). The intensity and manners of religious observance diverge, with some asking and following rabbis’ opinions on almost every aspect of personal and public life, while others limit the role of the rabbis to a bare minimum. Those on the very liberal edges of the sector may feel they have more in common with a secular Israeli than with the traditionalist RZs, while those who are very conservative religiously and otherwise, may sense a shared identity with the ultra-Orthodox community. This diversification seems broader today.

The sector is also diverse politically. The main RZ political party is currently the Jewish Home (*HaBayit HaYehudi*), historically called *MAFDAL*, a Hebrew acronym for simply “National-Religious Party” (NRP). Despite having a sectarian party, individuals who are part and parcel of the RZ sector may vote for other parties from both the political right and left, and many of the Zionist parties might include some MKs that are RZ themselves. Nevertheless, the sector’s party enjoys a significant share of the voters within RZ, and it commonly speaks on behalf of the sector as a whole. Plurality also exists among RZ’s religious leadership. Rabbis on the liberal end of the spectrum have their own schools, institutions, and rabbinical associations, as do the mainstream and the more conservative or traditionalist RZ rabbis.

From the moment of its inception as an ideological religious-political trend, it divided into many methods and shades disagreeing on many issues, from the

adequate attitude towards secular Zionism and the secular Israeli-Jewish society up to the status of Rabbis in general and the level of their involvement in political affairs. The up-to-date literature points out to at least seven sub-currents within RZ, among which three main groups stand out: first, the ultra-conservative national-*haredi* group (usually referred to as *HARDAL*— an acronym of ultraorthodox-national-religious – *haredi dati le'umi*, חרדי דתי לאומי – חרד"ל). The *HARDAL* is affiliated with RZHY Kook and his more conservative disciples, manifestly Rabbi Zvi Yisrael Tau (born in Vienna, 1937) and Rabbi Shlomo Aviner (born in Lyon, in German occupied France, in 1943). Tau is the president of Har HaMor Yeshiva, an offshoot of Mercaz HaRav, ruling over a network of satellite institutions. Aviner is head of *Ateret Cohanim* (Crown of the Priests) Yeshiva in Jerusalem (and the spiritual leader of its operative settlement arm) and a community rabbi in the Israeli WB settlement Bet El. Both rabbis are considered to be prominent spiritual leaders within RZ. The *HARDAL* group is close to the ultraorthodox in its strict religiosity, while actively participating in the Zionist national project, holding a statist approach (*mamlakhti*) and supporting the settlement project.

The second group is the RZ mainstream, referred to as the national-religious core-group. This group contains the majority of RZ in Israel and it is located in between the conservative *HARDAL* and the liberals (HERMAN et al., 2014, p. 96-97,133-134). This group is affiliated with the leadership of Rabbi Avraham Shapira (1914-2007), who was at the same time Israel's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi (1983 to 1993) and the successor of RZHY Kook as head of Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem since 1982. The RZ mainstream or core group is institutionally affiliated with the organizations of Mercaz HaRav, the RZ education system (MAMAD, see below), the Bnei Akiva youth movement and the sectorial political mainstream political leadership (the NRP and the Jewish Home party, see below).

The third group is the liberal-religious, located on the other end of the RZ spectrum, represented for example by Rabbi Yehuda Amital (1924-2010) and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein (1933-2015) from Yeshivat Har Etzion (located in Gush Etzion, hence known as "The Gush" or "Yeshivat HaGush" (BEN SASSON, 2020)).<sup>167</sup> While all three groups meet in Jerusalem, which is the center of RZ activity, both the liberal and

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<sup>167</sup> For terminology and statistics, see Herman's report (HERMAN et al., 2014, p. 43).

the RZ mainstream spread all across the RZ sector: in the large and central settlements such as Gush Etzion, Efrat (south of Jerusalem, between Bethlehem and Hebron) and Ofra (north-east of Ramallah). They are found also among the bourgeoisie of urban centers (partly affiliated with the Israeli political center-left), and in the Israeli periphery as part of RZ social initiatives and sense of mission. On some issues, such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict, the borders between the groups are soft and flexible. On more religiously doctrinal issues such as religious feminism, the line of division is clearer. For example central rabbi Haim Druckman (born 1932) is a political hawk but inclines towards the liberalism on matters of conversion. Liberal rabbis such as Amital and Lichtenstein similarly tend towards the center-left on political issues (despite being located in the WB settlements), but at time, they tend towards the conservative end on religious and political matters.

RZ's political leadership reflects this sectorial diversity. Ben Sasson notes that throughout the years RZ representatives held senior positions in the Knesset in different political factions from both the left and the right wing of the Israeli political spectrum (BEN\_SASSON, 2020, p. 5). For example, during the last decade a significant group of RZ ultra-nationalist and conservative hardliners such as former MKs Moshe Feiglin (b. 1962) and Yehudah Glick (b. 1965) established a RZ stronghold within Israel's ruling party Likud. On the other hand, the centrist Yesh Atid party founded by Yair Lapid, aspiring to represent the Israeli secular bourgeois middle class, tried to attract liberal NR voters by appointing as Minister of Education the RZ liberal Rabbi Shai Piron (b. 1965), despite the party's clear secular (yet not secularist) line. Thus, beyond the sectorial National Religious Party religious Zionist individuals are present all-over the political spectrum as elected officials (INBARI, 2012, p. 81-106).

RZ's rabbinical, spiritual, and religious leadership also reflects the sector's variety. At the liberal end we find the modernist rabbis of Beit Hillel Forum (<https://eng.beithillel.org.il>) and Tzohar (<https://tzohar-eng.org/>),<sup>168</sup> aspiring to build

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<sup>168</sup> The chairman of Tzohar's rabbinical council, Rabbi David Stav (b. 1960), comes from the heart of RZ's mainstream. He is a graduate of Mercaz, Yeshivat Bnei Akiva Nativ Meir and a disciple of Rabbi Avraham Shapira (1914-2007). Other liberal rabbis in the council are Chaim Navon, Yaakov Madan, Benny Lau, Re'em Ha'Cohen, Yuval Cherlow, Yitzchak Sheilat, Shlomo Riskin, Daniel Shilo, Avi Gisser and others, many of which (but not all) reside in settlement and are affiliated with GE.

a bridge between Jewish orthodoxy, democracy and the Israeli secular (or traditional) mainstream. Representing the RZ core is the rabbinical leadership of Mercaz HaRav yeshiva (<https://mercazharav.org.il/>) with its military *Hesder* Yeshivas (meaning “arrangement”, a special military track for RZ students) and the pre-army groups mostly affiliated with the conservative Har HaMor (<https://harhamor.co.il/>) but also with the more modernist and liberal Har Etzion Yeshiva headed by Rabbi Yaaqov Medan. The latter is located in the “Gush Etzion” settlement block in the south of the WB between the Palestinian cities of Bethlehem and Hebron (and therefore known simply as the Gush Yeshiva). On the conservative and more diehard nationalist and religiously rigid end of the spectrum are the ultra-nationalist rabbis of *Tkuma* party and Har HaMor. Despite this plurality, two groups take the lead in terms of numbers and political and public organization: the conservative HARDAL (Haredi-national) and the mainstream RZ core group (Mercaz, the Gush etc.), leaving the liberals in the sectorial margins.<sup>169</sup> The core group and HARDAL stand out in terms of not only media and institutions within RZ; they also mark the two distinguished approaches regarding the relations between religion and the political realization of the Zionist project. Within this framework, the NR core group, more statist, is setting the tone (BEN SASSON, 2020, p. 5-6).

“The new hegemonic elite”, this is how Israeli publicist Ari Shavit described RZ altogether in 2016 (Haaretz 11/08/2016). In 2014 Bezael Smotrich (b. 1980), a prominent RZ political leader of the new generation, bluntly expressed this elitist notion in an article published in the sectorial daily *Besheva* in an article titled “the nation of Israel deserves that we receive more”. Responding to a comment made earlier by the Israeli Minister of Education the RZ Rabbi Shai Piron, who called the RZ sector to stop patronizing the rest of the society, Smotrich said that the general society should consider itself privileged to give more resources to RZ (specifically Piron related to favoring RZ education budget over other sectors, thus creating inequality). Smotrich wrote that RZ deserves more than others because they lead the Israeli nation. This is

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<sup>169</sup> The divisions of self-definitions within the national-religious sector according to ideologies between the HARDAL and the liberal camps is based on Herman (HERMAN et al., 2014, p. 96-97, 133-134).

the role of the new elite, calling it “positive patronization” (Besheva 03/07/2014, p. 36):

*The religious-Zionist point of view on the world is what the Israeli nation needs today more than anything, in order to cope with the different challenges ahead – cultural, security, economic and social. It is almost the only thing that can save it from itself. It is not arrogance, it is positive patronization, so constructive to the construction of the Israeli nation.*

Seeds of RN in the early Zionist movement

### **“There is no god, but he promised us the land”**

Borrowing from Freud, we can say that Zionism started in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a secular Jewish national movement with a sort of “patricide”, breaking away and disconnecting from tradition. Zionism advocates the immigration of the Jews from the diaspora to the Land of Israel where they will establish a Jewish sovereign state. Zionism’s national vision is based inherently on the traditional Jewish story as it appears in the bible and Jewish literature and liturgy throughout the generations – the Jewish historical, literature, traditional and religious *topos* of “the return to Zion” (TZIDKIYAHU, 2016). Thus, an inherent tension exists between the secular nationalism of Zionism and its leaning on the Jewish religious story. Beyond its geopolitical association, in Jewish text and long memory “Zion” is more than a place, it is a religious concept. In the words of the famous scholar of nationalism and former Zionist activist Hans Kohn,

*[...] the Zion they longed to return was, until recently, the place where the Temple of the Lord stood, where the faithful could sacrifice to God as the Bible prescribed and could live their lives in fulfillment of all His ancient commands. (KOHN, 1970, p. 175-176).*

Yet Zionism did not build the Temple; it built the Kibbutz and the Hebrew University. Going back to Haim Arlozoroff, mainstream Zionism tried to secularize, modernize, and nationalize the theological term of Zion.

The prominent leaders of the Zionist movement were from secular homes or had abandoned the traditional way of life themselves. In contemporary Israel, the distinction between religious and secular (non-religious or “less” religious) is one of the manifest dichotomies defining and dividing the Jewish society (at least among Jews of Ashkenazi origin. This dichotomy, to a lesser extent maybe, also applies to Jews in diaspora). However, this dichotomy which reflects Western more than Middle Eastern thought, is an ideological structure that defines reality more than describes or explains it (just like other dichotomies: Jews-Arabs or Ashkenazi-Sephardic). The term “secular” in the Zionist context does not aim towards an Israeli civil vision that includes Jews, Arabs, and others (BEN-PORAT, 2013). Borrowing from Smith, it is an issue of ethno-nationalism. As Raz-Krakotzkin puts it, “The issue [...] is not secularism but rather Jewish nationalism [...] two visions of a Jewish nation, certainly not a civic vision confronted with a national-religious one” (RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, 2005)

Indeed, in accordance with Walzer’s “paradox of liberation” (WALZER, 2016), although Zionism defied the Jewish tradition from which it was born, its basic national narrative was based entirely on the interpretation of a religious myth – the Jewish biblical story of returning to Zion. Thus, Zionism can be seen not as a replacement for the Jewish religion but as another way of interpreting Judaism. Raz-Krakotzkin summarize this “paradox” of secular Zionism as follows: “There is no god, but he promised us the land” (RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, 2005).

According to Alain Dieckhoff, Zionism is yet another form of Judaism, one that paves the way to religious-nationalism (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 162):

*Basically, Zionism was not at all a break with Judaism but full of new potential: by reviving the links between the Jewish people and Eretz Israel, it gave a burning topicality to messianic redemption*

The state inevitably becomes a religious-messianic vessel of redemption. Indeed, the symbols of the State of Israel are not secular. The flag is based on the Jewish prayer shawl (*tallit*) and the state's emblem is a *menorah* surrounded by an olive branch on each side. The menorah was an instrument in the ancient Jewish temple; its image with olive branches is based on the biblical vision of the prophet

Zechariah (Zechariah, 4 verses 1-3). We have already mentioned Gershom Scholem comments in 1926 on the messianic tension waiting to explode out of the newly revived Hebrew language, which was part of the secularized Zionist project (SCHOLEM, 1989). Palestinians and Zionist (like other nations) are created and shaped by their own discourse no less than they control it, this discourse flows from the deep currents of a people's social existence, necessarily from its language and the political terminology at its disposal. The religious tension is inherently rooted in secular Zionism, making it prone to the emergence of religious-nationalism.

### **Religious roots bear a secular fruit - The forerunners of Zionism**

In some senses, religious-Zionism preceded the secular and socialist elites which became the mainstream of the Zionist movement – identified today with the second Zionist immigration wave (the Second Aliya, 1904-1914). RZ is rooted in the Lovers of Zion (*Hibbat Zion*) organizations founded in Eastern Europe in 1881 (SCHWARTZ, 2003, p. 10).<sup>170</sup> The forerunners of Jewish nationalism and of secular Zionism were almost entirely religious figures motivated by faith (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 13, 128-174). Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795-1874), Rabbi Samuel Mohilever (1824-1898) and Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Reines (1839-1915), founder of the Mizrachi RZ movement in 1902 were such pioneers of RZ, which, alongside others, preceded in their writings and preaching early secular Zionist thinkers (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 151-153).<sup>171</sup>

The early Zionist manifests such as Leon Pinsker's 1882 "Auto-Emancipation" and Herzl's 1896 "Der Judenstaat" (the Jewish State), can both be considered as national and secular essays. Indeed, in Pinsker's opening remarks he notes that "the Jewish question is not a 'Halacha in the Messianic period' (הלכותא למשיחא)<sup>172</sup>, but rather a question of life, renewed every day and which requires an outright solution."<sup>173</sup> This

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<sup>170</sup> Officially constituted under the leadership of Leon Pinsker in 1884.

<sup>171</sup> The German-Jewish thinker Moshe Hess (1812-1875) differed from most of the forerunners of Zionism in his outspoken secularism and socialist approach.

<sup>172</sup> This Talmudic term in Aramaic means "a religious law that will be applicable only when the Messiah will come (not applicable at present)" - from the Aramaic-Hebrew-English Dictionary of the Babylonian Talmud by Ezra Zion Melamed (Fondation Samuel et Odette Lévy, 2005), p. 152.

<sup>173</sup> I translated from the Hebrew source available online <https://benyehuda.org/read/1759/read>.

comment stands in stark contradiction to the Jewish orthodox approach. Yet many of the “forerunners of Zionism” were religiously motivated thinkers. The forerunners are a group of men who had been expressing proto-Zionist ideas since the 1850s, advocating “the return to Zion through personal and voluntary action by the Jews” (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 13-14). Dieckhoff characterizes the social cohesion of this group by its deeply religious worldview and language.<sup>174</sup>

In contradiction to the well-known Jewish orthodox rejection of Zionism, a religious-Zionist current of thought appeared, based on both nationalist and religious, sometimes messianic, ideas. Thus ultraorthodox (*haredi*) and national-religious (*Dati Le’umi*) stood on both sides of the Jewish orthodox spectrum in regarding their attitude towards Zionism. While the former opposed it, the latter accepted Zionism. In fact, from its first appearance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Zionist movement, which was a secular movement on the surface, was joined and supported by religious Jews. Like Hamas and the MB in the history of Palestinian nationalism, RZ is writing its history into the formative history of the Zionist movement. Many early Zionists from the first massive wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine (the first Aliya 1881/2-1903) were indeed traditional-religious orthodox Jews. The aforementioned *Hovevei Zion* (lovers of Zion) movement, which was active during this first immigration, was led, among others, by Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, Rabbi Mordechai Elishberg, and Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin. All three are considered “harbingers of Zionism”, together with Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Reines. According to their writings, they transformed Jewish traditional messianic zeal into action, motivated by a doctrine of redemption and activism that will distinguish religious-Zionist from ultraorthodox. However, a careful reading of these early Zionist rabbis reveals that they were in fact opposed active messianism. This fact exposes an internal tension that occurred within Jewish

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<sup>174</sup> Dieckhoff distinguishes between the forerunners of Zionism and the group of utopian dreamers, mostly identified with English protestant, who envisaged the restoration of Judea starting in the eighteenth century, as part of the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies. Nevertheless, I think that Zionism’s religious background is a point of proximity between both these Jewish rabbis – the forerunners of Zionism - and the protestant visionaries, which preceded them. It could be that the Britain Balfour Declaration took place partly due to such deeply rooted religious convictions. In Mishy Harman’s 2016 biography of Bishop Samuel Gobat (1799-1879), submitted as a PhD dissertation to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, one can find more information on such visionaries and their role in shaping the British approach towards Zionism (HARMAN, 2016).



orthodoxy, trying to understand this new secular Zionist movement in religious terms (RAVITZKY, 1996, p. 32-33).

Rabbi Reines, whose *Mizrachi* movement coined the popular national-religious founding slogan "*The land of Israel to the People of Israel according to the Torah of Israel* (ארץ ישראל לעם ישראל על פי תורת ישראל)", was even harsher in his critique of this ideal. Ravitzky mentions that "as early as the 1880s, Rabbi Reines spoke out against the confusion of practical, present-day settlement in the land of Israel with the hope for messianic redemption [...]" (RAVITZKY, 1996, p. 33).

The early religious Zionists were religious in the sense that they were observant Jews who were also Zionists. Even if there was a connection between the two, there was also some kind of separation. This separation brought hesitation and caused tensions which were consolidated into a coherent messianic ideology in British Mandatory Palestine in the thought and teachings of Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook (*HaRa'aya* or simply RAYH, 1865-1935). As the founder of the first religious-Zionist learning institution (*Yeshiva*), *Mercaz HaRav Kook* (מרכז הרב the center of the Rabbi Kook), RAYH and his son and successor Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (RTZY, 1891-1982), taught and developed the RZ Kookist approach, practically shaping 'religious-Zionism' as we know it today.

### **Comparison with Hamas**

Like Palestinian religious Nationalism, RZ existed both ideologically and institutionally from an early stage of the national movement. For the PNM in its early stages, the sanctity of al-Aqsa, Jerusalem and Palestine in Islam were the base and the rationale for its existence. Similarly, the organizing idea of Jewish nationalism was the theological concept of Zion. This is a significant similarity; both Zionism and the PNM base themselves on a religious idea. This similarity at the outset and the fact that the forerunners of the national idea and movement were almost completely religiously motivated, help explain the rise of RN in both national movements in later stages. It was always there, a latent force waiting to burst. The central role of religion and religious ideas in the embryonic stage of the national movement paved the way, or at least help to explain the rise of RN from the 1990s onwards. Once again we are

reminded of Scholem's idea that "this Land is a volcano" waiting to burst, that "it harbors the language! [...]" and that "God will not remain mute in a language in which he has been invoked and summoned into our existence in countless ways" (SCHOLEM, 1989, p. 59-60).

A significant difference between the two national movements, on the other hand, is the centrality and role of RN in the early and formative stages of the national movement's formation. As mentioned above, in the PNM religious-nationalism was the mainstream until 1948. Palestinian nationalism consolidated around religious ideas such as the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Palestinian calling to protect al-Aqsa Mosque in the name of Islam. During the 1930s-1940s, religious figures (such as the Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al- Husayni) led the PNM, their blunt national-religious discourse was widely accepted. It was only after 1948 that the new elite of the PNM became more secular and revolutionary. The Zionist mainstream was mostly secular, socialist, and even atheist, at least from the 1890s onward. This secularist and socialist elite was Zionism's hegemonic layer at least until the political turnover of 1977 and the rise of the Israeli political right. RZ was present in the Zionist movement from the outset, but in contrast to the PNM, RZ was a marginal group. On the other hand, it was never a total stranger to the mainstream of the national movement in the 1980s-1990s in the way Hamas was external to the PLO and an enemy of Fatah. RZ was continuously considered a part of the national movement, albeit marginal, all throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both ideologically and institutionally.

An interesting element, which merits further comparison, is the idea of exchange of elites. From a sociological perspective, by the end of the previous century, Israeli and Palestinian religious-nationalists were carrying a sense of bitterness towards the secular national elites. The inherent inferiority complex and embitterment gave birth to their sense of mission to replace these old elites, that of Mapai and the Labor parties in Israel, of the PLO and the Fatah in Palestine. At the same time, the religious-nationalists adopted many of the social, cultural and political features and ethos of the secular elites they sought to replace, dressing them in

religious outfits (BEN SASSON, 2007; GOODMAN, 2018; MANSOUR, 1999; AL-MAQADMEH, 1994).<sup>175</sup>

### Literature and Methodology

From the moment RZ appeared in history, it was subject to external and (mainly) internal scrutiny. Here I focus on the inner RZ discourse regarding political power and the shift that led RZ to strive for political and social hegemony in Israel. It is worth mentioning that much if not most of the existing academic and popular writing on RZ is produced by writers who are themselves national-religious Zionists (albeit from a wide spectrum with RZ).<sup>176</sup> This fact might, at times (and not categorically), blur the distinction between primary and secondary sources.

Bar Ilan University, Israel's national-religious university established in 1955, runs since 1972 an Institute for the Research of Religious Zionism.<sup>177</sup> The institute publishes academic studies on RZ and organizes conferences and seminars on issues concerning RZ. The institute also runs an archive dedicated to the study of RZ and publishes a journal called "Religious-Zionism", edited by the institute's director Dov Schwartz. Schwartz is a prominent academic, a professor of Jewish thought (*Machshevet Yisrael*) who introduced a new approach to the study of RZ, arguing that to understand in depth the RZ movement it is necessary to know its theological roots and its early thinkers (SCHWARTZ, 2009). Such an approach gives advantage to those scholars who grew up amid RZ and absorbed its learning and ideology. At the same time, unless left outside the study room, such an intimate emotional connection with the subject of research involves a strong bias that might prevent a free and critical approach so necessary for proper academic research. Scholars of RZ that are not RZ themselves, such as Gideon Aran (2013) and Motti Inbari (2009), enter in less details

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<sup>175</sup> Ben Sasson and Goodman are both, this way or another, affiliated with religious-Zionism. Ben Sasson, quoted here as an academic secondary source, is a liberal scholar. Goodman is a conservative thinker and his book can be considered both as a primary and secondary source alternately. Mansour and Maqadmeh on the other hand are Hamas ideologists, fully identify with the movement and are treated only as primary sources.

<sup>176</sup> There are of course exception. Among Israeli academics, it is worth mentioning Motti Inbari and Gideon Aran. On the practical level, Ofer Zalberg's policy analysis and work with RZ, and in the international academic sphere Alain Dieckhoff both constitute such exceptions.

<sup>177</sup> The institute is named after Zerah Warheftig 1906-2002, a prominent RZ leader and politician. To the institute's website: <https://jewish-faculty.biu.ac.il/riz>.

into theology and early ideological roots, they rather stress aspects of modernism, interaction with the state and examine RZ as a form of fundamentalism.

It is sometimes hard to distinguish between the inner RZ discourse and the scholarly debate on RZ. The abundance of RZ institutions and platforms for debate, publishing, writing, and studying ideological and theological issues further blurs this already thin line distinguishing between the writing on- and the writing of RZ, up to the level that one might ask if it is possible or even necessary to draw such a line at all.

Shlomo Zalman Shragai (1899-1995), a RZ ideologist, leader and politician was a talented man who served in many different positions including mayor of West Jerusalem between 1950 and 1952. Shragai was a productive writer and published numerous books and articles on various aspects of RZ's theology, ideology, and structure, including "The Book of Religious Zionism" (1977, co-edited with Yitzhak Rafael 1914-1999. Rafael was himself one of the prominent political leaders of RZ and Israel's Minister of Religions in the 1970s). The book was issued by Harav Kook Institute, one of the prominent RZ publishing houses, established in Jerusalem in the 1930s.

In the last two decades, the study of Religious-Zionism developed both in quantity and in variety of disciplines represented. During this period, several important anthologies that broadly examine RZ were published, such as the three volumes of "A Hundred Years of Religious Zionism" issued in 2003 by BIU edited by Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz. At the same time books on specific issues regarding RZ were published. For example Yosef Salmon examined RZ approach towards nationalism and *mamlachtiyut* – "statism" (SALMON, 2006); Ravitzky (1996) and Rosenak (2013) wrote on RZ's political theology; others examined major events in the status of RZ, the development of *Gush Emunim* (GE) and the challenges of territorial compromises (ARAN, 2013; FEIGE, 2002; ELDAR et al., 2007; ROTH, 2014; INBARI, 2012). In addition, Kimmy Caplan of BIU provided a comprehensive review and preliminary observations regarding the scholarly study of RZ, its achievements and limitations (CAPLAN, 2017,

p. 219-230).<sup>178</sup> Thus, as Ben Sasson asserts in regard to the period up to the 2005 Israeli disengagement plan, this dissertation is based mainly on existing studies with anecdotal need of central initial sources (BEN\_SASSON, 2020, p. 2)

Hillel Ben Sasson's recent article – "Haughty Eyes" – examines the new agenda of RZ leadership as it developed after the 2005 disengagement plan (BEN\_SASSON, 2020). According to Ben Sasson, Israel's 2005 unilateral disengagement (the withdrawal from Gaza and northern WB/Samaria), accelerated the shift in the contemporary power discourse of RZ and the Jewish religious right-wing in Israel (BEN\_SASSON, 2007; BEN\_SASSON, 2020).<sup>179</sup> Dov Schwartz also deals with RZ's transition from passivity to activism in connection to its shift from the periphery to the center of Israeli society (Schweitzer, 2010). Schwartz points out that the appearance of the internet at the beginning of the century helped the marginal and anti-institutional branches of RZ to be more aware and influential (Schweitzer, 2010, p. 182).

The official organ of the Yesha Council (an umbrella organization of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank),<sup>180</sup> the monthly magazine *Nekuda*, was held in high regard by scholars interested in RZ during the thirty years it was issued (1980-2010, until its integration in the sectorial daily newspaper *Makor Rishon*).<sup>181</sup>

Ben Sasson methodologically demonstrates how the Shabbath Pamphlet, brochures distributed every weekend at the synagogues, are an extraordinary source of information reflecting the discourse within Israel's religious population (BEN\_SASSON, 2020, p. 3). Ben Sasson argues that the Shabbath brochures are "an inner platform almost unexposed to the general Israeli media, and that despite acceptable approach regarding the decline of printed press, it was recently identified by

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<sup>178</sup> In his review Caplan examine separately the research and literature of the two main Jewish religious societies in Israel: Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox) and Religious Zionists.

<sup>179</sup> Ben Sasson is himself is a national religious scholar and political activist. He represent the liberal end of the RZ spectrum, born to a family of the old RZ political and intellectual elite.

<sup>180</sup> The territories occupied by Israel in 1967 received Hebrew the names Judea (*Yehuda*) and Samaria (*Shomron*) in the West Bank. Together with Gaza (*Aza*) it forms the Hebrew acronym *Yesha*.

<sup>181</sup> *Nekuda* was quoted by scholars (LUSTICK, 1988) and mentioned in a UN internal correspondence in 1987 (<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/D2F54FAB973A02E185256BA40068D7AA>). *Nekuda* had an English version – Counterpoint – which published 30 issues between 1981-1989. See in Yisrael Medad's blog Myrightword, The Last Issue of "Nekuda", 25/04/2010: <http://myrightword.blogspot.com/2010/04/last-issue-of-nekuda.html>.

researchers (for example CAPLAN, 2006) as a central expression of popular religion in Israel” (BEN SASSON, 2020, p. 3).

These leaflets, pamphlets, and booklets, unlike the old journals, do not require a subscription. About half a million copies are distributed free of charge in synagogues all around the country and are available online. Among the most widespread among RZ, representing both ends of the RZ spectrum are *Besheva* (<http://besheva.co.il/>) affiliated with Rabbi Zalman Melamed (born 1937), a prominent RZ rabbi representing the more conservative trends often described as Haredi-Leumi, a term combining ultra-orthodoxy with RZ (FISCHER, 2007, p. 3 n. 1). Another important Shabbat pamphlet representing the more modernist and up-to-date currents within RZ is *Olam Katan* ([www.olan-katan.co.il](http://www.olan-katan.co.il)), affiliated with the current political leader of RZ Naftali Bennett in the Jewish Home party in 2008 and the New Right and Yamina parties since 2018, addressing a younger audience. Both these pamphlets became an active platform for debate, they include exclusive interviews with different elements within RZ representing the entire spectrum of this society, addressing their own inner public (BEN SASSON, 2020, p. 4).

Another primary source is essays and manifests issued by RZ leaders, dealing with the overall nature of RZ or specific issues on its agenda. On the conservative end of the spectrum, Rabbi Eli Sadan and Rabbi Zvi Yisrael Tau published such documents. Sadan, running his educational project at Eli settlement (located in the West Bank north of Ramallah), published two such documents in recent years, in 2016 and on Israel’s 2020 Independence Day. In both, Sadan tried to define RZ in general terms. Rabbi Tau, Sadan’s teacher and spiritual guide, went further in his own manifest published on Israel’s 2019 Independence Day. In this manifest, Tau declares that the Zionist project has entered a new phase in the overall process of redemption, moving from the profane towards the sacred, providing a theological infrastructure to RZ sociological and political shift. Tau argues that the role of secular Zionism, which was right for its time, has ended. The time has come for RZ to take the lead. The idea of phases in the process of redemption and the role of secular and religious Zionism within it has been debated since the beginning of RZ, and has remained part of RZ discourse all along, kept alive by prominent figures in RZ society. Rabbi Haim

Druckman published in 2012 a book asserting that Zionism is the beginning of the full and final redemption of the world. Druckman explained that redemption appears "step by step" and that the state of Israel was the beginning of the emergence of our redemption (DRUCKMAN, 2012).

The shift in thought, operation, and leadership of RZ that led to the flowering of the settlement project, is marked by the shift from passivity to activism. This happened not directly after the victory of the 1967 war, but rather after the catastrophe of the 1973 war. Indeed, the first settlements beyond the green line were founded in 1968, but *Gush Emunim* as a movement came to life only in 1974, following the 1973 war (SCHWARTZ, 2003).

### Institutions

*To understand religious nationalism, we must firstly situate it [...] as an institutional project* (FRIEDLAND, 2002b, p. 382).

Being a NR Jew in Israel means to a great extent taking part in RZ institutions (Yehuda GOODMAN et al., 2004). The impressive institutional infrastructure of RZ is a crucial element in its success in general, and in the success of the Kookist school of thought in particular, mainly Gush Emunim (see below) and the settlements project. Building institutions was how RZ systematically implemented its ideology. Rabbi Reines founded the Mizrahi Movement, the first RZ organization in 1902 in Vilnius. RZ became a faction within the secular World Zionist Organization established by Theodor Herzl in 1897. Many more RZ institutions were established throughout the 1920s: Bnei Akiva youth movement,<sup>182</sup> the Religious Kibbutz settlement Movement, *Hapoel HaMizrachi* (The Oriental Worker), a political party which operated as a religious labor party. These institutions reflect the early stages of RZ, stressing their religiosity on the one hand, and their ideological affiliation to the secular and socialist Zionist mainstream in the spirit of the labor movements. The founding existential

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<sup>182</sup> Hebrew for "Children of Akiva", after Rabbi Akiva, a prominent Jewish sage from the first and second centuries AD known for his excellency in religious learning. Bnei Akiva was (and still is) typically characterized by a rather modern and religiously moderate approach. As the more religiously conservative (HARDAL) grew stronger they created in 1979 an alternative youth movement, Ariel, with full separation between boys and girls.

experience of RZ was a feeling of being nationally inferior to the secular Zionist mainstream and religiously inferior to the ultraorthodox. RZ communities founded Religious learning institutions and synagogues, anchoring RZ in the culture of rabbinic modern-orthodox Judaism. In the decades that followed up to contemporary Israel, Religious Zionism became a well-established sector with a comprehensive array of institutions that completely envelope the individual from birth to death, including family and community life.

### **Politics**

Politically sectorial parties have represented RZ in all Israeli parliaments since 1948. Moreover, the mainstream RZ parties have sat in the coalition of all Israeli governments, left and right, with the stark exception of the governments which actively promoted the peace process with the Palestinians (Rabin's 25<sup>th</sup> government 1992-1995, Peres's 26<sup>th</sup> government in 1996 and Olmert's 31<sup>st</sup> government 2006-2009). This fact delineates the political borders of RZ throughout the years and strengthens the main argument of this dissertation – that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which imminently includes a component of territorial and conceptual compromise, deeply contradicts the logic of RZ and endangers its *raison d'être*. This logic also applies to Hamas. The peace process pushed both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious nationalists to fight for control.

Religious-Zionist ideology always had a political expression, mainly through the NRP, which was formed in 1956 as a reunion between the Mizrachi party and its socialist offshoot – Hapoel HaMizrachi. Nevertheless, unlike Hamas, which is a centralized ideological and institutionalized movement with one sole political party, Religious-Zionists, despite having one political flagship party – the NRP, were always diffused among several political ideologies and parties.

Already in the early 1980 the NRP started to split on of ethnic (Sephardi-Ashkenazi) and religious grounds. Yet the main motivation for splits within RZ politics was always the national issue and territorial compromises with the Arabs. Throughout the 1990s and the 21st century, with the advancement of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, religious-Zionism split into several political branches, parties and factions.



The NRP tried to reinvent itself anew in 2008 as the Jewish Home Party, attempting to reunite all RZ factions under one banner and attract new publics. In 2018 the Jewish Home split and the New Right (*HaYamin HeHadash* הימין החדש) Party was formed. In all its embodiments, the RZ party continued the sectorial tradition of serving in the coalition of all Israeli governments (except the above mentioned, reflecting its ideological borders and shift to the right).

In the Israeli legislative elections, held on 23 March 2021 to elect the 24th Knesset, ran a new independent electoral list and a parliamentary group titled “Religious-Zionism”. While the party’s name indicates pretension to represent the entire RZ sector, on the ground it is a consequence of a political split within it. The “Religious-Zionism” party is actually an alliance between three parties: National Union–Tkuma, (Hebrew for revival),<sup>183</sup> Otzma Yehudit (Hebrew for Jewish Power) and Noam (Hebrew for pleasantness)<sup>184</sup>, the last two affiliated with the radical right and with hawkish and RZ conservative positions.

The NRP was the political sectorial embodiment of RZ. Thus, the internal changes this party underwent somewhat reflect the changes of RZ as a sector. Looking at the party’s leadership is particularly telling of these changes. From the mid 1950s, the NRP was led by prominent leaders such as Haim-Moshe Shapira (1902-1970) and Yosef Burg (1909-1999), respectively of Russian and German European descent, born in the diaspora and who immigrated to the Holy Land during the British Mandate. They were generally dovish, inclined towards socialism and the political left and were natural political allies of the Israeli Labor Party. Following the wars of 1967 and 1973, the Kookist revolution gave birth to a new generation of RZ leaders, who were more hawkish and inclined to the political right. The prominent political leader of this new generation in the NRP was Zvulun Hammer (1936-1998), who was also a founding

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<sup>183</sup> Founded in 1998-9 by Hanan Porat and Zvi Hendel, who left the NRP because of the Wye Memorandum, signed by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat in October 1998. It is currently headed by Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the Religious Zionist Party. Tkuma is ideologically devoted to the integrity of the Land of Israel and the settlements and is religiously conservative.

<sup>184</sup> Otzma Yehudit is a radical right-wing party founded in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the disciples of Rabbi Meir Kahane. Noam is also a far-right Jewish-Orthodox and religious-Zionist party founded in 2019 by the religiously conservative faction of Religious Zionism. Its spiritual leader is Rabbi Zvi Thau, head of Har Hamor Yeshiva. The party’s main agenda is to preserve “family values” by going against LGBT rights.

member of Gush Emunim (see below). Hammer became head of the NRP only in 1996, but his clique had become a dominant group in the party since the 1970s. Following the 1977 political turnover and the rise of the Israeli Right to political prominence, the NRP's settlement agenda and strong national sentiment made them natural political allies of the Likud, Israel's national-liberal right wing ruling party. Hammer was the political embodiment of the Kookist revolution. Nevertheless, both the old and the new guards of the NRP were still confined to sectorial politics. This changed only after the Second Intifada with the Jewish Home Party and Naftali Bennett. In 2008, the NRP was transformed to the Jewish Home Party and in 2012 Bennet took the lead, with an overt agenda of bursting RZ sectorial boundaries and setting the sights on RZ leadership of the entire nation. Thus, the shift of RZ from a sectorial party to a ruling elite was completed.

Bennet's own biography is representative of that change. Unlike the former heads of the NRP who came from within the RZ sector and were either rabbis, intellectuals or political wheeler-dealers, Bennett grew up in Haifa, served as an officer in military elite units, and before entering politics made a fortune in the high-tech industry. From a sociological point of view Bennett thus echoes an all-Israeli success story that goes beyond the RZ sector. In his latest political evolution as leader of Yamina Party (Rightwards) Bennett represents a RZ mainstream that aspires to sociological and political hegemony over the entire Israeli society, echoing the American neoconservatism (MALACH, 2019).

Participating almost in all Israeli coalitions since 1948, RZ's active political participation raises interesting questions. Does the political shift of RZ from left to right in the 1970s reflect a utilitarian realpolitik approach? Or is this shift an authentic one, reflecting the move towards the political right of the Israeli public in general and of RZ in particular? It could be that the answer is a little bit of both. Whichever is the case, what is clear is the emergence of a unique aspect to RZ's political participation – theology. Unlike ultraorthodox political participation, which is completely utilitarian, RZ sanctifies Israeli politics, based on the words of RZYH Kook (BEN SASSON, 2007, p. 64; Shlomo FISCHER, 2007, p. 232), who asserted that:

*This state is our state, the state of Israel, the foundation of God's Throne in the world, whose entire aim is that "God be one and his name one" (Zech. 14:9).*

Loyal to his father's approach, RZYH Kook sanctified Zionism as a whole. According to RZYH Kook, the ruling arrangements of the State of Israel are holy (Zvi Yehuda KOOK, 2003, p. 269). This approach makes Israeli politics a holy vessel for RZ and taking part in it a religious commandment. Thus, while ultraorthodox politics in Israel is also made up of well-established politicians and wheeler-dealers working in the national and local political system to promote sectorial interest, the ultraorthodox involvement in Israeli politics was always caveated, at least on the symbolic level. For RZ on the other hand, national politics goes beyond the promotion of sectorial or even national interests. It is an inseparable and essential part of the national and religious life altogether.

A relatively new aspect of RZ political activity is the attempt to change the ruling party – Likud - from within. These attempts started already when Ariel Sharon left the Likud to form Kadima (November 2005), as part of his effort to execute the disengagement from GS and northern WB and due to inner opposition inside the Likud. At this point RZ entered the ranks of Likud, first as party members, who have a vote and say over who becomes an MK, and later as elected representatives and MKs. Some of these new Likud members continued to vote to RZ parties (i.e., they became members of a party they don't vote for). In 2005 a RZ inner faction within the Likud called Jewish Leadership (*Manhigut Yehudit*) headed by Moshe Feiglin first entered the parliament through the Likud Party.<sup>185</sup> Feiglin himself was in the extreme margins of the radical right in the 1990s. In 2013, Feiglin served as a deputy speaker of the Knesset on behalf of Israel's ruling party Likud.

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<sup>185</sup> Feiglin is an intriguing personality: a hawk and a RZ zealot, a Temple activist and at the same time a libertarian. He entered political life in the 1990s when he devoted himself to the struggle against the Oslo Accords. After Rabin's assassination in 1995 he was convicted for sedition against the state for his activity. See Feiglin's archived website: <https://web.archive.org/web/20101124142708/http://mflikud.co.il/>. In 2015 Feiglin founded a libertarian party called *Zehut* (Identity) which mixed RZ ideology and economic libertarianism. The party was dissolved by Feiglin in 2019. Inbari wrote in depth about Feiglin's ideology and political activity (INBARI, 2012a, p. 81-106)

Another personality that exemplifies the RZ shift from sectorial to national politics and hegemony is Yehuda Glick. If Feiglin was motivated to act following the Oslo Accords, Glick was a senior civil servant who left his position (in the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption) due to the 2005 disengagement from GS and northern WB. Glick could not continue working for the state after the disengagement. He resigned and dedicated his life to the Temple Mount. Thanks to his skills and charisma, Glick played a significant role in transforming the Temple organizations from marginal to mainstream (BE'ER et al., 2013). In May 2016, Glick entered the Knesset as a representative of the ruling party – the Likud. Glick was part of RZ, studied and lived for many years in the RZ community of Otniel, an ideological settlement located in the WB south of Hebron. Nevertheless, despite being deeply rooted in the RZ community, Glick entered national politics through the national liberal, yet secular, Likud.

Thus, for several years during the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, RZ political activists created an impact within the Likud party. Prominent members including senior ministers publicly and repeatedly pledged allegiance to the settlement enterprise and proposed pro-settlements resolutions even when they knew that Netanyahu, both as Prime Minister and head of the Likud, objected them for diplomatic reasons. In 2012, nearly all of the prominent Likud members who were considered more liberal and moderate, such as Dan Meridor and Benny Begin, were ousted during the party' primaries.

### **Grassroots Movements and Civil Society**

RZ's civil society infrastructure is old, well established and well known in Israeli society. Thus, it is interesting in this dissertation to discuss the civil society aspect of RZ only in regard to the shift of hegemony. Like Hamas and the MB in Palestine (CARIDI, 2012), RZ is established in civil society through a web of civil society organizations and NGOs. Israeli-Palestinian sociologist Nohad Ali explores the theoretical background, demonstrating how both Israeli-Jewish-Orthodox and Palestinian-Muslim fundamentalists use civil society to create an enclave culture, to strengthen inner solidarity and interact with the state and general society (NOHAD, 2013b). RZ civil society includes informal education, youth movements and sport clubs

and all the way to NGOs that interact with the state to advance sectorial political interests such as the settlement organizations, Yesha Council and Amana that succeeded Gush Emunim in the 1980s.

Meir Harnoy, Yesha Council's founding member as head of the WB Shomron Regional Council, recounted the story of its formation, as an unofficial umbrella organization for the regional councils of Israeli settlers in the GS and the WB (HARNOY, 1994, p. 143-149).<sup>186</sup> Yesha Council was founded in the spirit of GE and on the background of the Israeli peace with Egypt, the eviction of Sinai and the crystallization of a Palestinian autonomy in the WB and the GS. Yesha Council's founding treaty (1981) mentions that the council will act continuously to apply Israeli sovereignty of all parts of the Land of Israel and will oppose any other solution. "The council reject the foundation of any non-Israeli sovereign administration [...] sees any proposal to deliver parts of the Land of Israel to a foreign sovereign [...] an illegal act". This approach was based on the thought of the spiritual leader of GE, RZYH Kook, who wrote in a letter to Moshe Dayan first published in 1977 around the peace talks with Egypt:<sup>187</sup>

*This Land is ours [...] there are no Arab Territories here, but rather the Israeli Lands, our everlasting patrimony, and it, in its entire Biblical borders, belongs to the rule of Israel.*

In the last decade, following the disengagement from Gaza (see below), the neoconservative right in Israel somewhat merged with RZ and founded dozens of new civil society organizations to justify and strengthen its ideological, social and political path. Israeli blogger and activist Yizhar Be'er's poignantly termed this process the "ideological velvet revolution" of the religious right, echoing the nonviolent turn of

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<sup>186</sup> Yesha Council was created in 1980 as a lobby group, leading advocacy efforts for the settlement enterprise in its entirety (Yesha is the Hebrew acronym of Judea, Samaria and Gaza). The Council, which is an independent non-governmental organization, is comprised of the elected heads of the various local and regional councils of the settlements as well as of other public figures. These councils, similar to those inside Israel, operate under the authority and supervision of the Interior Ministry, which also provides them with funding. This mixture between independent activism and state-funded elected council heads has helped intensify the settlement enterprise and the power of its leaders (official website: <http://myesha.org.il/ENG>).

<sup>187</sup> Similar things were published by RZYH Kook as early as September 1967, two months after the war. See a collection of such references collected by RZYH Kook's disciples: <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/3376>.

power in Czechoslovakia (BE'ER, 2020). Thought and research institutes, policy think tanks, publishing houses and bodies began persecuting political rivals in the education system, in the culture and in the media, such as the Kohelet Policy Forum, the Institute for Zionist Strategies and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, all dealt with below. Some of these organizations work behind the scenes, others in broad day light, training professional cadres and inserting them into inflective positions in the state apparatus, in translation and dissemination of neoconservative contents. Other organizations prepare legislative bills and operative programs to solidify Jewish supremacy on both sides of the Green Line. All these organizations clearly incline towards the political right and supported the leadership of Binyamin Netanyahu in the recent decade. They all share common hostility towards the Supreme Court and the legal system.

This “velvet revolution” succeeded in bringing the religious right to cultural hegemony. The most important expression of this success is the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People (Nation-State Bill, 2018) and the discourse on Israeli annexation of the WB that evolved around Donald Trump’s Israeli-Palestinian peace plan (2019-2020). The weakening of the value-based liberal discourse in Israel (not necessarily economic), the absence of peace and the disappearance of the peace process from the public debate, and Netanyahu’s lasting rule in Israel for over a decade, all indicate the success of RZ to become hegemonic and transform Israeli society and political consciousness.

Many of these bodies are closely connected to the Israeli governing elites. The Kohelet Policy Forum (KPF) is one of the most influential organizations exemplifying the connection between Israel’s ruling elites, RZ and neoconservative ideology. Founded in 2012 by Moshe Koppel, a professor of Computer Science in Bar-Ilan University (and a devoted RZ and Talmudic scholar), KPF “strives to secure Israel's future as the nation-state of the Jewish people, to strengthen representative democracy, and to broaden individual liberty and free-market principles in Israel” (<https://en.kohelet.org.il/>). Among KPF’s founding members is Zvi Hauser, who served as Netanyahu’s government Cabinet Secretary (2009-2013). Afterwards Hauser, who identifies with the conservative right, held a number of senior public

positions before returning to national politics, this time as an elected member of parliament in 2019 for Blue and White.<sup>188</sup> KPF produced dozens of policy papers on a wide variety of issues concerning society, law, and governance, supporting the Nation-State bill, promoting conservative legislation, and limiting the judiciary.

Similarly, the Institute for Zionist Strategies (<https://www.izs.org.il/>), whose offices neighbor those of the KPF in Jerusalem, is one of the NGOs that provides an ideological and intellectual authorization to the Nation-State Bill and the hawkish line of the Israeli government in general. The IZS clearly resembles American neoconservative bodies that flourished under President George W. Bush. Apparently, some of those American bodies (such as the Hudson Institute for example) also funded the IZS directly (Haaretz 25/12/2012). Israel Harel, former head of the Yesha Council and the first editor of *Nekuda* – the RZ settler’s organ - is the founder of the IZS. In 2012 Yoaz Hendel, who comes from RZ background and grew up in the settlement of Elkana, became the director of the IZS. In 2011, Hendel worked closely with Netanyahu. Currently (July 2021), he serving as the Minister of Communications, having been re-elected to the Knesset in the 2021 elections within the New Hope faction.

Another institute which demonstrates the close ties between RZ, American neoconservative and the Israeli right wing ruling elites is the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (<https://JCPA.org/about/>), a policy think tank headed by yet another associate to Netanyahu, Dore Gold. Gold is an Israeli American scholar and a devoted RZ, former Israeli ambassador to the UN and director-general of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The JCPA works with many RZ writers such as Mordechai Kedar and Nadav Shragai (dealt with in the next chapter). Indeed, the examples are too many to mention, from all aspects of the civil society activity (*ibid.*). Another organization worth mentioning here is the “Jewish Statesmanship Center”, a college named after Ido Zoldan (<https://www.statesmanship.org.il/he/>).<sup>189</sup> The founding director of the

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<sup>188</sup> We would have expected to see Hauser with the Likud Party. However, due to his rivalry with Netanyahu Hauser linked with Telem, a rather right-wing section within Blue and White Party led by former Defense Minister and IDF’s Chief of Staff Moshe Ya’alon, registered on 2 January 2019.

<sup>189</sup> Zoldan was a settler from Kedumim, murdered in November 2007 by dissident Palestinian police officers from the nearby village Kafr Qadum (YNET 03.12.07). The obituary in memory of Zoldan on Kedumim’s website praises his national-religious fervor and his devotion to the sanctity of the land of

college is Asaf Malach, an intellectual affiliated with the ideological political religious right and with Naftali Bennett in particular (see also Part 3). In 2007, while he was still a Ph.D. candidate, Malach founded the Jewish Statesmanship Center, and he still heads its Ethics and International Relations Program. Today the center is a leading institute striving to shape “mainstream intellectual and cultural dialogue; train public leadership which has an historical consciousness and broad-minded perspectives and advance talented young professionals in the public sphere.”<sup>190</sup> Malach is a religious-nationalist deeply embedded in the messianic religious right. In 2015 Naftali Bennett, head of RZ Jewish Home party, became Israel’s Minister of Education and appointed Malach as director of the Committee for Citizenship Studies in Israel, arousing a public controversy (HAARETZ 15/11/15).<sup>191</sup>

It seems that in the last decade, the two elements composing the Israeli right - the RZ settlers and the neoconservative right - united. At first sight, these are two separate types of powers, one devoted to religion and a territorial expansion culminating in annexation of the occupied territories, the other advocating for narrowing government intervention and promoting ethnocentric nationalism. Yet when coupled together, these two forces create a synergy on several levels: pooling resources in receiving state funds and philanthropy, training professional cadres and a serving elite, uniting and coordinating the web of institutions of the RZ settlers (Amana, Yesha Council, Garin Torani etc.) and the neoconservatives (KPF, IZS, Shalem etc.) under the philanthropic support of both conservative American Jewish and evangelical Christian funds (Haaretz 25/12/2012). Their methods are similar: influencing the discourse, actively “settle in the hearts”, promoting legislation, lobbying and policy, diverting resources and attacking the progressive left, weakening the

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Israel. From the text it appears that Zoldan’s opinions were close to the “hilltop youth” gangs. While the Jewish Statesmanship Center claims it is “striving to shape mainstream intellectual and cultural dialogue”, it is named after Zoldan who was closer to the messianic radical right than to the Israeli mainstream. See <http://www.kedumim.org.il/?CategoryID=199&ArticleID=107> accessed on 24/08/18 15:00.

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.statesmanship.org.il/en/about-the-jsc/vision>, accessed on 13/12/2017 16:57.

<sup>191</sup> Citizenship studies in Israeli is a topic taught in middle school (junior-high) and high school and it has been at the heart of an ongoing controversy since the 1990s and even more so since 2012. These controversies regarding the content and methodology of civic studies in Israeli schools touch the heart of the conflict between the Jewish and the democratic elements of Israeli society that stand at the core of Israel’s identity crisis.



liberal aspect of democracy and fighting against the Judiciary. All these similarities add up to a resemblance on the level of public agenda and ideological infrastructure. This synergy can be seen in the move of the RZ elite towards an economic neoliberal direction. The RZ settlers bring to this marriage a well-established network of field organizations and operational experience, mass movement and connections to the state, while the neoconservatives bring an elitist top-down approach. It seems that this joining gives both the national-religious and the right wing a strong position in contemporary Israel.

Raef Zreik, an Israeli jurist and a scholar, argues that the weakening of the two states solution has brought about a new discourse in the RZ right. The centrality of the territorial discourse has been replaced by a new discourse of ethnocentric nationalism. Instead of land, the nation is brought to the center of the discourse, and this new focus is expressed in legislation and assaults on minorities and political rivals in a way that corresponds with the new nationalism and populism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>192</sup> The 2018 Nation-State bill is the manifest achievement of this coordinated campaign (ZREIK, 2020). As can be seen in the following quote, Zreik claims that the nation-state law replaced the geographic separation of “here and there” by “us and them” (respectively referring to the Jews and the Palestinians), regardless of their location:

*[...] the question of the Jewish democratic state and that of Greater Israel — the internal question and the external question — become two aspects of the same project: to legitimize the privilege of Jews over Palestinians between the river and the sea (Ibid.).*

### **Media and Communication**

RZ had its own sectorial communication and media platforms from an early stage, based both on the modern methods, from journalism to contemporary social media, and on traditional methods such as synagogue sermons and leaflets. Like other social, religious and fundamentalist groups, the RN use both sectorial and general

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<sup>192</sup> On the new nationalism worldwide and its ties with religion, populism and the political right see Foreign Affairs Magazine (March/April, 2019) “The New Nationalism”.

media platforms, to convey messages but also for recruitment, consolidation and group solidarity (NOHAD, 2013b, p. 120-124).

Rabbi Meir Bar Ilan, a prominent RZ leader, founded in 1936 the newspaper *HaTzofe* (The Observer), which became the most prominent RZ newspaper for the seventy years that followed. It was a daily newspaper, defined as national-Zionist-religious and affiliated with HaMizrahi and later with the NRP (ZIMMERMAN, 2010). *HaTzofe* was replaced in 2007 by *Makor Rishon* (following a merger), whose current editor is Haggai Segal, a RZ settler and journalist convicted of terrorism in 1984 for his part in the Jewish Underground (see below). Segal had also been editor of the monthly settler journal *Nekuda* (Point) mentioned above.<sup>193</sup> Other important sectorial platforms were the Yesha Rabbis journal and the Shabbath pamphlets distributed in synagogues and RZ places of community encounters.

RZ sectorial media also developed online and in the social media. The shift to hegemony, however, as expressed in the media, went beyond the sectorial platforms, with the presence of RZ journalists in the mainstream media. The manifest example of this trend is Amit Segal, the son of Haggai Segal mentioned above, who is one of the most important and influential political analysts in contemporary mainstream Israeli media (rated first out of the 50 most influential Israeli journalists by Globes 04/04/2019). Segal Junior (b. 1982) grew up in the ideological settlement of Ofra, deeply imbued in the atmosphere of Gush Emunim and RZ. While Amit Segal is a professional journalist in Israel's largest media platforms (Hadashot 12, Yediot Aharonot), his background is clearly sectorial and very ideological. Segal's father is the editor of the biggest RZ daily newspaper, carrying the sectorial aura of a court conviction for membership in the Jewish Underground. Amit Segal's older brother, Arnon, is also a sectorial RZ journalist, a prominent Temple activist, and a journalist in *Makor Rishon*.

While committed to the value of objectivity in journalism in his work, Segal's personal Twitter account (@amit\_segal), with more than half a million followers, is together with his other social media presence a platform in which Segal expresses freely his ideological, national and religious opinions, which greatly correspond with

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<sup>193</sup> Meir Harnoy recount in his book "The Settlers" the story of *Nekuda* as the organ of the settlements and Yesha Council (HARNOY, 1994, p. 143-145).

the mainstream RZ right. Another prominent RZ mainstream journalist and political analyst who shares a similar biography to Segal's is Akiva Novick. Born in 1988 and raised in Ofra, he is the son of the convicted member of the Jewish Underground, Yitzhak Novick. Just like Segal, Novick expresses his RZ ideology more freely through the social networks (@akivanovick).

In a sense, both Segal and Novick owe their rise in popular media to Uri Orbach. In 1987, Uri Orbach (1960-2015), a prominent RZ writer and politician published an article in *Nekuda* entitled “the best to the media”, calling the RZ youth to serve in the army radio (Galatz), considered a springboard for a career in journalism in Israel (ORBACH, 1987). Paraphrasing on the Israeli slogan “the best to the Air Force,” Orbach claims that if RZ wants to influence the public agenda in Israel, it is not enough for it to take over the combat units, once the stronghold of the old elites. It should also aim to occupy positions of influence with the media. Orbach criticized the RZ cultural enclave, and preached RZ to burst out of its sectorial bubble and take positions of influence in the general Israeli society. As Segal himself testified, Orbach “fathered” a new generation of young RZ journalists, trained and motivated them to succeed in the media field which was up to that point considered a secular, liberal and progressive stronghold.<sup>194</sup> Importantly, Orbach's call echoed in 1987 the “settling in the hearts” doctrine that Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun came up with after the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai: it is not enough to settle the land; we must also settle in the hearts of the nation (BIN NUN, 1984). It is thus not surprising that Orbach is considered the political mentor of Naftali Bennett.

### **The Community as a Total Institution**

RZ settlement activity started in the 1920s in parallel to the general Zionist settlements. National religious kibbutzim and moshavim started to appear in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Sde Ya'akov was founded in 1927 by *HaPoel HaMizrachi* and named after the founder of Mizrahi Rabbi Yaacov Reines, and Kfar Haroeh was founded in 1933, and named after RAYH Kook. Like the secular Zionist workers organizations, the NR *HaPoel HaMizrachi* was also influenced by romanticist

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<sup>194</sup> See Segal's eulogy in honor of Orbach [www.amitsegal.co.il](http://www.amitsegal.co.il) 16/02/2015, also published in the News 12 website <https://www.mako.co.il/> 16/02/2015.

ideas. RZ saw in agricultural settlements a central goal and a means by which to return to the national Hebrew origins of working the land prior to the ancient exile, living the ideal religious life according to the Torah, and thus strengthening relations between man and its creator. The NR workers followed the Zionist model of agricultural and cooperative settlements, before the establishment of the state of Israel. Educational institutions were founded in these NR settlements, such as RZ boarding schools and yeshivas, synagogues and grocery stores, creating a closed social system completely organized according to the norms, rules and logic of RZ.

These institutions were central to community members' socialization, creating what Erving Goffman calls a total institution. According to Goffman, a total institution is "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (GOFFMAN, 1961, p. xiii). All institutions have encompassing tendencies, but what makes some institutions "total", according to Goffman, is that they are far more encompassing than others. In this sense, the Zionist secular Kibbutz certainly fell under the definition of total institution in its days of glory (GOLDENBERG et al., 1972). Yet still today, many RZ live in separate communities, in designated settlements or in distinguished groups within cities. These separate spheres of faith-based community life in a post-ideological Israel (after the failure of the socialist Israeli-left and of the liberal Israeli-right since the 1980s) remain a strong ideological and political resource, giving RZ a significant advantage over the unorganized secular and liberal society in Israel.

### **Education**

One of RZ's greatest institutional achievements is the national-religious public education program (MAMAD - *Mamlachti-Dati*), a separate system of state-funded kindergartens and schools, with its own supervisors and pedagogy specialists, which delineates its political and religious indoctrination (in 2003 for example about 18%-19% of the Jewish pupils in Israel attended MAMAD schools, Haaretz 30/12/2003).<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> During 2019 school year, my 5-year-old's kindergarten neighbored a MAMAD kindergarten in the heart of my middle class and relatively secular neighborhood in West Jerusalem. Many religious and traditionalist Jewish families from the area frequented the Kindergarten. Every morning as I escorted my son Nathan into his own kindergarten, I could see RAYH Kook's portrait staring at me from the

In the years of the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish national institutions) and the early years of the State of Israel, Jewish national education was divided according to religious denominations, ideological currents and political parties. The Israeli State Education Law legislated in 1953 unified and regulated Israeli education. The law divided national education into two distinguished school systems: state-secular and state-religious, the latter is the RZ MAMAD.

As the religiously conservatives grew, they founded in 1971 another separate network of schools called Noam (for boys) and Zvia (for girls, named after RZYH Kook) (<https://noamzvia.co.il/>), further emphasizing Zionist-religious studies (which also falls under the MAMAD system). These two systems satisfied the distinct needs of the Jewish Zionist community in Israel. Alongside the secular and NR state-funded education, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities received an “Independent Education System”, enjoying both pedagogic independence and partial or full funding by the state (and in some cases without state funding at all). Another independent ultraorthodox education system founded in the 1980s and officially recognized in the 1990s is *El Hama'ayan* of Shas, the Sephardic Jewish orthodox education for religious and traditional non-Ashkenazi Jews. This last system is more Zionist than the Ashkenazi Haredi “Independent Education”, yet it is not part of the MAMAD national-religious education system. The MAMAD was actually an embodiment of the RZ separate education system established as early as 1905 by Rabbi Reines and Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon (1875-1962, a RZ political leader and Israel's first Minister of Religion) in the framework of the Mizrahi movement.

There is a wide range of RZ high schools, yeshivas for boys and *Ulpanot* for girls, corresponding with the different approaches, combining in various levels secular

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entrance of the neighboring institution. I met parents from this kindergarten at the gym and some parent in my son's secular kindergarten were themselves, at least by their dress code, RZ. This way or the other, due to the sociological and economic circumstances that are beyond the scope of this dissertation, most of the kindergarten teachers in both institutions were ultraorthodox women. My neighborhood in Jerusalem, the secular Beit HaKerem, is surrounded by ultraorthodox and religious-Zionist neighborhoods in which practically all residents and educational institutions are sectorial. In Beit HaKerem on the other hand, one can find RZ kindergartens, a RZ elementary school and at least one ultraorthodox yeshiva. This exemplifies that secular Jews are still considered as “general public” and thus hegemonic, and that RZ is an integral part of Israeli society and in some cases completely interwoven into the general secular (and other cases ultraorthodox) public.

and religious studies and providing socialization activities. High school graduates can choose from a series of *Mechinot* (pre-Army preparatory program), a variety of designated tracks adapted for national-religious military service (*Yeshivat Hesder*, literally “arrangement”, a special religious-Zionist framework combining advanced Talmudic studies with military service), and special non-military national service tracks for RZ women. Young adults can study in a variety of RZ high yeshivas, also in accordance to the different RZ schools. High yeshivas usually have an entire institutional ecosystem build around them, covering the entire education system from infancy to adulthood and higher learning. The individual is thus entirely immersed in the communal ideology.

Traditionally, at least since the 1977 dramatic political turnover in Israel, the NRP and later on the Jewish Home party have aspired to manage Israel’s Education Ministry. Through its educational vocation over several decades, RZ prepared its future strength, internally through the upbringing of a new generation inside the sectorial boundaries and externally by influencing the general national education system. Through education, similarly to the concept of *da’wa* for the MB, the national religious approach brings to contemporary politics, with its fast and dynamic rhythm, a long-term vision. Contemporary politics relate to “here and now”, religious-nationalism brings to the “post ideological” era an educational vision based on clear values, rooted in the mythic past and aiming towards an ideal future. In times of constant change and confusion, such a faith-based ideological stability and coherence is a valuable asset. It provides comforting certainty in a changing world and enables power building for future generations. This certainty provided religious nationalists with a significant advantage in building their power over several decades (in a time when other ideologies reached their peak and started to decline, be it socialism or liberalism).

Many of the RZ institutions are imbued with a strong sense of mission. One prominent example is the RZ central stream’s (stretched from Mercaz HaRav to Har-HaMor) mission of preaching their interpretation of Judaism to secular or traditional Jewish population in the geographic and socioeconomic periphery. Another prominent mission, common among the central stream of RZ is to Judaize areas in

mixed cities with a Palestinian majority inside the Green Line, for example in Acre, Jaffa, Lod etc. Groups called *Gar'in Torani* (a Torah-based core group) of idealistic, religious-Zionist individuals and families settle in underdeveloped communities to help build up and strengthen the community through social, religious and educational programming.

These Torah-based groups played a major role in the wave of intercommunal violence that erupted in Spring 2021 in Israeli mixed (Jewish-Arab) cities. In routine these communities function as a civil RZ community working to expand Jewish presence in Arab populated places through real-estate, community development, culture and education. In times of emergency and intercommunal violence, these communities played a double role: First their activity and presence drew Arab rage violence, and second, they became a base for RZ armed volunteers, one might even say militias, who came by busses in an organized manner from the settlements in West Bank, to strengthen their brethren.<sup>196</sup> This development was foreseen in advance. A report from 2009 pointed to the potential effects of the Tora-Based community on the Arab populations within which they settled – “without a proper solution to the essential problems of the Arab residents, a rise in national agitation and a sever eruption of animosity and violence are only a question of time” (the report was republished in the online news site Mekomit.co.il 23/06/2021).<sup>197</sup> The report clearly locates the activity of these Torah-Based communities in the power shift of RZ from the 1990s and via the 2005 designment from northern WB and the GS.

Another predominant mission of RZ educational institutions is aimed at the secular majority, but not necessarily with an explicit aim of converting them. Through its missionary activity in secular Jewish schools in Israel, mainly workshops on identity, nationalism and tradition related issues, RZ educational initiatives aim to establish RZ as the central and hegemonic Israeli narrative. As Avner Inbar (an Israeli secular liberal

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<sup>196</sup> See Arab journalist and activist from Lod Rami Yunis' account on this affair in Foreign Policy (28/05/2021), “Israeli Religious Extremists Are Driving Jewish-Arab Street Violence”: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/28/israeli-religious-extremists-are-driving-jewish-arab-street-violence/>.

<sup>197</sup> The report was originally written by Noga Eitan and Ilan Frenkel and issues by the NGO “New Horizon” – The Arab-Jewish Center for Dialogue and a Shared Society co-directed by Thabet Abu Rass and

scholar affiliated with the secular Zionist-left) asserts, the religionization, (in Hebrew *hadata* - roughly translates as increased religious influence) in Israel's state secular schools is not meant to turn secular students into religious ones. The goal of religionization is rather to "engender" the consciousness and pave the way for RZ to become hegemonic:

*The goal is to make the religious Zionist worldview and values the backdrop from which young secular Israelis can develop their national identity [...] to make them forget the general and national sources of inspiration on which our own culture is based. The effort is instead to expose them to another culture that [...] serves the exceptional political theology of religious Zionism (Haaretz 23/10/2019).<sup>198</sup>*

In 2013 The Jewish Home Party, the new face of the traditional NRP, established the Jewish Identity Administration – an institutional initiative aiming to preach RZ's version of Judaism in secular schools through NGOs.<sup>199</sup> Scholars and political activists from the secular-liberal end of the Israeli spectrum agree that this activity is not aimed at converting secular children to become religious, but is rather a religious-political project. Zionist religionization aims to intensify ethnocentric nationalist feelings – the assertion that the entire land of Israel is "ours" by a divine decree, that the Jews are the chosen people, that "we" have a special history and therefore "we deserve" (Globes 06/12/2019).

A 2017 report on religionization dates the phenomenon back to 2007, between the disengagement from Gaza and the Annapolis peace talks which shook RZ and threatened the settlement project. The report, written from an opposing standpoint, also asserts that the organized penetration of religious right NGOs to state-secular schools does not seek to "religionize" secular kids, but rather to establish the status of RZ as the spiritual and political elite; it moreover states that the second goal is to

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<sup>198</sup> Written by Avner Inbar, the co-founder and senior fellow at the Molad Center of the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, under the title "Religious Indoctrination's Great Failure".

<sup>199</sup> See interview with rabbi Avichai Ronsky, IDF's former chief rabbi appointed as head of the Jewish Identity Administration (<https://tomerpersico.com> 09/07/2013) within the framework of the Ministry for Religious Services – a ministry created on the ruins of the erstwhile Ministry for Religious Affairs, which was created in 1949, and disbanded in 2003 as part of the coalition agreement between the Likud and Shinui parties.



delegitimize the debate on the settlement project. The entire religionization project is based on the assumption of a “values void”, in the sense that mainstream secular society suffers from a dangerous loss of identity (MOLAD, 2017, p. 4). The religionization project is executed by the Jewish Home party’s non-parliamentary institutional infrastructure, such as NGOs and young using young RZ woman in the framework of their national service – thus using public funds. It promotes education for “Jewish values” over science and democracy, it constitutes privatization of the values-based education (*Ibid.*, p. 5). The contents discussed point to a doctrinal indoctrination, dealing with the Third Temple and the settlements, but also discussing general topics such as Rabin’s Memorial Day and “Jewish sexual education”. The aim is to create an associative connection between RZ and political value-based leadership towards future decisions in the spheres of politics and security (*Ibid.*).

### **A National religious university**

Bar Ilan University (BIU) is an institution of higher education defined as a Jewish national-religious university. It is named after Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan (born as Meir Berlin, 1880-1949), who was a prominent national religious leader, head of the Mizrahi Movement. Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan blended intellectual writing and religious learning with public affairs and political activity. He also established the first RZ newspaper, thus combining religious and scholarly learning with politics, media and public affairs, a role model of the RZ ideal. BIU was inspired by the “Yeshiva University,” an American private academic institute founded in New York in 1886 as a Jewish modern-orthodox university.<sup>200</sup> BIU aims "to blend tradition with modern technologies and scholarship [...] to synthesize the ancient and modern, the sacred and the material, the spiritual and the scientific", and to “build character and leadership for Israel and the Jewish nation, based on the belief in the centrality of Israel to the Jewish world as its national homeland.”<sup>201</sup>

BIU was established as an antithesis and an alternative to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI). Like HUJI, the founders of BIU wanted to train a cadre

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<sup>200</sup> There are other examples of religious universities, such as the Catholic University of America (CUA) in D.C or the Institut Catholique de Paris (ICP).

<sup>201</sup> <https://www1.biu.ac.il/en-about>, accessed on 10/12/2017 15:04; also: Bar-Ilan Mission from September 29, 2011 (quoted by Wikipedia but removed from BIU’s website).

of professionals to serve in the newly forged Israeli establishment. However, unlike HUJI, the founders of BIU gave their institute religious legitimacy (KLEIN, 2013, p. 67). Professor Pinkhos Churgin (1894-1957) was the founding father of BIU and its first president. Churgin, a former Dean of Yeshiva University in NY and the president of the Mizrachi Movement in the USA, envisioned the students and graduates of the institute as an “ideal type, superior to the secular academic type that he characterizes as denying his ancestral legacy and his country.” In an appeal to his students, reflecting the classic RN anti liberal tendencies, Churgin distinguished between the national-religious student and the universalist secular academic type of the Hebrew University. In BIU Churgin wished to cultivate (quoted in Klein 2013, 67-68):

*A generation that knows his Torah and thinks about it [...] a healthy generation pure in its soul, free from the hatred complex, tolerant and acknowledging his love of the homeland, the nation and humanity [...]*

Churgin highlighted national patriotism and religiosity over academic freedom (radical objectivity in his words), as necessary values for the creation of an “ideal man”. Despite not stating his rival’s name, it is clear that Churgin referred to the Hebrew University as an embodiment of the secular Zionist elite. Indeed, throughout the years Bar-Ilan played a dual role. On the one hand, BIU is a distinguished academic institute, an all-Israeli university open for students from all sectors of the society. On the other hand, it is a major NR hub, an epicenter of RZ sectorial socialization, institutionalization and political development. Alongside BIU’s regular academic activity, it sponsors many organizations, conservative policy oriented think tanks and national-religious oriented academic colleges.<sup>202</sup> BIU's most famous college, Ariel, was founded in 1982 in the Samaria area of the West Bank. In 2012, the college became a full research university – the first in the occupied territories, further strengthening the Israeli territorial hold in the West Bank.

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<sup>202</sup> Academic colleges in Israel are non-university facilities for higher-learning that are accredited by the Council for Higher Education (CHE) to confer bachelor's and in some cases also master's degrees. Some of the colleges act as Research institutions. Up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all academic colleges needed the patronage of a university, but in the last two decades, due to changes in regulations, the colleges gradually became independent.

In the 1990s, BIU became a center of RZ right wing political activity against the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. On November 4, 1995, a law student at BIU and a radical RZ political activist named Yigal Amir assassinated the Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Rabin and changed the course of history. While Yigal Amir was a radical, and clearly a lone wolf, his actions were rooted in the atmosphere and religious-political discourse of RZ, as he received them at BIU. From Amir's explanation to the Shamgar Commission of Inquiry that investigated the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, it turned out that stopping Oslo was only the symptom of a larger problem that Amir wished to curtail, which was secularism. Amir's explanation can be seen as the violent and radical end of Churgin's resentment towards secular Zionism, yet he still reflects here the anti-secularist tendencies of RZ, and their political and nationalist translations, as expressed by staff and students of BIU.<sup>203</sup>

Many of the academic staff and graduate of BIU work with a matrix of NGOs dealing with social, political, cultural, and religious affairs, promoting mostly conservative, right wing and by large national-religious agendas. Some of these organizations, established in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reflect the new tendencies of the neo-conservative and neoliberal religious-right, influenced by their American counterparts, such as the Kohelet Policy Forum, which worked on the legislation of the 2018 Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People.

A national religious university, as we see both in the case of the Islamic University in Gaza and of Bar-Ilan, seems to be an essential institute for the creation of NR elites. Through processes of social mobilization in which the university plays a role, this new NR elite will demand a hegemonic place in society, bureaucracy and politics.

After building this encompassing institutional setting, RZ later on sought to burst its own sectorial bubble and exceed its boundaries in search for a hegemonic role, leading Israeli society altogether. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, RZ feels ready to steer the Zionist train.

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<sup>203</sup> Israeli journalist Yoav Limor recently published Amir's recordings in a documentary broadcasted by channel 12 in Israel on 29/10/2020 (Exposure season 2, episode 2, available online at [www.mako.co.il](http://www.mako.co.il)).

### **Comparison with Hamas**

RZ's solid institutional infrastructure serves as a practical platform for implementing its way of life, ideology, and politics. This institutional achievement overwhelmingly covers all aspects of life, creating a sectorial bubble and in some cases even cultural enclaves. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to survey in detail the entire maze of institutions, which includes publishing houses, research institutes (academic, religious and policy oriented), operational settlement organization, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and a wide educational infrastructure. Yet even a partial institutional survey suffices to expose the similarities to Hamas' well-established and institutionalized *da'wa* mechanism.

Despite being a distinguished and organized sector, RZ is deeply rooted in Israeli-Jewish society. It entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century (after the end of the second Intifada in 2005 to be precise) ready to take the lead, using its existing institutional structures, expanding and adapting them to the changing realities. Another interesting similarity between Hamas and RZ in this sense is that both imitated the structural, cultural and sociological features and principles of the old national and secular elites.

RZ's relative marginality within the Zionist movement pushed it into forming its own institutional structure. This institutional infrastructure distinguishes it from the mainstream of the Zionist Movement, highlighting its uniqueness as an ideological and social sector. Similarly, Palestinian RN invented itself outside the PLO as a marginal phenomenon. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both RZ and PRN moved to the centerstage of the mainstream national institutional order.

Palestinian nationalism evolved from an idea into a national movement in the 1920s, once it had become institutionalized. All the early institutions of the PNM accepted the religious framing of Palestinian nationalism, thus they were, to an extent, national-religious: the Muslim-Christian Associations and the Arab Executive Committee, the Supreme Muslim Council, the World Islamic Congress and the Arab Higher Committee. After 1948, Muslim Palestinian religious nationalists sheltered under the pan-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood, through its Egyptian and Jordanian branches in Gaza and the West Bank respectively. Palestinian RN took a more

independent path following 1967 and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with the establishment of the institutional network of the *da'wa* and welfare by Sheikh Yassin, the appearance of the militant PIJ in the early 1980s, and up to the establishment of Hamas in the late 1980s.

While the institutional infrastructure laid down by Yassin's Palestinian MB reminds the Jewish-Israeli national religious networks, there is an important difference. From a sociological point of view, the RZ are mostly bourgeoisie of middle class Ashkenazi origins, while Yassin's institutions firstly served the poor, deprived, and aged Palestinians, mainly (but not only) in the refugee camps. In this sense, the Islamic Center's welfare and educational institutions are closer to *El Hama'ayan* (אל המעיין, literally "to the spring"), a network of Sephardic ultraorthodox religious schools and welfare organizations established in the early 1980s by Shas political party, as demonstrated by Israel sociologist Nohad Ali. Ali compared Shas' social network to that of the Islamic Movement in Israel (NOHAD, 2013b). Unlike the anti-nationalist establishment of the Ashkenazi Jewish ultraorthodox community, with its own education system and institutional matrix, the Sephardic Shas combines ultra-orthodoxy and softer traditionalism with active Jewish nationalism. Moreover, Shas' network appeals to Israeli socio-economic periphery and deprived populations, similar to the MB activity on both sides of the Green Line (*Ibid.*).

Ideological changes within RZ and PRN alike receive institutional and structural expressions on several levels: religious, social, and political. Since the 1970s, NR institutions on both sides have undergone a process of transformation and development, influenced so it seems, by the 1967 war and its geopolitical consequences. Catalyzed by the same events, the shift expressed in institutional evolutions and led to similar political and social consequences.

The synagogue is the center of the religious and community life. It is not only attended several times a day, it is also the place where special life events are celebrated. Like in mosques for Hamas' *da'wa*, the daily and weekly meetings in the synagogues for daily prayers (especially on the Shabbath and weekends), are a manifest agent of socialization, contributing to the consolidation of a sense of

togetherness and belonging, and to the creation of cultural, ideological, and political coherence. Together with the education system and the entire blanket of institutions for men and women, children and youth, this generates a well-distinguished sector and a crystallized community.

### **Raising dropped banners – Religious-Zionism**

Hamas adopted much of the national “sacred values” delineated by the PLO and Fatah and reframed them in religious dressing. Similarly, RZ adopted many of the original features of the pioneering Zionist socialist elites, the founders of the Israeli labor movement.

This fact corresponds well with Waltzer’s theory on the paradox of liberation, which delineates how “religious counterrevolutions” adopt many of the features of the secular revolutionists they want to counter (WALZER, 2016). One can see this as a kind of national-religious supersessionism theology. Hama’s quest for power and leadership role is rooted in the teachings of Qutb, Yassin and Maqadmeh. Similarly, some of the Kookist RZ Rabbis promote such ideas: on the occasion of Israel’s Independence Day in May 2019 Rabbi Zvi Tau, leader of the ultra-conservative national-Haredi current and head of the RZ Kookist *Yeshivat Har Hamor* in Jerusalem, published a pamphlet called “Courage to Independence” (THAU, 2019). Tau lay down the theological infrastructure for RZ’s supersession of secular Zionism. RAYH Kook early acceptance of secular Zionism’s, despite the compromise of accepting heretic ideas, was right for its time. But now, according to Tau, the time has come for a new phase in which RZ will succeed and replace the secular Zionist elite (*Ibid.*).

#### The Jewish Brothers’ First Revolution

### **Kookism**

*“The **State** of Israel is the foundation of God’s throne in the world, and its will is that God will be One and His name is One” - Rav Kook (ARAN, 2013, p. 168)*

IN the 1970s-1980s, RAYH Kook was the only conspicuous national-religious thinker in the world of RZ. According to Yair Sheleg, a liberal RZ intellectual, in RZ

circles seminal names like Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993, affiliated with American Jewish Modern-Orthodoxy) were unknown, not to mention other giants such as the *Baal HaTanya* (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi 1745-1812, founder of Chabad Hasidic group) or Reb Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810). They were simply irrelevant for religious-Zionists (SHELEG, 2015). RAYH Kook's epigrams, on the other hand, were hanging on walls and balconies in every RZ School and branches of the RZ youth-movement Bnei Akiva.

RAYH Kook's religious philosophy was extensively analyzed both within Kookist religious stream and in the academic literature (Shlomo FISCHER, 2007, p. 75-125). Fischer analyses RAYH Kook's extensive and wide-ranging philosophy as "expressivist," and compares him to figures such as Rousseau, Herder and Hegel (*Ibid.*, p. 75-76, 94-101).

Religious-Zionism shaped itself through a constant dialogue with (the changing) reality. Slogans like Torah and Work (*Torah veAvoda* תורה ועבודה) and Torah and Science (*Torah veMada* תורה ומדע) highlight the connection of orthodoxy to modernity. Ultraorthodox Judaism, extremely conservative and stringent, passively segregated itself from society. RZ consciously opposed this segregation, which it judged adequate only for passive and enclosed Jewish existence in the diaspora. In partial congruence with Modern Orthodox Judaism, RZ institutions such as the *Mizrachi* movement, the socialist *Hapoel HaMizrachi*, and the religious kibbutz (from the 1920s onward) moved towards the secular Zionist awakening. Paraphrasing on Raz-Krakotzkin, RZ differs from the secular mainstream in its assertion that **there is a God**, and He promised us the Land. Many observant orthodox Jews not yet taken by the socialist or nationalist dogmas wondered how it came to be that they prayed for two millennia for the return to Zion, yet heretic secular Jews lead the Zionist revival which fluffed, in their eyes, the old prophecies. RAYH Kook provided them with an answer. He argued that Zionism was in itself part of the sacred, that secular Zionists were unknowingly delivering the divine plan of redemption. By synthesizing the sacred and the profane through the concept of "the unity of opposites" (אחדות ההפכים), RAYH managed to provide such a complex explanation. Fischer explains this concept as synthesizing between lower, material elements and higher, divine, elements into a

new creation that manifest the material becoming divine (*Ibid.*, p. 81; ROSENAK, 2013).

In this way RAYH united these two elements of identity into the one hyphenated identity: religious-Zionism, also referred to in Israeli public discourse simply as religious-nationalism, in which both elements inseparably intertwine. Religion, or at least the religious narrative, will no longer remain a cultural marker. Similarly to Islam in the PNM, national-religion will become a source of authority in the common awareness of the people, up to the point that separation between the different components of collective consciousness becomes practically impossible. Thus, RAYH Kook transformed RZ, in an evolution that one can described in retrospective as this sector's first significant (r)evolution.

RAYH Kook's teaching are profound and multi-layered.<sup>204</sup> In the context dealt with here, RAYH Kook placed redemption before repentance (Teshuva). Such priority reversed the traditional Jewish order, which approaches Teshuva, a "return" of Jews to the full religious observance, as a precondition to redemption. Zionism altogether turns this order on its head. First, there is redemption - the people of Israel return to Zion, establish a state and conquer back their lands. Then, according to Kook, they will do Teshuva, they (the secular and the ultra-Orthodox) will realize that Zionism was God's will and that observing His laws is their duty. These ideas were developed by RZYH Kook (RAYH's son), to a comprehensive messianic, religious and nationalist agenda called by scholars Kookism (ARAN, 2013; SCHWARTZ, 2002b; ROSENAK, 2013).

With time, this form of RZ played a growing role in the Zionist movement and the State of Israel. Kookism was the basis for the next phase in RZ's evolution, which although it was rooted in the 1950s and 1960s, took place, as we shall see below, in the 1970s. While not all RZ in Israel consider themselves as followers of rabbis Kook, the Kookist approach is by far the most influential among RZ when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As one geopolitical analyst explains, in "devising policy toward the West Bank", the Kookists "hold the view that full

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<sup>204</sup> Many scholars wrote about RAYH Kook's ideas (DIECKHOFF, 2003, p. 161-174; MALACH, 2016; SCHWARTZ, 2002a).



redemption will come only when the entire People of Israel live in the Land of Israel under full Jewish sovereignty. Settlement construction, it follows, forms an intrinsic part of their project" (ZALZBERG, 2013, p. i). Kookism, according to Tomer Persico, can be summed up as follows: "politics as God's playing field, political reality as the bearer of messianic tidings, the nonchalant presumption to understand the Almighty's will, and the undoubting faith that our own ilk possesses the secret to deciphering the course of history" (Persico in Haaretz 29/03/2013).<sup>205</sup>

The Kookist school itself is divided in two groups, represented by two mother-institutions: Mercaz HaRav<sup>206</sup> and Har HaMor ("mountain of myrrh", Song of Songs 4:6). The split officially occurred in 1998 and the official reason was Rabbi Tau's objection to academic studies alongside the traditional ways of Jewish learning. But the divide is deeper: it stems out of an ideological gap and differences in the religious interpretation of Orthodox Judaism and goes back at least to the 1970s (SHELEG, 2020). However, only after the death unifying figures such as Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neriah and Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli in 1995 did the soaring tensions reach the breaking point, leading to an open and official institutional split. Rabbi Zvi Tau left Mercaz HaRav with his followers and established Yeshivat Har HaMor due to an ideological dispute with RZYH's successor Rabbi Avraham Shapira. Ever since, many have pointed out to the increasing fragmentation within the national religious community in recent years (Shlomo FISCHER, 2007, p. 201-202 n. 14). Nevertheless, the split is but partial and many teachers and students continue to take part and interact in both frameworks.

All kookists, and practically all RZ circles, hold RZYH Kook in high respect. RZYH Kook succeeded his father, RAYH Kook, as head of Mercaz HaRav – the formative and most important learning institute of religious-Zionism. He delivered a sermon on Israel's 19<sup>th</sup> Independence Day celebrated in May 1967, entitled "The Nineteenth Psalm to the State of Israel" (מזמור י"ט למדינת ישראל).<sup>207</sup> This short sermon was to

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<sup>205</sup> Translation from Persico's blog: <https://tomerpersicoenglish.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/kookism-settler-politics-as-gods-playing-field/>

<sup>206</sup> Mercaz is currently headed by Rabbi Yaakov Eliezer Kahana Shapira (born 1950), who inherited the role from his father Rabbi Avraham Shapira (1914-2007). Har HaMor is headed by Rabbi Zvi Yisrael Tau (born 1937).

<sup>207</sup> Kook, T. Y. *L'Netivot Yisrael* II, 35.

become one of the formative texts of the post 1967 religious-Zionist movement. It contains all of the movement's basic creeds: the sanctification of the Land, especially the (lost, soon to be occupied) "territories", of the State, and of the army; and the polemics with the ultraorthodox:

*[...] Nineteen years ago, on the night when news of the United Nations decision in favor of the reestablishment of the State of Israel reached us, when the People streamed into the streets to celebrate and rejoice, I could not go out and join in the jubilation. I sat alone and silent; a burden lay upon me. During those first hours I could not resign myself to what had been done. I could not accept the fact that indeed "they have...divided My land." (Joel 4:2)! --- Yes [and now after nineteen years] where is our Hebron - have we forgotten her?! Where is our Shechem [Nablus], our Jericho, - where?! - Have we forgotten them?! And all that lies beyond the Jordan - each and every clod of earth, every region, hill, valley, every plot of land, that is part of Eretz Israel - have we the right to give up even one grain of the Land of G-d?! --- On that night, nineteen years ago, during those hours, as I sat trembling in every limb of my body, wounded, cut, torn to pieces - I could not then rejoice.<sup>208</sup>*

Less than a month after the delivery of this sermon, in what seemed by many as a miraculous event of divine intercession (Akiva ELDAR et al., 2007), the Israeli army occupied the West Bank from Jordan (alongside the Sinai and the Golan), and all the place RZYH mentions and long for in his sermon came under Israeli rule. In the eyes of many Israeli Jews this was a liberation of lost parts of the homeland – Judea and Samaria. Rabbi Kook's sermon entered the RZ canon as a prophecy and as a call for action (ARAN, 2013, p. 199).

Israeli sociologist Gideon Aran studied RZ's main body of revival in the 1970s and 1980s - Gush Emunim - and described it as "a religious movement, which perceives matters of foreign affairs and defense as religious principles and settlements a religious medium" (*Ibid.*, p. 20). Aran describes it as a move from religious-Zionism

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<sup>208</sup> See partial English translation here: <http://www.mercazharav.org/shiyurim/mizmor19.htm>.

to a Zionist religion, as “Judaisation of Zionism and Messianization of Judaism.” (*Ibid.*; DIECKHOFF, 1990; DIECKHOFF, 2003).

### **Gush Emunim – Kookism in Action**

The chapter of *Gush Emunim* (GE), Hebrew for “the Block of the Faithful”, founded in 1974, is an important episode in the shift of RZ from the margins to the center stage. Comparing it to contemporary developments that took place in Palestinian RN, mainly the founding of the Islamic Center (IC) in the Gaza strip in 1970 (which gave birth to Hamas in 1988), reveals that following the 1967 war, both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian Muslim RN reacted with an ideological and institutional evolution that is somewhat similar, and maybe even interdependent. First, the historical circumstances are similar, an institutional expression of a national religious ideological reaction to the same event – the 1967 war. Second, a textual examination of GE’s founding declaration reveals some basic similarities to Hamas founding document (published some 14 years later). Both documents indicate to a strong religious motivation at the outset of the national-political development they represent. Finally, both the IC and GE represent a national-religious institutional phase of civil society activity that heralded political engagement or development that will later lead to political prominence.

In the winter-spring of 1974, a group of enthusiastic young RZ men and women emerged in the Israeli public sphere, advocating settlement in the occupied territories of 1967. Beyond advocacy, members of this group actively settled on the hilltops of the WB, for them the liberated biblical lands of Judea and Samaria.<sup>209</sup> They did not hesitate to confront the embarrassed Israeli soldiers who came to evacuate them at first. Within a few years, following the 1977 political turnover, their settlement activity became the State of Israel’s official policy in the WB and GS. This was *Gush Emunim* (GE), the Block of the Faithful, a newly founded movement launched by disciples of RZYH Kook and graduates of Mercaz HaRav. Much was written about this well know episode of GE as a national-religious and even fundamentalist phenomenon (DIECKHOFF, 1990; ARAN, 2013; ALMOND et al., 2003a; Akiva ELDAR et al., 2007;

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<sup>209</sup> Yair Sheleg, “From Sebastia to Migron” (Hebrew), Haaretz 11/03/2004 (SHELEG, 2004).

SEGAL, 1988). As these scholars show, GE's chapter was a first significant harbinger of the RZ shift from the margins to the center stage.

The foundation of the Islamic Centre (*al-Mujama'*) in Gaza by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin in 1970 was a first institutional expression of the nationalization (or Palestinization) of the local MB branch, in reaction to the geo-political earthquake of the 1967 war. This dissertation postulates that in a similar process, the emergence of GE was a first significant institutional expression of the RZ shift. Officially founded in 1974, GE's activity incubated in the cradle of the RZ ideological evolution during the 1950s and 1960s. Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, one of the founders of GE, points to the early signs of this evolution sprung in the first RZ settlement activity immediately after the 1967 war in Gush Etzion and Hebron in the southern WB (SHELEG, 2004). It was there, in the renewed settlement of Kfar Etzion (located in Gush Etzion, south of the WB) that GE was founded, obviously rooted in this early settlement activity. Nevertheless, it was only with GE that RZ started to act as an organized movement building settlements throughout the central and northern WB, the GS, Sinai and the Golan Heights. GE appeared several months after the October 1973 War, in which Egypt and Syria surprised Israel with a coordinated simultaneous invasion. Israel halted the invasion but with huge loss of life, remembered in Israel as a catastrophic trauma, standing in sharp contrast to the glorious victory of 1967. For many RZ it was a sign from God – a sort of punishment for neglecting the national and religious duty to settle the newly liberated (occupied) lands immediately after 1967. According to this logic, 1973 was a wakeup call, a reminder from God to act (*Ibid.*).

The occupied Palestinian territories had already been in Israeli hands for nearly seven years when GE appeared. Hanan Porat, a RZ rabbi, activist and politician and one of the founders of GE, explained the timing (*Ibid.*):

*Until the Yom Kippur War (October 1973), the perception was that the process of returning to Zion should be led by the government. After the war, in the general context of the rift that had opened between the people and the leadership, ripened the realization that we can no longer trust it either.*

Another founding member of GE and the living spirit behind the renewed settlement in Hebron in 1968, Rabbi Moshe Levinger explains that only after the 1973 war and following the efforts of US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, a territorial compromise was seriously discussed for the first time. This, according to Levinger, pushed them to act (*Ibid.*). Uri Elitzur, another central figure in GE, also talked about the atmosphere of territorial compromise, and the feeling that the existence of the state is no longer secured. Elitzur added that following the war, the feeling was that in the special circumstances of the Zionist project in the Middle East, if you don't expand and build all the time, you are actually retreating and projecting weakness (*Ibid.*).

Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun anchors the appearance of GE at this point in time in the emerging political reality after the war. According to Bin Nun, following the war the political orientation shifted. At first, under Prime Minister Golda Meir, the labor movement supported GE more than the National Religious Party, explains Bin Nun. After the war Golda lost her prominence and Rabin entered the stage, bringing with him American influence. Under Rabin, explains Bin Nun, GE had to move on, bursting its way on the ground. This was when the historical roots of the long hostility between Rabin and the RZ settlement movement were formed (*Ibid.*). To summarize this point, the historical developments of the post 67 war and the Israeli takeover of the Territories, generated a religious-national response on both sides. Both RZ and Palestinian RN reacted with an ideological and institutional evolution that translated their changing ideology into a practical program. As a young RZ parliamentarian, Zvulun Hammer (1936-1998) participated in the foundation of GE, heralding the prominence of the younger and more militant generation, Kookist such as Hammer, in the leadership of the NRP.

Annex Number 1, the founding document of GE, was not a well-known document like the 1988 Hamas Covenant written by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin. Nevertheless, its reading reveals a movement that is deeply religious, obviously messianic, that will grow, under the spiritual guidance of RZYH Kook, into an influential RZ organization. Through GE, RZYH Kook's disciples, manifestly Hanan Porat (1943-2011) and Moshe Levinger (1935-2015), stood up to claim - or better put - redeem the

divine promise embedded in the Kookist ideology. In other words, GE transformed Kookism from an idea to an organized working plan (ARAN, 2013). The goals of GE go beyond settlement in the occupied territories: it aimed to replace secular Zionism, leading the Zionist project into its next level, “on its way to its complete designation – the complete redemption as foreseen by the prophets of Israel, to which the nation yearned from ancient times” (GUSH EMUNIM, 1974). GE constituted a RZ institutional expression of the Kookist ideology.

The Kookist ideology incarnated in reality through the institutional “flesh” of GE, under the spiritual guidance of RZYH Kook (ARAN, 2013; DIECKHOFF, 2003; SCHWARTZ, 2016). The Kookist members of GE wanted to bring redemption through political action in the physical world. GE’s founding document describes the goals of the movement (GUSH EMUNIM, 1974):<sup>210</sup>

*To bring about great awakening in the Israeli nation for the fulfillment of the Zionist vision in its full scope, out of the recognition that the source of this vision is in the tradition of Israel rooted in Judaism, and that its purpose is the complete redemption to the people of Israel and the entire world [...]*

The document specifies “Principles for Action”: to “connect to the Torah of Israel [...] with love of nation and Land [...] Zionist consciousness and the vision of redemption”. The fourth principle is “settlement in the entire Land of Israel”. The principles also touch on more general and practical issues such as immigration, economy, society and education, alongside more abstract notions such as “Love of Israel” (second principle). Like Palestinian religious-nationalists,<sup>211</sup> GE members call to live a humble life, love of hard work and to balance between practical labor and religious contemplation. Like Palestinian religious-nationalism, GE’s founding document anchors its spiritualistic arguments in security and realpolitik, calling to integrate the settlements into the security vision of Israel, turning remote settlements

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<sup>210</sup> A copy of the original annex is available in Israel’s National Library manuscripts collection. No Annex 2 was ever issued, albeit other documents do exist in the same folder in the archive.

<sup>211</sup> Despite this similarity, there are obvious sociological difference between the mostly middle class RZ activists (who came mostly from the laboring agricultural settlements and the bourgeois urban communities) and the mostly poor Palestinian activists of the MB coming for the majority of them from refugee camps.

from a liability into an asset (principle 7 – security policy). The document calls to adopt a hawkish and tough security concept that is not deterred by consideration of ‘morality’ or politics [...] according to the concept of “he who comes to kill you, you should kill him beforehand”,<sup>212</sup> all this while immersed in “[...] humility and holiness and purity within our midst, in human relations and between the genders” (*Ibid.*). The eighth and last principle deals with sovereignty. The article argues that full and exclusive sovereignty of the Israeli nation is a Jewish obligation and a commandment from the Torah. This assertion requires the State of Israel to annex the occupied territories and immediately enforce full sovereignty in Judea, Samaria (the WB) and Gaza, alongside the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. For this Israel must stand firm in front of the nations “until the day will come and the honor of Israel will grow and the truth will be revealed amongst the nations” (*Ibid.*). The document ends with symbolic biblical prophecies which condition redemption to the fulfillment of God’s will (Samuel 2, 10:12; Isaiah 2:3).

Hamas published its founding document fourteen years after that of GE and under different circumstances. Nevertheless, comparing these documents reveals a similarity in the transition from religious political passivity to geopolitical and militant religion-based national activity. In both cases the founding documents is a deeply religious text, drafted by, or under the spiritual guidance of, a charismatic leader of a high religious stature. In both cases, the movements’ actions deviated with time from the strictly ideological text. Nevertheless, these texts explicitly expose the deep and thorough religious grounds from which these movements grow.

Both Hamas and GE strongly opposed territorial compromises. This opposition stemmed from national-religious motivations and it triggered a religious and political response. Both GE and Hamas make their respective national movements into a religious decree. The advent of GE could have been a historical anecdote, but it turned out to be an event of enormous historical significance, influencing the Israeli Palestinian sphere to this day. Israeli anthropologist Gideon Aran assert that GE was an essentially religious movement, no less than a political one. Aran points to the

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<sup>212</sup> A famous Talmudic *midrash*.

religious revival and renewal in GE, showing how the movement influenced Israeli society by making Zionist Israeli Judaism more messianic (ARAN, 2013). Kookism is the manifest esthetics of GE, its specific and unique religious method. Even after the Kookist school disintegrated to sub-currents, its organizing principles remained: redemption is sovereignty by the government of the people on the entire breadth of the land of the people. The Messiah is “[...] the kingdom of Israel. A full governance.” Only “then the time to build our Temple will come” (*Ibid.*, p. 192).

The Kookist enthusiast of GE read the Biblical descriptions of the early Jewish - or rather Israelite - kingdoms, and draw conclusions regarding contemporary wars, conquests and proper governance (LUBITZ, 2012). The admirable Biblical leaders were typically daring, powerful, proud and unbending. A Prime Minister who seeks out diplomatic compromise is a humiliation. On the one hand the State of Israel is holy, on the other hand, when it carries out policies that clearly contradict the Kookist interpretation of the Biblical narrative, its actions are illegitimate. This complex approach generates serious tensions. When an Israeli government signed agreements including territorial compromises, giving the Arabs pieces of “Israeli land” in return for peace, this tension exploded.

The 1977 political turnover in Israel and the rise of the right wing to power greatly affected GE. Now the ruling party, the Likud adopted GE’s policy. Hanan Porat’s 1975 program “Yesh” outlined a future map of settlements. Even though it seemed at the time unrealistic even to his own followers, the program was accomplished (ARAN, 2013, p. 18). Israel’s first right-wing coalition headed by Menahem Begin was a moment of triumph for the religious right, boosting the settlement enterprise. The lasting rule of the political right since 1977 has been crucial for the success of the settlements, and for the rise of RZ to power.

Yet Begin also deeply disrupted the direction of “redemption” as understood by GE and the Kookists. In 1979, Israel signed a peace agreement with Egypt, which included two components highly criticized by the religious right: first, a full evacuation of all the Israeli settlements established in the Sinai Peninsula. Second, a somewhat vague promise to establish a Palestinian “autonomy” in the Palestinian territories (WB and GS). By 1982 the settlements in Sinai were evicted and demolished. The RZ



leadership protested in an attempt to prevent the evacuation. Nevertheless, all steps taken by the religious right and particularly RZ had miserably failed. Many of the leaders and participants of “The Movement to Prevent the Withdrawal from Sinai” were members of GE, students, and graduates of Mercaz HaRav (*Ibid.*, p. 221). Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook passed away in March 1982 as the withdrawal from Sinai was ending.

The withdrawal from Sinai was a clear signal: the Israeli public is not with GE. The popular vote endorsed the withdrawal, and the State of Israel was not fulfilling redemption. Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, a Kookist and founding member of GE, reflected on that episode in hindsight, asking why their enthusiasm did not affect people outside of the RZ circle. Bin Nun stated in 1984 that

*The sphere in which the turn of events will be determined is in the heart of the nation and in the political-public atmosphere. This is perhaps a harder sphere than that of land and construction, yet it is the main sphere [...] My personal lesson from the destruction of Yamit is that we cannot succeed without having the support of the overwhelming majority of the people (BIN NUN, 1984, p. 10-11).<sup>213</sup>*

The loss of Sinai further strengthened the determination of the Kookist to influence the general Israeli public. Another source of reinforcement was wider social and cultural changes. From the 1980s onwards Israelis’ sense of collective identity and national purpose grew weaker, and trends of individuality, capitalism and adoption of Western culture grew stronger. Those who followed the Kookist path looked at this reality and thought: they have lost direction, and they need us for new guidance.

During the 1980s GE faded as a movement. It was replaced by both political and civil activity. On the parliamentary level, the work of GE was done mainly by the NRP (alongside several smaller nationalist and sometimes secular temporary parties). On the civil level, a body called the Yesha Council was founded in 1980 to replace GE’s activity as an umbrella organization of all the Jewish settlements in the WB and GS. On the ground a body called Amana ('Covenant') deals with the spatial aspects of

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<sup>213</sup> Yamit was the largest Israeli settlement evacuated from Sinai in 1982.

settlements building. Amana was originally founded by GE in 1976 and continue its activity under the Yesha Council.

### War, Violence and Peace

The shift of RZ to hegemony is reflected to some extent in this sector's relations with the army. An entangled process of militarization of RZ society and religionalization of the Israeli military comes with a benefit as it paves RZ's way to hegemony. At the same time, as we shall see below, it also comes with a cost. Beyond its increased presence in the security forces, one of RZ reaction to the peace process was the use of illegal violence. Unlike Hamas, this form of violence is marginal in scope and appearance, yet it stems out of the RZ mainstream ideology and serve the political goals of the religious right as a whole.

#### **RZ relation to violence**

RZ's attitude towards violence was from the outset synchronized with the secular mainstream of the Zionist movement (Anita SHAPIRA, 1992). In this sense, and unlike the Palestinian political and radical Islam, RZ was always part of the mother movement, its members integrated into the military force of the national movement. RZ served in designated unites in the Zionist paramilitary groups before 1948 and in the Israeli army afterward. They also served in the general units alongside secular and traditional Jews, integrating in all sectors of society. Consequently, most of the militaristic vigor and violent tendencies of RZ were channeled to the institutionalized violence of the state.

Palestinian Islamist violence on the other hand was always dissident, first during the British rule in Palestine (1917-1948) against Zionism and British imperialism, representing the PNM. After the establishment of the PLO (in 1964), and especially after the foundation of the PA (in 1994), Islamist violence was considered a double dissidence – externally towards Israel and internally towards the PLO, Fatah and the PA. Thus, while Palestinian violence in general and Islamist Palestinian violence in particular is considered illegal and terroristic, most (but not all) of the RZ violence is administered through the state and the military. This institutional embrace of RZ into the Zionist secular mainstream has mostly prevented RZ militias and

terrorism. Nevertheless, dissident and illegal RZ violence and terrorism exist, and not only in the margins of RZ society as most tend to believe. In the last decades, one manifest expression of the RZ shift towards hegemony is happening through the religionization of the army. In recent years, several scholars wrote about the conception of violence and military power in RZ, described as a shift from the “bravery of the spirit to the sanctification of power” (GREENBLUM, 2016; LAVIE (ed.), 2015)

In his PhD dissertation Rabbi Ronen Lubitz surveyed Zionist-rabbinic and doctrinal literature on the topic of the confrontation between Israel and the Arabs (LUBITZ, 2012). Lubitz is himself a liberal RZ rabbi. He follows the development and change in RZ society regarding militarism and the Arab enemy through a century of RZ existence, indicating the strengthening of the national element and the crystallization of stricter attitudes towards the Arabs. These changes, one can argue, occurred also in the “general” Israeli society, and as Lubitz indicates, they cover the entire RZ sector. These changes are evident in the RZ rabbinic literature, which has great influence over the RZ public. This genre of literature is increasing in the recent decades (*Ibid.*). Jewish sources, from the Bible up to the “new age”, contains both a national-particularistic tendency alongside a humanistic-universal tendency. Lubitz demonstrates that the mainstream of RZ follows the Kookist ideology, and that despite the fact that RAYH Kook thoughts and writings can provide an infrastructure for a humanistic and universal worldview, most of his followers, especially the second generation of his disciples (students of RAYH Kook’s students), preferred developing the national-particularistic aspect, highlighting the contradiction and polarization between “Israel and the nations”.

The chapter on war in RAYH’s 1920 book *Orot* (lights) contains ten short paragraphs, which shape the RZ concept of war.<sup>214</sup> At first, the reader gets the impression that RAYH sees war as purifying the world, eradicating evil and increasing the good. As the text advances, one realizes that it is anchored in the events of WW1,

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<sup>214</sup> The book, which is a compilation of essays from the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a fundamental and canonical RZ text, studied in all RZ institutions and criticized both by ultraorthodox and liberal circles due to its emphasis on nationalism. RAYH’s son, RZYH Kook published the book’s first edition in 1920 through his father’s movement, “Jerusalem Flag” (דגל ירושלים). It was republished since in numerous editions. It is available in its entirety online on wikisource: <https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA>.

the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, and the Zionist awakening. In chapter three (i.e. the third paragraph on war), RAYH explains that Israel left the world politics for two thousand years of forced exile because violence was throughout history inherent to political life. This earthly violence, according to RAYH Kook, is inadequate to the nature and destiny of the Jewish people (Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen KOOK, 1920, chap. 3 part 2).

However, RAYH Kook's "dialectic thought was replaced by a monistic, nationalistic approach, which evolves around the axis of the redemption of Israel and sees confrontation with the nations as a vital stage along the road to redemption" (LUBITZ, 2012, p. 340). Already Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap (1882-1951), RAYH Kook's most prominent student who succeeded him as head of the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva, demonizes the gentiles and grasps the struggle against the enemies of Israel as a battle between holiness and impurity, a necessary struggle for the promotion of redemption and not a consequence of circumstances in retrospect. Nevertheless, despite this standpoint, Rabbi Charlap assumed that the territorial dispute with the Arabs can be resolved (*Ibid.*, p. 31-33).

Another prominent figure of the movement, RAYH Kook's son, RZYH Kook, argued that the attitude toward the Arabs as individuals should be tolerant, but when dealing with them as a collective with national demands, there should be no place for compromise (*Ibid.*, p. 33-34). Kook the son, editing his father's work, created a militaristic ideology, which was more hawkish than the policies of the RZ's political platforms until the mid 1970s, connecting wars and redemption, in a way Lubitz describes as manipulative (*Ibid.*, p. 155). The enormous Israeli military victory in 1967 and the occupation of Judea and Samaria (the WB) generated a messianic approach, rapidly translated to politics and unprecedented RZ activism. RZYH highlighted that occupation of the Land of Israel from the gentiles and establishing Jewish rule over them is a religious commandment already in the scriptures and the writings of seminal Jewish medieval thinkers. Accordingly, the military was, according to RZYH Kook, a tool for the implementation of this religious decree. In the post 1967 war, the glorification of the army received a dimension of holiness in RZ, ascribing holiness to the military's weapons and war materials (*Ibid.*, p. 157):

*The holiness of the army uniform in Israel is original sanctity in itself. It is a holiness of all the tools of the religious commandment, from all the sides, of all the tanks, the holiness of our tank that will appear tomorrow*

Lubitz demonstrates how RZ Rabbis used Biblical narratives and archetypes for consolidating a harsh approach towards the Arabs, correlating between the Biblical wars and the contemporary Israeli-Arab conflict (*Ibid.*, p. 49-148).<sup>215</sup> The conflict is depicted by the spiritual elite of RZ as a continuation of the religious wars described in the Bible. The Arab Palestinians constituted a contemporary embodiment of the ancient Philistines, and in some cases even of the Amalekites, a biblical hostile nation that God commands the Israelites to eradicate (*Ibid.*, p. 147-148).<sup>216</sup>

Disciples of RZ Rabbis such as Rabbis Tau, Aviner, Shmuel Eliyahu and Uzi Kalchheim, all prominent conservative RZ rabbis, adopted the Biblical model as an operative guide for handling the contemporary conflict with the Arabs, including the justification of killing innocent civilians. This conceptual approach is similar to the writings and sayings of Hamas' leaders, such as al-Maqadmeh, and with other Islamic scholars such as Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (1928-2010), Sheikh al-Azhar from Egypt, who describe the contemporary conflict with the Jews in Quranic terms as enemies of the Prophet Mohamad and of Islam. RZYH Kook created a systematic political theology which integrates the Israeli-Arab conflict as part of the messianic process in which the Israeli nation is immersed. Based on this theology (anchored in Talmudic interpretation) RZYH asserts that consolidating Israel's military power is a tool of the divine to advance redemption. According to this agenda, any nation that is trying to restrict and limit the Israeli nation is sabotaging redemption, which is a linear and irreversible process. Thus, fighting those who limit this process is a divine calling, and the army and its might become vessels of holiness.

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<sup>215</sup> Lubitz scrutinizes this trend extensively and in details, through a careful reading of his fellow RZ rabbis.

<sup>216</sup> Scholars have pointed out that the story of Amalek as described in the Books of Exodus (17:8-16) and of Samuel is a divinely commanded genocide: "[...] I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven [...] the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." See Naimark, Norman M. *Genocide: A World History*. Oxford University Press (2017). pp. 8–9.

### **A Land is redeemed by blood**

Today, militarism has become a manifest characteristic of RZ and the army is one of RZ's major platform for hegemony. Israeli sociologist Yagil Levy described this process as "theocratization" of the army (LEVY, 2015, p. 12). Theocratization, according to Levy, goes beyond the cultural-religious influence of religionization. It constitutes a penetration of religious authorities into the army in an attempt to influence the military administration, which is normatively exclusively in the hands of the military and the political level in charge over it (LEVY, 2015).

*Bnei David* (sons of David) was the first pre-army preparatory group (*mechina*), founded in 1990 by Rabbi Eli Sadan in the WB settlement of Eli ([bneidavid.org/Web/en](http://bneidavid.org/Web/en)). An independent documentary "Kod Elkana" (LEV et al., 1997a),<sup>217</sup> offers first-hand view into this prestigious institution and the ideological structures behind the theocratization process. Bnei David is the flagship of the conservative wing of RZ for the past decades, educating the future serving elite of RZ. The young participants are immersed in ideological elitism and blunt militaristic indoctrination all throughout the one-year program (*Ibid.*). The young participants learn to navigate and operate weapons. During one of these military-like trainings, a group of participants sit around a campfire on a barren hill, freely discussing their beliefs, echoing the ideological credo of their Yeshiva (*Ibid.*):

- We will combine Torah and work, spirit and practice, and pose example to the Israeli nation, which will eventually unite around the Torah.
- Religion is an integral part of political life and the state.
- Judaism is the foundation of the State of Israel, which is part of the process of redemption of the world. Thus, it would be absurd to separate religion from the state.

In line with this logic, they explain, we should join the melting pot of the army not in small, enclosed units designated for RZ, but rather enter the major "regular"

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<sup>217</sup> The film was broadcasted on the Israeli First Channel and is available in the film archive of Israel's Broadcasting Agency. The movie is available online: <https://vimeo.com/208093393> (password: ELKANACOD97). I want to thank Director Shimon Lev for granting me access (LEV et al., 1997b). The film follows the eighth year (1997-8) of the program.

units, to serve with everyone else, and there to give all we have, be the best we can be, to set an example for everyone else. To implement the Spirit of Elkanah.<sup>218</sup>

We see throughout the documentary that in the spring of 1998, RZ teenagers were cultivated and brought up with a strong elitist sense, heading out to achieve the goal of leading the Israeli society in all fields: media, industry, culture, and politics. As they explain in the film, the military service represents their ticket into the general Israeli society. Moreover, RZ religionization of the army reflects the RZ adoption of the labor movement's ethos on its way to replace the latter as the dominant sector of Israeli society. Once representatives of Max Nordau's (1849-1923) muscular Judaism (*Muskeljudentum*) and secular kibbutzniks, the archetypal combat soldiers are now sun scorched and armed settlers (BEN SASSON, 2007; BEN SASSON, 2020). In this respect, RZ's militaristic tendencies answered both an independent religious creed and a utilitarian institutional purpose. In contemporary Israeli society, RZ imitate even the dress code of the old pioneering elites and read their old canonical literature, forsaken by the descendant of the secular elites affiliated with the Israeli political center-left.

In Rabbi Sadan's booklet defining RZ (titled: Who are you Religious-Zionism? מי את הציונות הדתית?), the most important element both visually and textually, is the deep militarization of this society (Eliezer SADAN, 2016). Out of 21 images in the 40 pages booklet, 17 are of soldiers in uniform or of men conspicuously armed with military assault rifles. Sadan asserts that for RZ soldiers, serving in the Israeli army is not only a civil obligation but also a religious commandment and a great privilege

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<sup>218</sup> The Spirit of Elkanah or the Elkanah Method is the name of Rabbi Sadan's educational approach. The name is based on the Biblical Elkanah, father of the prophet Samuel (at the beginning of the Books of Samuel). Rabbi Sadan compare the reality of Elkanah to his own time, explaining how Elkanah's piety transcended Israel from sovereignty (the period of the Biblical Judges) to redemption (King and Temple). Elkanah's son the prophet Samuel crowned kings which build the Temple in Jerusalem. Like Elkanah, with our piety we shall transcend Israel from secular Zionism (which Sadan calls post-Zionism) to the stage of redemption, represented by king and Temple. The theological lesson is clear, RZ will take the lead from the secular Zionists who, like the Biblical Judges, established earthly sovereignty. Sadan explains this approach, in typical length, on the website of the archeological site of ancient Shilo, adjacent to the WB settlement of Shilo and Eli, which according to Jewish tradition was the City of the Tabernacle (n.d. Hebrew: <https://www.a-shiloh.co.il/2575>, Eli is a Biblical figure, a Judge and a priest in the Temple of the Tabernacle in Shilo). This idea will be developed by Rabbi Tau, Sadan's teacher, to a comprehensive replacement theology, based on RZYH, asserting that reality is moving to a new stage in which RZ will take the lead from secular Zionism in leading the nation towards the redemption (THAU, 2019).

(*Ibid.*, p. 6). Here again we see that RN soldiers are now the new military elite, replacing the old elites of the Labor Party and the kibbutzniks. In this sense, military prominence is a harbinger of political and social hegemonic replacement of the old elites.

The Kookist religious ideology development preceded RZ organizational and political evolution. At the time when the ideas of RZYH Kook were crystallizing in RZ's *beth midrash* (house of learning), the NRP was still a dovish satellite of the Israeli labor party. Following the wars of 1967 and 1973, the establishment of GE in 1974, the settlement project and later the Israeli Arab peace process and the Israeli territorial compromises throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Kookists were pushed to complete their revolution in the 1990s. One major characteristic they adopted along the way was militarization, affiliated earlier with secular Zionism and figures like Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, and Ariel Sharon.

For RZ, the Israeli army was the surest way into the heart of the Israeli mainstream. Thus, RZ set out to generate another revolution, this time using the military rabbinate to indoctrinate secular soldiers. Rabbi Shlomo Goren (1917-1994) established the military chief rabbinate as a RZ stronghold. In his famous Hebrew novel *Et HaZamir* (The Time of Trimming, Am Oved 1987), Israeli author Haim Be'er describes the messianic fervor within the Army's chief rabbinate in the period leading up to the 1967 war. Yet after Rabbi Goren, the military rabbinate served mainly the religious needs of observant soldiers. It was only after the Israeli disengagement from the GS that the military rabbinate became more active, under military Rabbi Brigadier General Avichai Rontzki (1951-2018), who held the position from 2006 until 2010. Among the *mamlachti* (statist) RZ rabbis, Rontzki held ultra-conservative and hawkish opinions; he was among the founders of Itamar, an ideological Jewish settlement located deep in the WB, southeast of Nablus, and head of the settlement's yeshiva. During his time in office, Rontzki revolutionized the role of the military rabbinate through the Jewish Identity Administration mentioned above.

Rontzki improved and enhanced the administration, labeling it under the slogan "Jewish Consciousness for a Victorious Army". He transformed the military rabbinate into an arm of RZ ideology, making it a sectorial spearhead within the Army



aimed not to serve religious soldiers, but to indoctrinate the secular soldiers in the mind of RZ (Haaretz 22/08/2008). After his release from the army in 2010, Rontzki's model was expanded into the national education system as we saw in the "Education" section above. RZ orchestrated its shift into the Israeli center stage, to a great extent, through the military – Israel's biggest, most important and most consensual institution.

For Jewish religious-nationalists, the entangled processes of militarization of RZ and religionization of the army come with a benefit, but also with a cost. The benefit is that prominence in the army paved the way to social and political prominence in Israel, as the story of Effi Eitam (born 1952) exemplifies. A former secular Kibbutz member which adopted RZ after the 1973 war and studied in Mercaz HaRav, a decorated war hero and Brigadier General, Eitam was elevated upon his release to head the NRP at the beginning of the 2000s and as such held senior political and ministerial positions. Eitam, an ultra-conservative hawk, was approved in November 2020 to head Israel's famous Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and research center (Times of Israel 13/12/2020).

However, at the same time, RZ's new positioning delineates the boundaries of power at the utility of holding key army positions. As RZ includes a critical mass of senior officers and combat soldiers who place (their interpretation of) the Torah before the secular rules of the state, these officers and soldiers will encounter dilemmas between these two sets of authority and value (LEVY, 2015, p. 197-199). Such situations have occurred primarily in the context of Israeli territorial compromise (INBARI, 2012b).

The story of Brigade Commander Ofer Winter exemplifies the limitations of this process. During the Gaza war of summer 2014 (Operation Protective Edge), Winter, a RZ senior combat officer and a graduate of Rabbi Sadan's pre-army program circulated a letter among his officers and soldiers describing the anticipated fighting against Hamas militants as a religiously motivated holy war.<sup>219</sup> The content of the

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<sup>219</sup> Winter's "battle letter" (דף קרב) from 09/07/2014 said, among other things: "*History has chosen us to spearhead the fight against the terrorist Gazan enemy who curses, vilifies, and abominates Israel's God [...] I raise my eyes to the heavens and cry with you 'Hear, O Israel! Adonai is our God! Adonai is*

letter leaked to the media and caused a heated public debate.<sup>220</sup> As a highly esteemed combat officer Winter's promotion in the army's ranks was not halted, but the momentary public scandal proved both the religionization of the army and the fear and objection it provokes among many Israelis. The shift is ongoing but not completed. Eventually the heads of the State of Israel and the security apparatus realize the problematics and limit the prominence of RZ officers and soldiers. This understanding in turn pushes RZ to obtain power outside the military – in the social and political sphere in charge of the army.<sup>221</sup>

### **Illegal Violence**

While RZ strives toward the drivers' seat, some occurrences of national-religious terrorism push RZ back to the social fringes. The Palestinian Hamas was a resistance movement from the outset, placing resistance militarism and political violence high on its agenda. Since its inception Hamas was not a regular army, it was an illegal militia and a terror organization.<sup>222</sup> Only in 2007 did Hamas adapt to the new reality of policing and governing a population, including monopolizing and regulating violence in the territory under its control – the GS. RZ, on the other hand, integrated into the organized apparatus of the state's legal violence. Illegal violence and terror remained a marginal phenomenon for RZ. Nevertheless, albeit marginal in scope and appearance, at least since the 1980s, illegal violence and Jewish national-religious terror accompanied RZ and served the political goals of the RZ mainstream and the

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*One! Adonai the God of Israel succeed our path in which we are going to fight for you nation Israel against an enemy that blaspheme thy name"*

<sup>220</sup> See for example Reuters sepecial report By Maayan Lubell "Israeli military struggles with rising influence of Religious-Zionists" (Reuters 15/04/2016).

<sup>221</sup> In recent years, with the exception of the army, the heads of all major security agencies in Israel - the police, the Israel Security Agency (the Shin Bet), the Mossad and the National Security Council (Roni Alsheikh, Yoram Cohen, Yossi Cohen and Meir Ben-Shabbat respectively) - are all religious-Zionists, wearing RZ traditional head covering – the knitted kippah. These RZ senior officers have been completely loyal to the state and were not publically taken as representatives of RZ.

<sup>222</sup> Hamas appears on the EU terrorist list COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2020/1132 of 30 July 2020. Hamas appealed in 2010 against its continued presence on the EU terrorist list. In December 2014, the EU's General Court annulled the decision, only to reverse it again later, on 19 January 2015. Currently Hamas remains on the EU terrorist list.

sector's core values. This terror evolved around Israeli territorial compromises (*Ibid.*).<sup>223</sup>

RZ formerly convicted terrorists were not outcast and did not pay a social price for their crimes. Many of them actually hold today key positions in Israeli political and cultural scenes. The first Jewish National religious terror group from the early 1950s - the "Zealots' Alliance (*brit hakanaim*), was aiming to forcefully transform Israel to a Jewish theocracy. Its members were arrested in 1951 while attempting to attack the Knesset during a discussion on recruitment of women to the army. Two of the several dozen convicted members of the underground later held prominent positions. The first was Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (1929-2010), who became a prominent RZ spiritual leader and Israel Sephardic Chief Rabbi (*Rishon LeZion*) from 1983 to 1993.<sup>224</sup> The second was Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz (1918-2009), elected as a Member of Parliament for the ultraorthodox party *Agudat Yisrael* in 1951 shortly after his arrest. Lorincz remained in parliament until 1984.

The Jewish underground, operating in the early 1980s, attacked prominent Palestinian and plotted to explode the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in an attempt to hinder the Israeli retreat from Sinai and hasten redemption (SEGAL, 1988). Caught and dismantled in 1984, the underground murdered and injured a number of innocent Palestinian students and political figures in the WB.<sup>225</sup> The members of the

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<sup>223</sup> For a detailed account of on the illegal activity and relations to the state in RZ see chapter VII in Fischer's dissertation (Shlomo FISCHER, 2007, p. 318-403). Fischer, based on scholars such as Taylor and Sprinzak, lay down a theoretical foundation that explains how the entire RZ mainstream affiliated with the settlement movement between 1968 and 2005 (and onward) and the Kookist stream of *Mercaz HaRav* and its offshoots, all fall under the definition of "radical", or as Fischer prefer, "expressivist" or "Kookist" religious Zionists (*Ibid.*, p. 3).

<sup>224</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu is often quoted as saying "I admit my mistake [...] I did not change my opinions, but the path I chose was certainly faulty" (SHELEG, 2006, p. 28). In my early twenties, I worked several times in an event hall serving mainly the RZ public. At one point time, the exact date of which I cannot remember, the Bar Mitzvah of Rabbi Meir Kahane's grandchild was held there. The 13 years old child was an orphan. Both his parents were murdered in December 2000 by a Palestinian gunman in the WB. The child was a scion to the Kahane family, representing the most radical and violent ideas located at the margins of RZ. The entire elite of the radical religious right came to the events, including many of Rabbi Kahane's students. The peak of the event was the arrival of Rabbi Eliyahu, who embraced the young orphan and praised his late father and grandfather. This was a rare glimpse into the radical entourage of one of RZ's prominent rabbis.

<sup>225</sup> In addition, Israeli bomb disposal police officer Suleiman Hirbawi was blinded while dismantling an explosive charge planted in the garage of Ibrahim Tawil, the mayor of al-Bireh (a municipality adjacent to Ramallah).

underground came from the heart of RZ' Kookist school and Gush Emunim. Israeli authorities arrested twenty-nine, and fifteen were convicted in court, among which three received life sentence, while the rest received sentences of up to seven years.

The vast majority of RZ leaders and rabbis condemned the underground. Nevertheless, as we mentioned the convicted terrorists were not outcasts and did not pay a social price, on the contrary. The entire political and social apparatus of RZ recruited to support them. Rabbi Yehuda Hazani, a prominent founding member of Gush Emunim, created a public lobby advocating their release. Three hundred thousand Israelis signed a petition for their release and according to polls, 73% of Israel's Jewish citizens supported their release (SHRAGAI, 1995, p. 132). Within a few years, all the convicted terrorists, except the three serving a life sentence, got out of jail. By 1990, the president also pardoned the three "lifers". Eventually none of the convicted terrorists served more than seven years in prison. Some of the leading figures in the Jewish underground play today prominent roles in the spiritual, intellectual, and political spheres and in the media of the RZ mainstream. Among the convicted members of the Jewish underground are well-known personalities, loved and revered by the settlers, famous rabbis, journalists, and intellectuals, some of them well known also beyond their sector.<sup>226</sup> While the Jewish Underground was an exceptional episode, its members came from the heart of the Kookist RZ stream. They were high-ranking officers in the army, and almost immediately after their early release from jail many of them assumed positions of power and influence within the RZ sector and beyond.

Another type of illegal violence that seems at first marginal but actually stems out of the mainstream core of RZ are lone wolves such as Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir. It is true that these two individuals, like other lone wolves, came from the sociological and political margins of the RZ sector: Goldstein was an American immigrant and a follower of the far-right Rabbi Meir Kahane, Amir was a Jew of

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<sup>226</sup> Among them Moshe Zar and Zeev Zambish Hever are well known land dealers and political wheeler-dealer in the WB; Yehuda Etzion, who planned to explode the Dome of the Rock, is considered an original and appreciated RZ intellectual and a Temple Activist; Haggai Segal is the editor of Makor Rishon, the most important RZ daily newspaper in Israel, and Nathan Nathanson is a leading political adviser for the Jewish Home Party.

Yemenite origin and on the verge of ultraorthodox (*hardal*). However, unlike other RZ lone wolves, Goldstein and Amir executed strategic attacks that generated a chain reaction which contributed to the collapse of the peace process and advanced a political turnover in Israel.

Goldstein massacred 29 Muslim worshipers in Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque during Ramadan and Purim in February 1994,<sup>227</sup> and Amir assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Rabin during a peace rally in November 1995. Both Amir and Goldstein acted from a deep national-religious conviction aiming to halt the Oslo Process by their actions (JUERGENSMEYER, 1996b). Other RZ lone-wolf terrorists such as, for example, Eden Natan-Zada and Asher Weisgan,<sup>228</sup> can mostly be described as mentally unstable or marginally radical, and in any case, most of their actions did not stem similarly from the ideological core nor did they carry significant strategic ramifications.

Lastly, a contemporary ongoing example of illegal RZ violence that seems marginal but can in some respects be treated as stemming from or at least serving the

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<sup>227</sup> Goldstein committed the massacre in Purim, the Jewish festival of "lots". It was also the morning prayer of the first Friday before the Islamic fast of Ramadan and the main prayer hall was full, with many hundreds of Muslim worshipers. The time and place of the massacre overflow with religious significance. Beyond the festive character of this Jewish holiday, Purim carries a potential of religious violence. In the Biblical Book of Esther affiliated with the holiday, the Jews butcher their enemies after being saved from their evil plots. Goldstein was an observant Orthodox Jew, the previous morning he ended the Fast of Esther, lamenting these evil plots, and in the evening, hours before the massacre, he joined the public reading of the Book of Esther in the Synagogue, celebrating the Jewish deliverance and mass killing of their enemies' civil population (SHAMGAR, 1994). The Book of Ester is unique in the sense that the usually powerless Jews were not only saved from extinction by divine intervention, but they also got to take arms and kill their enemies while enjoying political backing. As a follower of Rabbi Meir Kahane, a radical messianic religious-nationalist hardliner, Goldstein was in full awareness of these religious meanings while perpetrating his attack. The symbolism of the act is difficult to overlook. Shooting men in their back while they bow in pray to God, on a Friday of Purim and Ramadan, inside the second most important Mosque and synagogue in the Holy land, where Jews and Muslim compete not only over the present and future but also over the past, not only over the ground but also over the divine. Juergensmeyer (JUERGENSMEYER, 1996a) also noted the Goldstein's massacre overflowing religious significance. Once again, a bloody event in a shared holy space during a holy time generates violence to achieve political goals – halting the Oslo Accords.

<sup>228</sup> Eden Natan-Zada was deserted from the Israeli army in the summer of 2005 in protest of the disengagement from Gaza and Northern Samaria. On August 4 2005, two weeks before the actual evucition of the Israeli settlemewnts in the GS, Natan-Zada opened fire inside a bus in the Arab city of Shefa-Amr located in northern Israel. He killed four Israeli-Arabs and wounded about a dosen others before he was first stopped and later linched to death by mob. On the same day of ther forced eviction from the GS, August 17 2005, Asher Weisgan, an Israeli Jewish settler from Shilo in the WB shot and killed four Palestinian workers and injuered one more in protest against the Israeli eviction (Weisgan was arrested and later committed suicide while in jail). Both Jewish terrorirsts were of RZ background and acted in protest against the Israeli disengagement plan.

RZ mainstream is the hilltop youth gangs. Acting from the illegal outposts throughout the WB, the gangs' violent attacks against Palestinians received the name "Price Tag," as they usually appear in retaliation to an action taken against them by state authorities or Palestinian terror. Their actions range from damage to Palestinian agriculture and property, desecration of holy sites, up to violent attacks on and even murder of innocent Palestinian civilians. For the most part, hilltop youth gangs are comprised of youth from the margins of society. At the same time, as some researchers indicate, it is but a logical generational development based on the Kookist ideology and the example of their grandfathers from Gush Emunim and of the Zionist pioneers of the first and second immigrations of the late Ottoman period and the British Mandate (SINGER, 2016; CARTON, 2011; FRIEDMAN, 2018).<sup>229</sup> As one settler explains this point, their children:

*[...] heard our pioneer stories of how we went on to settle barren hilltops, living in shacks and tents, facing harsh weather conditions, and fighting the Arabs. They on the other hand were born into comfortable and permanent homes, with backyards, parks, shops, schools. They were born into the success stories of their parents and were also taught that settling the Land of Israel is of prime significance. It is only natural that they would wish to go out into the empty hilltops and settle them (ZALZBERG, 2013, p. 13).*

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<sup>229</sup> Shlomo Fischer highlights the alienation of the hilltop youth from the state apparatus and symbols as well as from the settlement's institutions and support. This alienation grew significantly after 2005 Israeli disengagement from GS and Northern WB, highlighting the gap between them and the RZ mainstream (Shlomo FISCHER, 2007, p. 46). Nevertheless, Fischer also acknowledges that Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburg from the WB settlement of Yitzhar (south of Nablus) is the most acceptable religious authority of the hilltop youth (*Ibid.*, p. 399-400). Fischer rightly defines Ginsburg as "a very important contemporary radical religious nationalist thinker". Ginsburg is known to support Goldstein's massacre and to endorse the Halachic book *Torat Hamelech'* of Shapira and Elitzur, which allows of killing non-Jews during times of war and peace.

At the same time, I wish to argue that in contemporary RZ the distance between the central stream and the radical margins is small and bridgeable. In 2019 Rabbi Ginsburg received a prize for "creativity in Torah" by the the "Torah and Wisdom" institute, a small organization that funded by the Israeli Education Ministry. Israel's Education Minister at the time and head of the RZ Jewish Home Party Rabbi Rafi Peretz and RZ MK Bezalel Smotrich both attended the the prize ceremony, honoring Ginsburg with their presence. In previous years central RZ rabbis received the prize, among them Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun and Rabbi Haim Drukman (Haaretz 04/08/2019, JPost 09/08/2019). Another example of the proximity between the margins and the center in RZ in the fact that in recent elections, in 2019 and 2020, and again in March 2021, the Jewish Home and other RZ parties forged a political partnership with *Otzma Yehudit* (Jewish Power), the far-right messianic party based on the Kahanist racist ideology.

The way hilltop youths frame themselves can better place this phenomenon in context. In a detailed post from 06/01/2021 on a Facebook page advocating hilltop youth, Elifa Yered from Maoz Esther outpost explain in details their self-perception as young pioneers going out of the comfort of their established settlement homes to serve the nation's territorial and ideological expansion on the barren hills, combining Torah with pioneering settlers' zeal.<sup>230</sup>

Not only are these youths armed with religious zeal, they are also backed by certain rabbis, and enjoy the protection of the army and the logistic support of the settlers regional councils and of the Yesha Council. Another aspect demonstrating that their marginality is only partial is the lack of unequivocal denunciation and condemnation of the regular violence of these gangs from the spiritual and political leaders of RZ. This leads to the conclusion that, albeit marginal, these violent margins play an active role in defining the boundaries of the RZ mainstream, and in addition help to create a "balance of terror" with the state, defining the boundaries of legitimate action and expand the settlements.

Thus, we may say that albeit being fully integrated into the state apparatus and especially to its mechanisms of organized violence, RZ benefits politically also from illegal violence that stem out of its sectorial margins. Despite portraying the perpetrators as marginal and insane individuals, the illegal violence stems out of the ideological and religious heart of RZ and it serves its core interests. In this sense, similar to Hamas, RZ uses a combination of legal - within the Israeli army - and illegal violence alongside political action while striving for influence and power. On the broader theoretical level, one can argue that religious national movements that strive for hegemony, combine legal and "legitimate" political action in the security forces (and the legal system) alongside organized and individual illegal violence. It is

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<https://www.facebook.com/NoarHagvaot/photos/a.167609737114417/870571670151550/?type=3&theater>. The Facebook page of the outpost Maoz Esther demonstrate how these outposts are connected to the old and established settlements and local administration and mainstream settler RZ establishment. <https://www.facebook.com/pg/%D7%9E%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%96-%D7%90%D7%A1%D7%AA%D7%A8-1981384345425607/posts/>

especially so in states (or societies) with a non-religious national-political elite, and with some sort of functioning mechanisms of democracy and the rule of law.

In 2020 the Israeli government promoted a bill to regulate the illegal outposts of the “hilltop youth”, i.e., to render them “kosher” post factum, relabeling them in pioneering terms as “young settlements” (Arutz Sheva 15/12/2020).<sup>231</sup>

#### From movement to government – taking the driver’s seat

An invitation to a special Conference of Directors of Religious-Zionist Institutions published online in February 2019 reads: "The three-day-conference event (12-14/02/2019) took place at the Dead Sea under the title 'Values in a world of innovation'." The opening day included a mix of RZ politicians, from the sectoral parties such as Bezael Smotrich (The Religious Zionist Party, at the time the National Union) and Rafi Peretz (Jewish Home), but also Minister Ze'ev Elkin, at the time Minister for Jerusalem affairs for the ruling party – the Likud.<sup>232</sup> The mix of rabbis, politicians, sectorial RZ and international artists, former senior officials such as Roni Alsheikh, a former Israeli intelligence officer and head of Police, prominent figures from the business world, directors, innovators and entrepreneurs, all indicated that RZ is no longer a sectorial cultural enclave, but rather the new Israeli hegemony. The logos of the sponsors displayed on the conference’s invitation showed both sectorial companies and RZ media channels alongside large Israeli banks, finance companies, and national health providers (similar to American HMO or the French “mutuelles”). The message was clear “we, Religious-Zionists, are the new hegemony. We are everywhere”.

So far, we have seen how this shift emerged through the historical, ideological and institutional sources of RZ. Now we turn to compare between RZ's and Hamas' move towards the drivers' seat. To do this, we revisit seminal points within this shift in their chronological order, from the shock of the peace process throughout the

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<sup>231</sup> <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/293148>

<sup>232</sup> See invitation and program of the conference: <https://tickchak.co.il/3215?ref=nwc>. The conservative Channel 7 covered the conference and filmed some of the seats: <https://www.inn.co.il/news/393981>.



1990s, through the Second Intifada in the turn of the millennium and the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from the GS and Northern WB in 2005 and up to current days.

### **The 1990's**

The signing of the Oslo accords was a breaking point for those in the Religious-Zionist sector who believed that the State of Israel is the force of redemption and therefore no part of the Land of Israel can be compromised. As we have seen above, such assertions were made by RZYH Kook shortly after the occupation of the territories in 1967 and again by his disciples around the peace accords with Egypt which included a retreat from Sinai and talks of a Palestinian autonomy in the WB and the GS. In fact, RZYH Kook defined territorial compromise as a prohibition that justifies death (“Let him be killed rather than transgress”) and his students, leading rabbis from the whole RZ spectrum, quote these severe prohibitions. No government or democratic process can change this religious assertion, carrying the stamp of divine authority – this Land must not be compromised, even at the price of inner bloodshed.

Between 1992 and 1995, prominent RZ Kookist rabbis, affiliated with both Mercaz HaRav and Har HaMor repeated the halachic prohibition to give up parts of the Land of Israel to the Palestinians ([YESHA RABBIS, 1994b](#); [YESHA RABBIS, 1994a](#)). Rabbi Menachem Felix, one of the early settlers and a prominent student of RZYH Kook wrote after Oslo in Nekudah (December 1993) that “the current government in the State of Israel has no legitimacy to continue rule in the Jewish State [...] it is an illegitimate rule.” Another well known student of RZYH Kook affiliated with Har HaMor, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner wrote:

*even if most of the nation supports this dangerous and disgraceful step – there is still no moral justification. It is not enough that the decision will be made by a political mechanism for it to be moral (AVINER, 1999)*

The revolution was complete, the old liberal and dovish RZ elite was completely replaced by the Kookists in all centers of power. Yosef Burg, one of the founders of the NRP, said in 1994 that the Kookists “praise the integrity of the Land, but they forgot the integrity of the state, the integrity of the Torah, the integrity of the

camp. If through the idea of the integrity of the Land we can reach ideologically to Kahane, this is a great fault".<sup>233</sup>

According to the RZ mind-set they were supposed to gradually become the leaders of the Israeli society. Instead, reality moved in the opposite direction, pushing them to an opposition that was preventing peace. Ideological RZ settlers, both individually and on the communal-ideological level, were under direct danger of displacement from their settlement. Some announced that the secular Zionist movement had ended its historic role. In 1994 Rabbi Arie Stern (born in 1944, graduate of Mercaz HaRav, since 2009 Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem) said:

*Secular Zionism's role is over. It did many things, it holds many virtues, but today it is no longer capable to rally the forces that can raise the banner [...] therefore the time has come for the religious-national movement to take leadership, and it is capable of doing so (STERN, 1994).*

One explanation to this position is that because secular, historical Zionism was not deeply rooted in religion it could not last and could not stand up to the Palestinian national demands (THAU, 2019). RZ political and rabbinical leadership was united in its harsh opposition to Rabin's 25<sup>th</sup> government (1992-1995).<sup>234</sup> Almost all RZ platforms from that period are full of oppositional expressions, (YESHA RABBIS, 1994b; YESHA RABBIS, 1994a). The protest against Rabin and the Oslo process included blunt and sever incitement. This protest included clear RZ elements, culminating in Rabin's assassination in November 1995 by Yigal Amir, a zealot RZ.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> See leaflet issued by Burg's descendant following the recent political partnership between the disciples of Rabbi Meir Kahane and the political successors of the historical NRP before the elections to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Knesset in March 2020: <https://hamigdolor.idea.org.il>. A similar political partnership was consolidated in 2021.

<sup>234</sup> One exception to this opposition was a left wing religious-Zionist movement and a political party called Meimad (a Hebrew acronym for Jewish and democratic state). Prominent figures in Meimad were Rabbi Yehuda Amital (1924-2010) and Rabbi Michael Melchior (born 1954), both of whom served as ministers in left wing governments (1995-6 and 1999-2000 respectively). However, in the RZ society Meimad remained marginal and an insignificant episode.

<sup>235</sup> Many videos of the protests which preceded the murder show significant RZ presence. Many of the protesters call "death to Rabin" and other similar slogans, some of them in what seems to be a national-religious ecstasy. See for example: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MTx8O\\_1hzU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MTx8O_1hzU) and also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiF-YmuA4pw>.

Rabin's murder shook RZ society. Days after the assassination the NRP organized a conference in rare cooperation with moderate RZ elements (Meimad), during which prominent rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein from Gush Etzion (settlements block) expressed remorse for RZ's role in the atmosphere that led to the murder.<sup>236</sup> Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, a founding member of GE, went further and claimed he had concrete information about RZ rabbis who provided Amir with a halachic permission to assassinate Rabin (Haaretz 13/07/2006).<sup>237</sup> Rabbi Shapira from Mercaz HaRav and Rabbi Thau from Har HaMor, together covering most of RZ, mourned Rabin and severely condemned his murder. After the assassination RZ was eaten by guilt and felt as if it was carrying on its shoulder the blame for the general Israeli society (SOREK, 2004).<sup>238</sup>

RZ society felt like an isolated outcast. For the first time since the foundation of the State of Israel the NRP had not been part of government, and the political direction of peace and territorial compromise threatened to abolish RZ's greatest achievement – the settlements that paved the sector's road to hegemony. With its back against the wall, RZ had no other choice but to fight back. The collective RZ sense of remorse did not last long. The first conspiracy theories regarding Rabin's assassinations actually appeared in HaTzofe, the largest RZ daily newspaper, and are still today echoed by prominent RZ figures.<sup>239</sup> The "blame game" backfired.

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<sup>236</sup> See Lichtenstein's speech in <https://www.etzion.org.il/he/02-%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%A4%D7%A9%D7%94-%D7%93%D7%A8%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%95-%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%94>

<sup>237</sup> See link to an interview with Bin Nun for his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.1558511>. Amir himself claimed in his investigations that he received such rabbinical permission (*din rodef*) although he refused to provide the rabbis' names. Bin Nun never provided the names either, but they leaked later on. They were Rabbi Nahum Rabinovitch (1928-2020) and Rabbi Dov Lior (1933-). Later, former Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (1929-2010) was also mentioned (Haaretz 13/07/2006).

<sup>238</sup> See also day of seminar in Israel Democracy Institute held on 02/11/2015 (the murder's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary) titled "the Impact of the Rabin Assassination on Religious Zionism": <https://en.idi.org.il/events/7152>. The entire discussion is available on-line: <https://en.idi.org.il/events/7152>.

<sup>239</sup> "Mordechai Kedar: Yigal Amir didn't kill Yitzhak Rabin" <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/mordechai-kedar-yigal-amir-didnt-kill-yitzhak-rabin-606302> (30/10/2019).

Rabin's assassination derailed the Oslo peace process and brought the political right back to power. It was the first term of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister, leading the anti-Oslo political camp in 1996. Under Likud's government, the NRP returned to government, sitting in Netanyahu's first anti-Oslo coalition, anchoring its sectorial interest in coalition agreements and in the Fundamental Guidelines of Government Policy of Israel's twenty-seventh government, formed on 18/06/1996 (1996), based partly on the NRP's political platform. The shift was also expressed outside politics, in RZ theological and sociological changes, for example regarding the issue of the Temple and the Temple Mount (INBARI, 2009), in parallel and in reaction to Palestinian Islamic activity regarding al-Aqsa Mosque/Compound (TZIDKIYAHU, 2015b).

Unlike for Hamas, there was no negation of the political process as a whole in the 1990s by RZ. On the contrary, if following the 1992 elections, RZ was excluded from political power, it aspired to regain it. Unlike Hamas RZ participated in the 1996 elections and re-entered the circle of decision making. Like Hamas, RZ fought the Oslo Accords and the peace Process using ideology, social and political infrastructures, and violence. Both Hamas and RZ managed to bring about a political change and transform the reconciliation process to an overall clash.

### **2000-2005 The Second Intifada: Losing Life, Gaining Power?**

The turn of the millennium and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked the end of the peace process and the beginning of a new era. The Oslo process failed to bring peace and the Second Intifada erupted in October 2000. It lasted for five years, causing thousands of casualties on both sides. The eruption of violence in the holiest place at a holy day, was pouring national-religious meanings both Jewish-Zionist and Muslim-Palestinian, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Ariel Sharon may have mobilized religion for political ends when he conducted his controversial visit to the Holy Esplanade. Despite the bloody price, it brought Sharon to the Prime Minister office after being tagged as a lame duck. The raging violence during the Second Intifada weakened the pro-peace camp on both sides and strengthened the nationalist and hawkish elements within the political right. In the long run however, the al-Aqsa Intifada heralded the growing religionization of both

society and politics in Israel and Palestine. Israelis and Palestinians developed growing hostility towards each other and towards their own pro-peace political elites. The Fatah created al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in attempt to imitate Hamas. In Israel, it was time for the religious political right to establish itself, led by RZ. This process had an effect, it prepared the grounds to the more religious and more hawkish powers in society, and in the meanwhile a new generation of RZ leadership and public was in the making.

Among the Israelis, the settler communities suffered immensely from the political violence in the WB and GS through the Second Intifada (2000-2005). Normal daily acts such as driving to work became terrifying for the settlers, more than for Israelis residing in the sovereign parts of Israel (similar to Palestinians and maybe, the residents of Jerusalem). The entire political spectrum in Israel and Palestine became more right, nationalist and hawkish, and more religious. Michah Goodman, an Israeli RZ thinker, described this process as the downfall of both the socialist left and the liberal right and the rise to power of the religious right instead, which paved the way for the new RZ leadership in the decade and a half that followed the second Intifada (Micah GOODMAN, 2018).

### **The 2005 Withdrawal from Gaza and its effect on Religious-Zionism**

The end of the Second Intifada was marked by one of the most dramatic crises for the RZ movement – the Israeli unilateral disengagement from GS and northern WB. After a turbulent decade and a half in which their entire settlement project and world view was challenged, this was “the straw that broke the camel's back”. A forced eviction of 26 settlements and about ten thousand settlers from their homes, created a fracture within RZ, and changed their power discourse.<sup>240</sup> Hillel Ben Sasson analyzed the textual change of the contemporary Kookist power discourse on the background of the disengagement (BEN SASSON, 2007). Since Rabin's murder the Israeli media and academia had developed a fear from the violent potential of the Kookist school and RZ altogether, who prefer the integrity of the Land and of their messianic vision over the integrity of democracy and of state institutions. In accordance, the media

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<sup>240</sup> Within five days in August 2005, the Israeli army evacuated 8,600 settlers from the Gaza Strip, which remained vacant of any Israeli settlements. In addition, 680 settlers were evacuated from four settlements in the northern West Bank.

anticipated violent scenarios around the disengagement. Nevertheless, 1751 families and thousands of supporters were evacuated with no violence between settlers and Israeli security forces. Scholars explain this fact by sociologically analyzing the links between RZ and the general Israeli society, and also by delving into the Kookist statist ideology (ROTH, 2014; ALIM, 2013). RZ remained part of the general Israeli society and, unlike Hamas, did not rebel violently against the state or the hegemonic ruling elites.

Instead of going to war against the State of Israel, RZ decided to take it from within by taking positions of power and replacing the leadership (BEN SASSON, 2007; ALIM, 2013). The disengagement, “the expulsion” (*girush*), fell on the RZ settlers as a complete surprise, causing a deep ideological fracture. The Israeli government, headed by no other than the pro-settlements Ariel Sharon, evacuated settlements and gave the GS to the Palestinians. This was the opposite of the move toward redemption as understood by Kookism. Many truly believed with religious conviction that the State of Israel, which they saw as an expression of God’s will in the world, cannot allow such a turn of events.

The entire RZ apparatus was recruited to the civil protest and political opposition to the disengagement. The rabbis stood at the front rows of the rallies alongside RZ parliament members and members of the youth movements. Yesha Council, the NRP, and the entire apparatus, failed to stop the eviction. Beyond the RZ circles, the general Israeli society supported Sharon’s policy. Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun assertion “we failed to settle in the hearts” echoed once again, this time backed by a strategic decision to take the lead. Other elements in RZ turned away from the state and retired from the general public, turning inward. Smaller RZ groups turned their eyes to the heavens, disengaged from politics and developed sectarian characteristics. Another group, led by Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburg of Yitzhar in the WB and his followers, turned to an active revolution of individual violent action in order to advance the messianic model (BEN SASSON, 2007). However, the most significant part of RZ, the statist successors of the Kookist ideology, set out to take key positions within the state. The mainstream of RZ highlighted the dignity and virtue of restraint, patience, and perseverance over a violent break with the state (*Ibid.*, p. 73-76). The ambivalence of

the mainstream RZ regarding the heretic state is expressed well in the words of Rabbi Zalman Melamed (b. 1937), head of Beit El Yeshiva and a student of RZYH Kook:

*Our Rabbi [RZYH] taught us that the state of Israel is not only a technical formalistic frame, for the existence of the nation, a frame with no self-value. He taught us that mere existence of the state carries divine meaning. He educated us not to make the mistake to think that the value of the state will be measured according to the government's action. That we shall not think that when a government behaves fairly then the state has value, and if it does not behave fairly then the state does not carry divine value, since it is a significant stage in the process of realization of the vision of redemption.<sup>241</sup>*

The statist rabbis distinguished between the state and the government (*Ibid.*, p. 78). Thus, they reached the understating that they must change the state from within, as explained by Rabbi Elazar Aharonson in the weekly pamphlet *Shabaton* (parashat Ekev):

*We are not desperate – our spirit will grow stronger, and we will build the spiritual building [...] until the entire land will be Gush Katif [the GS evicted settlements]. An everlasting nation is not afraid of a long road. It knows this is the only way – no shortcuts, not in violence nor by underhanded political opportunism, but through a deep and long-range spiritual building and face to face encounters.*

The spiritual leadership of the central stream of RZ adopted the approach arguing that the long road towards redemption has ups and downs. They decided not to separate from the state, but rather to hug it closer, to take over the positions of power, to “occupy democracy from within”, in the army, in courts, the media, politics and even the arts (*Ibid.*, p. 79-80). The leadership channeled the huge resentment and sense of illegitimacy of the state by the mainstream RZ public, into “constructive forces”, enhancing the role of religion in public life and to “occupy” positions of power within the state mechanism.

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<sup>241</sup> <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/doc/doc12/rabeinu.doc>

On the institutional level, the RZ leadership failed to stop the eviction. The Yesha Council came under unprecedented inner criticism and lost its influence. A more confrontational approach was to be taken from now on. When the High Court of Justice ruled to demolish illegal homes in settlements or to evacuate outposts, the police met an angry public ready to clash. RZ and settlers' youth was shoulder to shoulder with the leadership, like during the eviction of the outpost of Amona in February 2006.

Furthermore, making facts on the grounds by establishing settlements was not enough, since the general public did not rise up against evictions. Rabbi Eliezer Melamed published in September 2005 an article titled "Starting a New Path" which involved three strategies: strengthening resilience within the community, directly criticizing the state authorities, and preparing alternative plans for how the State of Israel and the Israeli society should be organized (ZALZBERG, 2013, p. 11). His son Rabbi Zalman Melamed set out to influencing public opinion by building independent media, both for inner consolidation and for external influence on the general discourse (BEN SASSON, 2020, p. 13). Melamed's first point about creating internal resilience among the religious population can be seen as similar to the desire of the MB to strengthen the character of the Muslim believer, the second point is similar to the way Hamas' media platforms take part in the general public debate. Rabbi Yisrael Rozen, yet another prominent RZ leader, also called to take the Israeli democracy from within by training a serving elite and instilling them into the media, the courts, politics and the arts. This became a real program (*Ibid.*). In the first versions of this work, we wrote that the next step would be to get a RZ Prime Minister elected, as this thesis reached completion this was in fact achieved with the election of Naftali Bennet in June 2021. This required RZ to go out of the boundaries of their sector.

The Israeli disengagement from the GS shook both RZ and Hamas. The differences between them are clear, nevertheless, both groups were keen to achieve growing, if not decisive involvement in national politics and government. In that sense, Israeli and Palestinian national religious movements reacted in a similar way to the same event. They were both "pushed" by it from the margins to center stage.



## From sector to hegemony

*There is no such thing as religious-Zionism. There is only Zionism.  
Period [...] there is one Israeli nation, one state of Israel and one Zionism.  
Religious-Zionism? And what is Zionism that is not religious?*

According to Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun's intonation, his question is clearly rhetoric. What he is actually saying is that Zionism is religious at the outset, sealing his argument with the declaration that he is fed up with all this labeling and sectorial discourse (conference in the Israel Democracy Institute 02/11/2015).<sup>242</sup> Ten years after the disengagement the tone is clear, there is no sector, we are all one. The hidden message is also clear, RZ represents true Zionism, blending Jewish tradition with modernism and nationalism. Hillel Ben Sasson asserts that this process started in the mid 1990s (BEN SASSON, 2020). After the Gaza disengagement plan, in response to political developments towards compromise, RZ leadership underwent a transformative change: integrating into the Zionist movement and its leadership did no longer suffice, now they wanted to replace them. This new ideology seeks to replace secular Zionism by the religious-Zionist, who will hence take on the leadership role. Their new aim is no longer partnership with the Israeli public, but rather "to replace founding Zionism, to spread a new and different conceptual foundation, and to demarcate the borders of legitimacy of politics in Israel" (*Ibid.*, p. 3). Israeli publicist Ari Shavit, a classic representative of the old secular Zionist elite of the labor movement, wrote in 2016 that the successors of Rabbi Kook are Israel's new ruling elite (Haaretz 08/11/2016):

*What they've been doing for the past 49 years is educate, which is impressive, mobilize and enlist, which is exciting. They've gone from one power hub to the next and taken it over, which is legitimate.*

*The religious avant-garde worked by the good old system of one more dunam and one more goat. Thus, gradually, they established an elite, and have become the almost sole elite. They have turned the knitted kippa into the new hegemony.*

<sup>242</sup>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLmCtYOSs2DQz-AadIKWjVBQf4FgAQMVF&v=Gr32SqliwDal&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLmCtYOSs2DQz-AadIKWjVBQf4FgAQMVF&v=Gr32SqliwDal&feature=emb_title)

For RZ to lead the Israeli society, its main political vessel, the NRP, had to change. This party reached the end of its historical path. At this point in time, RZ politics had to redefine its relations both with the RZ rabbis and with the general - secular - Israeli society.

#### The Jewish Home Party - Consolidation of Power (2008 onwards)

In order to increase its political capital, the NRP, which historically represented the RZ sector, transformed itself to the Jewish Home Party (HaBayit Hayehudi) in 2008. It was formed as a political faction that incorporated and integrated several existing right-wing religious parties into the NRP. Towards its first elections in 2013 the Jewish home elected a new chairman – Naftali Bennett. Bennett was the new face of RZ – a young and successful Ashkenazi man, an officer in an elite military unit, a wealthy high-tech entrepreneur, with public record both at Yesha Council and with relevant experience after working as Chief of Staff for Benjamin Netanyahu. Bennett is what RZ call a “light religious”, wearing a small, symbolic, yarmulke. He brought with him his friend and former colleague to the New NRP – Ayelet Shaked, a secular woman who shares with Bennett the ultra-nationalist world view but not the religious one. Rabbi Rontzki rationalizes the secular elements into the NRP by asserting that “they are not religious in the narrow sense of the word, but they are greatly religious in many other ways” (*Ibid.*, p. 21). The practices that defined Jewish observance for centuries, such as strictly keeping Shabbat and Kashrut, are not central to such definitions. The political beliefs are what now define not only a person’s Zionism, but also a person’s Jewishness.

This marked the direction of the change – appealing to new crowd of Zionists, nationalists, maybe traditional or even secular, who are not necessarily part of RZ. The Jewish Home party achieved a huge success in these first elections, winning 12 seats. Together with RZ MKs in other parties, the total number of RZ MKs in the 20th Knesset was 20, a growth of 7 seats from the prior Knesset (ZALZBERG, 2013, p. 1).

It is not necessary to survey all the details of the turbulent Israeli politics (SHELEG (ed.), 2019).<sup>243</sup> Since January 2013 and up to March 2021, Israel underwent six national election campaigns. Much happened during this time, but the general direction remains clear. According to Bennet the political battle is to replace the old guard (Arutz Sheva 13/12/2014):

*We are not going to remain quiet, or be ashamed of ourselves, or feel any sense of inferiority. On the contrary. The national public is raising its head high [...] we are proud of who we are: Lovers of the people, the Torah, and the Land.*

But this shift towards nationalism and the secular public could not go down without a reaction from the more religious-conservative wing of RZ. Historically, RZ rabbis did not interfere directly in the NRP's political work. But following the 2005 crises and the founding of the Jewish Home Party, RZ rabbis became increasingly involved in the political game. An indication for the Rabbis aspiration for more power over the political sphere can be seen for example in Rabbi Eli Kaplan (in 2015) and Rabbi Haim Druckman (in 2014) clear statement that the members of the Jewish Home party should turn to the party's forum of rabbis, a forum created to consult the party on every issue (BEN SASSON, 2020, p. 21).

It was only a question of time until the conservative section of RZ and the HARDAL would split from the mainstream RZ approach. This split is religious and cultural and it is also expressed in political parties. On the one hand the RZ mainstream is becoming more national and getting closer to the "general society", and maybe, as a consequence, is becoming less religious in the traditional sense. The more conservative rabbis, especially those affiliated with Har HaMor and the HARDAL movement, tried to strengthen their involvement in the Jewish Home political affairs through a mechanism called *Da'at Torah* (Knowledge of Torah), a concept borrowed from ultraorthodox Judaism to enable a rabbinic input on matters that are not strictly halachic (BROWN, 2005). Eventually the Jewish Home Party dissolved in 2018 onto the

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<sup>243</sup> Israel Democracy Institute has issued a comprehensive volume titled "From the Margins to the Fore? Religious Zionism and Israeli Society", which comprehensively surveys in depth the political, cultural, and sociological aspects of this process (SHELEG (ed.), 2019).

more mainstream Yamina headed by Naftali Bennet, which became Israel's first RZ Prime Minister in 2021, and the more conservative "Religious Zionism Party" headed by Bezalel Smotrich which remained in the opposition and teamed with the more radical and Kahanist elements, up to that point relatively marginal in RZ mainstream politics.

Smotrich is a conservative RZ politician affiliated with Rabbi Tau's yeshiva of Har HaMor, accepting the rabbis' involvement in politics constitute a greater religiosity than simply following their religious decrees. The RZ rabbis, by large, accept the democratic rules of the game: they will impact the Jewish Home's position, but if their opinion forms a minority position in the Knesset they will accept the majority vote (BEN SASSON, 2020). RZ political equation is between the "light", who take more political power on one hand, and the more messianic and conservative forces on the other hand. However, in that equation, both sides grow stronger, gain more influence and become more mainstream in the general Israeli society.

By 2019, Bennett and Shaked left the Jewish Home Party and formed the New Right Party (Yamina). Free from the rabbis' restrictive involvement and the constraints of the conservative and more religious wing, Bennett and Shaked could now take an independent position, nationalistic and religious to an extent that enabled them to approach wider publics. At the same time, they could politically team with the Jewish Home as a united RZ block as they did for example during the second elections of 2019, which took place in September.

After an ongoing political crisis, in a country entangled with the Coronavirus pandemic, and as the fourth election campaign in two years approached, Naftali Bennett decided that the time was ripe for a RZ candidate for the Prime Minister's office and announced his candidacy for the job (the Times of Israel 23/12/2020). On June 13, 2021, as mentioned in the introduction of this work, Naftali Bennett became the first religious-Zionist Prime Minister of Israel.

As Kookist rabbis came to realize, after settling on the hills of the WB, the time had come to settle in the hearts of the Israeli public. Since the term "settle in the hearts" was coined in the 1980s, the RZ movement came to magnificent institutional, spatial, and geo-political achievements and greatly developed its settlement

endeavor, but at the same time suffered great losses with territorial evictions. In the post-Kookist era, the mainstream of RZ and the settlement movement have moved towards the driver's seat, asking to steer the state of Israel all together. This move towards the center comes with a cost, but it is not clear that the more ideological and zealot margins of this sector are able to pay and might even take arms to fight future evictions or even commit group suicide (ARAN, 2013).

## Conclusions

This part of the dissertation (Chapters Three and Four) dealt with the shift from the social and political margins towards the political center-stage of both Hamas and RZ since the 1990s. The main innovation of this part of the work is the comparative assessment which is achieved by juxtaposing both chapters with one another. The comparison follows the differences and similarities of this shift to hegemony through the process of politicization and institutionalization in both sides.

The work in this part is based on primary sources alongside an analysis of the existing knowledge and secondary sources in Arabic, Hebrew as well as in English and French, analyzing founding documents and archival materials, online sources such as official and news websites, new archives, social media and other forms of new media alongside personal memoirs and (auto)biographies. Intellectual products and policy papers of Hamas oriented intellectuals are used here as primary and secondary sources as well. While studies on Hamas are generally somewhat harder to find, much of contemporary RZ thought is available online. Studies and testimonies on the topic are abundant and discussing the shift of power within RZ is *bon ton*. However, comparing the shift from margins to hegemony of RZ to that of Hamas constitutes, as far as I know, a unique and innovative aspect of this dissertation.

Some previous works have mentioned Hamas' shift towards politicization and governance (BACONI, 2018). Others have mentioned RZ's shift towards hegemony (BEN SASSON, 2020), but no one has yet offered a comparative, parallel and juxtaposed examination of both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim national-religious movement's shift from the margins to center-stage. As the two chapters above exemplify, this NR shift to hegemony, is not constituted of two separate moves which happen independently in the Palestinian Hamas and in the Israeli religious-Zionism, but is rather one complex and intertwined process of strong-national-religionization of the Israeli-Palestinian political and social spheres. Not seeing this connection and insisting on focusing in each side of this conflict as if it they were completely separate and independent one from the other, fails to understand the gordian knot of interdependencies bounding together both sides of this national-religious conflict and the Holy Land.

First, we examined the rationale of comparing Hamas and RZ by surveying the differences and similarities between them. Then we explained the importance of the institutional theory of RN as a venue to explore the shift of Hamas and RZ from the social and political margins to the center stage. This dissertation compares between Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Hamas' founder and spiritual leader, and Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, the founder of the RZ Kookist school of thought and the spiritual leader of Gush Emunim. The story of these two main protagonists, who also built the institutions for their NR movements strive for power, is told in light of Sela's theoretical assertion that when revolutionary national-religious movements wish to acquire political influence, they usually shift from the single founding charismatic leader to "a hierarchic structure of representative institutions and rational political decision-making" (SELA, 2015, p. 31). Sela wrote this assertion about Hamas, however, as it seems, it can also be applied on RZ. As the NR institutional logic indicates, part of the power building process of NR movements is the foundation of a NR university. This dissertation juxtaposes the role of the RZ Bar-Ilan University and that of the Islamic University in Gaza in the process of socialization and politicization of RN in Israel and Palestine. These two comparisons – for example, are innovative and unique to this dissertation. Both merit further research, delving into the contents of the specific case-studies and also in a comparative context with other, similar cases around the world.

The innovative approach of this part of the work lies in the combined analysis of political history, of theological-ideological texts, and of institutional structures. Hamas' 1988 charter is compared to Gush Emunim's founding document Annex number 1 (GUSH EMUNIM, 1974), standing on the structural and functional differences on the one hand, and the similarity in contents and deep NR political essences on the other hand. Hamas 2006 entry to the political game, is juxtaposed with RZ's political renewal and the foundation of the 2008 Jewish Home party. And Hamas' 2017 document can be seen as similar, not in content or context, but in essence, to the founding in 2018 of the new RZ party Yamina – both indicate a clear move away from ideological rigidity and sectarianism, towards the political mainstream and governance.

Chapters Three follows Hamas' political history, starting with the relevant historical background, its founding 1988 Charter, the changes in approach to political participation between the 1996 and 2006 elections and all the way to the 2017 Document of General Principles and Policies. Chapter Four follows the parallel political history of RZ and its progenies, with the necessary methodological adaptations, emphasizing social structures and institutions.

The structural difference between the two movements, as explained above, dictated different methodology in each of the chapters. However, the comparison between RZ and Hamas remains a necessary outlook for a new and deeper understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian case-study. This approach of a juxtaposed and comparative scrutinization of the political and institutional approach of the shift to hegemony made by both Israeli and Palestinian RN is the main innovation of this dissertation.

Another accomplishment of this part of the dissertation is in proposing a new organizing framework of the existing knowledge. In the chapters above the shift to power of Hamas and RZ is placed on a new theoretical and conceptual infrastructure that was laid down in the first part of the dissertation (Chapters One and Two). In this way, the political, institutional, historical and sociological approach to the shift surveyed above, are reviewed in a new context, that of SRN, at the outset. The logic presented in the first part of the dissertation continues in part two with the historical background of both NR trends. The formation of the Kookist ideology and Gush Emunim is juxtaposed with the foundation of the Islamic center of the MB in Palestine throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Both chapters end with a chronological review of important events relevant to the shift.

At this point the similarities in the shift on both sides are clear, both Israeli and Palestinian RN moved from the margins to hegemony. "Together" they halted the peace process. Each side combined its own institutional power with ideological fervor and political violence, and managed to replace, in variable degrees of success, the ruling elites. However Hamas, suffering from internal illegitimacy, treated as an illegal entity by Israel and the international community, and having negated itself political participation at first, had to go through a greater distance than RZ. This gap might



somewhat explain the fact that despite the harsh rift, most of RZ remained loyal to the state of Israel, while Hamas violently split from the PA. RZ did not start a civil war with the Israeli liberal and secular elites, it remained within the boundaries of the Israeli political game. Instead of a rift, RZ set out to take the political system from within. Eventually, so it seems, Hamas is seeking to reintegrate into the Palestinian political sphere, and it is the Fatah, Israel and the international community which are preventing it from doing so.

The institutional, political and sociological approach only goes a limited distance. In RN movements, which are usually highly ideological, institutions, political and sociological actions are seen as subjugated to ideology. In an interview in February 1994, Rabbi Bin Nun affirmed that "there is a foundational difference between the worldview and the entity that is Gush Emunim" (HARNOY, 1994, p. 286). As Bin Nun then expands, what is more important than RZ's specific entities is the robust NR ideology that is its backbone. A similar assertion can be made concerning Hamas. For this reason, the next and last part of this dissertation focuses on the central ideological themes of Israeli and Palestinian SRN.

## Part 3

### Chapter 5: Self and Other: Contemporary National-Religious Polemics

In the following chapter, we will examine how Israeli and Palestinian SRN interact and rise to prominence through a dialectic of ideological discourse. Since the 1990s, both RZ and Hamas advanced to center stage in their societies by posing a comprehensive ideological worldview. The main interlocutors who lead the discourse surveyed in this chapter are Jewish and Muslim NR clergy, public intellectuals, and politicians. The core arguments of strong national-religious movements will be examined, such as divine election, a promised land to a chosen people, the myth of autochthony (“we were here first”) and Jerusalem – a holy city which is an embodiment of the entire national-religious argument on both sides. These argumentations constitute the prototype of a national-religious ethos (Anthony SMITH, 2003a; BEN-ISRAEL, 1986b). Until now we have conceptualized SRN and have considered its shift towards center stage throughout the 1990s through the prism of institutionalization and politicization. Importantly, this process of institutionalization rests upon an ideological framework. Henceforth, it is worthwhile to examine this framework through several of its prominent themes.

Both ideologies, Islamic-Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli RN, are rooted in their own national and religious context, nevertheless, they mirror one another, they conduct an indirect debate as well as more direct polemics. Both ethoses relate to the same land, to the same holy city and sites, and thus each ethos build itself also through the negation of the other. Our examination will stress the existence of some parallel lines between the Palestinian and Jewish RN movements, particularly in their engagement with these concepts since the 1990s onwards. Moreover, it shows that these movements’ manner of engaging these ideas are, to an extent, entangled in one another. This entanglement is constituted through a dialectic between these movements’ ideological discourses.

From its early establishment onwards, both the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalist movements have been preoccupied in generating their

own historical narratives of Israeli/Palestinian nationhood. The SRN intellectual product examined here runs contrary to the predominant view of historians of nationalism such as Eric Hobsbawm, according to which historians should refrain from personal commitments to political nationalist agendas (HOBSEBWM, 1991, p. 12).<sup>244</sup> These intellectual products go beyond national propaganda, advocacy or apologetics; they are national-religious polemics. The writers examined below echo widespread opinions and generate an influential discourse (more on “common knowledge” below). Therefore, instead of addressing these texts as academic scholarship, one should address them rather as cultural texts, i.e., as testimonies of contemporary national-religious polemic thought, somewhat like texts produced by RN clergy and politicians.

SRN renders politics and religion inseparable. Thus, SRN discourse is created and shaped equally by religious clergy, public intellectuals, and politicians. Public intellectuals are a group of interlocutors located between clergy and politicians, since they shape SRN discourse by molding and transforming religious talk into politics. In many cases these intellectuals hold simultaneously academic, religious, and public titles (be it in the media, politics, or civil society). Entrusted with both ideas and policymaking, this group of interlocutors play a connecting role between the religious clergy and the politicians.

In the secular societies, politicians and lawmakers are the highest, in many cases the sole, source of authority. For ultraorthodox Jews, religious clergy plays this role. Similarly, in many Islamic societies, religious ruling is in the hands of institutionalized Islamic scholarship.

In RZ and Palestinian political Islam, which are two interconnected manifestations of SRN, authority does not lie exclusively in the hands of the religious clergy, or of politicians and of the state’s legal system. It has become open to interpretation in the public sphere, mainly by public intellectuals of academic or independent education. The chapter presented herein discusses some of the central

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<sup>244</sup> By SRN intellectual product I refer here not necessarily to the work of intellectuals who also happen to belong to the RN sector, but rather to work which is essentially SRN, and thus subjected to a different logic and is judged by a different set of norms and standards.

Israeli and Palestinian SRN concepts. The main interlocutors examined here are public intellectuals and ideologists, and to a lesser extent clergymen and politicians. Reflecting their ultra-conservative societies, these actors are all hegemonic national-religious men. While national-religious feminism exists, women are to a great extent still absent from the discussions shaping the core of the NR narratives.

The chapter is structured as follows: after presenting the main characters whose works we will examine; we explain what we mean by the opposition between polemics and academic writing. We then turn to examine recurrent themes of the polemics between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim RN such as the sanctity of Jerusalem, the notion of promised Land, the right of return, etc.

#### The main interlocutors

Religious-nationalism in Israel and Palestine, like elsewhere, was first created as a movement and led by religious clerks. It was further institutionalized and politicized by public figures and NR politicians. Thus national-religious clerks and politicians are the immediate suspects to represent the national-religious ideology and practice. However, like other fundamentalists, religious-nationalists often have one leg in the modern (and mostly, allegedly, secular) world, and another leg in tradition. While NR politicians bring religion into the mostly secular realm of state politics, and religious clerks represent the traditional religious discourse, public intellectuals who come from the NR sector and deal with relevant fields of knowledge, mainly from the humanities and social sciences, constitute a blend of modern-academic and traditional-religious learning, with an understanding of both worlds. These people are the new and influential cultural agents and the agents of change, sometimes bridging between the clerical and political worlds, sometimes completing the two with an intellectual undertone, participating in the public discourse, partaking in the ongoing effort to shape the public sphere. In Gramsci's understanding of the concept of hegemony, intellectuals play an especially important role, and specifically traditional religious intellectuals.

At this stage we reiterate our methodological comment: the academic writing of such intellectuals is regarded here as a primary source. This is a risky but necessary methodology. In our quest for understanding we will do our best to avoid ad hominem argumentation and approach this endeavor with caution and humility.

Mordechai Kedar and Asaf Malach are two Israeli academics and public intellectuals who echo the religious Zionist ideology, theology and politics no less than politicians and rabbis. Both of them are graduates of BIU and started their public activity around the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in Annapolis.

Kedar's academic qualifications are not directly connected to his current field of interest. He submitted his PhD on Syrian political rhetoric at BIU in 2000, after retiring in 1995 from the Israeli Military Intelligence with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He sometimes mentions having some experience in interfaith activity.

Kedar's academic product is scarce,<sup>245</sup> but since 2008, he has become a leading and influential public intellectual and a sought-after speaker on Arab-Israeli affairs. His popular articles and lectures are widely quoted by many Israelis. A fluent Arabic speaker, Kedar uploads his popular television appearances in the Arabic media to YouTube with subtitles, where they receive up to hundreds of thousands of views. Kedar became famous for his controversial confrontations on these programs, mainly on Al-Jazeera channel, in which he negates the existence of a Palestinian nation and Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam. In Israeli terms, Kedar is a media "star" and some of his videos were shared on the official Facebook page of Naftali Bennett, current Prime Minister of Israel and at the time head of the national-religious Jewish Home party and Minister of Education. On his part, Kedar publicly supported Bennett in 2012 when he ran for the head of the Jewish Home Party, calling the national-religious public in Israel to enlist to the party and support Bennett, expressing hope to see him in the future as Israel's Prime Minister (SRUGIM 09/07/12) - a wish which came true less than a decade later. During October-November 2019 Kedar was widely criticized after a speech he gave at a demonstration in which he expressed doubt about the fact that

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<sup>245</sup> According to the catalogues of Israel's national library and that of BIU Kedar has two to three publications, including his 1998 PhD dissertation and one or two short articles (in Hebrew).

Yigal Amir was the murderer of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, supporting instead some conspiracy theories regarding the famous political murder.

In a profile article about Kedar in the popular Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth (Yediot 17/12/17), Kedar describes himself as an “Israel Jew and a Zionist who defends his nation, his religion and country against the peoples of the desert who do not accept the state of Israel [...]”. In the interview, Kedar argues that mentioning the Jewish historical and religious precedence:

*pulls the rug out from under the Islamic narrative that Jerusalem is holy to Islam and not to Judaism. According to the Islamic approach Judaism is a void religion and only Islam is the true religion. I am not willing to accept this label that deprives the Jews of any right. According to Islam you and me [addressing the journalist] need to live under the wings and the mercy of Islam as humiliated Dhimmis. When I tell them that we are not under their wing and that we are not the descendants of apes and pigs as you believe us to be, this collides with their religious axioms [...] I fear only God all mighty. I'm afraid that on Judgment Day it will turn out up there that I studied more about Islam than on Judaism and that this will be against me.*

Asaf Malach is a scholar of nationalism and political philosophy and a public intellectual, affiliated with the ideological political religious-right and with Naftali Bennett in particular. In 2007, still a Ph.D. candidate at the time, Malach founded the Jewish Statesmanship Center in which he still serves as founding director and head of the Ethics and International Relations Program.

Malach, like Kedar, is a religious-nationalist deeply embedded in the messianic religious right. Malach's positions aroused a public controversy when the Israeli national-religious Minister of Education Naftali Bennett appointed him as director of the Committee for Citizenship Studies in Israel's Ministry of Education (HAARETZ 15/11/15). Citizenship studies is a topic taught in Israeli middle schools (junior-high) and high schools and it has been at the heart of an ongoing controversy since the 1990s and even more so since 2012. These controversies regarding the content and methodology of civic studies in Israeli schools touch the heart of the conflict between

the Jewish and the democratic elements of Israeli society that stand at the core of Israel's identity crisis. Bennett's appointment of Malach was seen by many as sectarian, enforcing the values of a small sector in the Israeli society on the majority, that of the Jewish orthodox nationalist-religious sector that is ideologically located at the far end of the political right.

Some national religious Rabbis are also mentioned in the chapter. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag is quoted below in the section on borders of the Holy Land. Leibtag teaches mainly at the national-religious Yeshivah Har Etzion, located in the relatively liberal West Bank settlement Alon Shvut. He is a renowned scholar of Bible studies, known for his mix of modern and traditional methods and online teaching. He is an example of the modernist school of RZ rabbis located on the relatively liberal end of the spectrum. Conservative RZ rabbis such as Aviner and Melamed, already mentioned in the previous chapters, are brought in for comparison, demonstrating that on ideological core issues such as the Land of Israel, there is a wide consensus between RZ rabbis, both liberals and conservatives, which distinguish the NR sector from other groups within Jewish orthodox.

On the Palestinian Islamic NR side, we will focus on three intellectuals, all of whom have combined academic, religious and political roles in various degrees. The first is Mustafa Abu Sway,<sup>246</sup> a professor of Islamic philosophy at al-Quds University. Since 2013 Abu Sway holds the integral chair for the study of Imam al-Ghazali,<sup>247</sup> an Islamic and academic position funded by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and shared by the al-Quds University and the Islamic Waqf at the al-Aqsa Mosque. On top of his scholarly work, Abu Sway has published dozens of academic articles, mainly in Arabic and English, on Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from an Islamic perspective. He is also a member of the Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of al-Aqsa

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<sup>246</sup> Abu Sway obtained his BA from Bethlehem University and his MA and PhD from Boston College. See list of selected publications in his personal page on al-Quds University's website. <https://www.alquds.edu/en/staff-profiles/faculty-of-arts-staff/116-department-of-philosophy/465-mustafa-abu-sway.html#selected-publications>.

<sup>247</sup> Al-Ghazali (died in 1111) is a famous Islamic Middle Ages theologian and scholar. The *wakfiyya* of Abu Sway's position is available online in English: "The King Abduallah II Ibn al-Hussein Waqf for the Integral Chair for the Study of Imam al-Ghazali's work and the Holy al-Aqsa Mosque and al-Quds University", Designed and produced by MABDA, The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre a branch of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought © 2012.

Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, and a member of the Islamic Waqf Council in Jerusalem.<sup>248</sup> Between 2012 and 2018, Abu Sway was regularly listed among the “World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims” issued by the Amman based Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, affiliated with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.<sup>249</sup> In the YouTube Channel “Al-Masjed Al-Aqsa” multiple videos of Abu Sway are available. Dressed in traditional Islamic garments, he can be seen preaching or giving theology lessons about al-Ghazali’s thought inside al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>250</sup>

Indeed, Abu Sway seems like a serious scholar. He taught at the International Islamic University in Malaysia and was a visiting scholar in several American academic institutions. He also co-authored several editions of an Islamic 7th grade education book for the Palestinian ministry of Education.<sup>251</sup> Abu Sway is also involved in public issues and many of his papers deal with Islam and the Palestinian issue.<sup>252</sup> In addition, Abu Sway participated in interfaith dialogue activity.<sup>253</sup> Abu Sway shares Kedar’s conviction that the conflict between the Palestinian-Muslims and the Israeli-Jews has a significant theological and religious dimension. Despite Abu Sway’s academic background, unlike Kedar, he does not even pretend to talk the academic language. Abu Sway’s polemic discourse is expressed completely in religious terms and carry political conclusions.

We linger on the character of Abu Sway to consider the important question of whether he is a Hamas member, or an independent moderate Islamist. The first thing to take into account is that since Abu Sway lives in East Jerusalem, which is subjected

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<sup>248</sup> <https://www.alquds.edu/en/staff-profiles/faculty-of-arts-staff/116-department-of-philosophy/465-mustafa-abu-sway.html>

<sup>249</sup> <https://www.themuslim500.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TheMuslim500-2018-low.pdf>

<sup>250</sup> This YouTube Channel is probably a private page managed by Sheikh Khaled al-Mugraby: <https://www.youtube.com/user/almsjd/search?query=%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%88+%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A>. al-Mugraby is a known preacher that gives lessons and sermons at al-Aqsa Mosque and was arrested for incitement to violence in November 2015 and sentenced to 11 months in jail. See also: [http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=157&doc\\_id=17532](http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=157&doc_id=17532).

<sup>251</sup> Abu Sway (& co.), *Al-tarbiyyah al-Islamiyyah: lilsaf al-Sabi al-Asay* (Islamic education for the seventh grade, primary school, editions 2001, 2002, 2010).

<sup>252</sup> Abu Sway’s bio on the website of the Centre of Islamic Sciences: [www.cis-ca.org/bios/mustaf~1.htm](http://www.cis-ca.org/bios/mustaf~1.htm).

<sup>253</sup> I have seen Abu Sway on several interreligious occasion when I worked as the secretary of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land between the years 2013-2016. See also USIP report: “Healing the Holy Land: Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine (Yehezkel Landau, September 2003), pp. 33-34.



to the Israeli law, he can not openly be an active Hamas member without suffering constant arrests by Israeli authorities, according to whom Hamas is an illegal terror organization.

Some American pro-Israeli national-religious and fundamentalist elements claim Abu Sway is affiliated to Hamas, in an attempt to undermine his legitimacy.<sup>254</sup> In addition, in 2006 an article in the Israeli press stated that Abu Sway is a Hamas member “holding moderate positions and under certain conditions supports normalization with Israel” (HAARETZ 16/02/06),<sup>255</sup> though it is unclear on what basis such claims are made.

What is known is that Abu Sway was connected to Hamas following the organization's victory in the 2006 elections, in the following way: at the time, Hamas' Shura council was expected to recommend Abu Sway as Minister of Jerusalem Affairs. However the Council also recommended Adnan al-Husseini, who was clearly not a Hamas member, as the Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.<sup>256</sup> The fact that Husseini was also mentioned by Hamas for a ministerial role indicates that Hamas was looking for candidates in Jerusalem that were deeply devoted to Islamic values and the Palestinian cause but that were not necessarily affiliated with the movement.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Pipes is an American pro-Israeli conservative intellectual and Middle East researcher. He is the leading figure in attacking Abu Sway: Daniel Pipes & Asaf Romirowsky, New York Post, October 20, 2003, Fulbright's Terrorist Tie <http://www.danielpipes.org/1287/fulbrights-terrorist-tie>; Daniel Pipes and Asaf Romirowsky, New York Sun, January 27, 2004, Hamas in Florida Classroom <http://www.danielpipes.org/1487/hamas-in-florida-classroom>. In 2006 Pipes received the “Guardian of Zion Award” from BIU.

These arguments are vigorously repeated by a number of Christian-evangelical groups (and supporters of conspiracy theories so it seems), trying to hinder him from appearing on American campuses. Dexter Van Zile, the Christian media analyst for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), published an article titled “Muslim supremacist to speak at Elmhurst College in April” on the website of the Jewish News Syndicate on 22/03/16, around Abu Sway's participation in a conference there on: “Spirituality in an Age of Violence: Al-Ghazali's Relevance Today”. Van Zile's article opens with the words: “Mustafa Abu Sway is a Muslim supremacist.” <https://www.ins.org/opinion/muslim-supremacist-to-speak-at-elmhurst-college-in-april/>.

<sup>255</sup> These arguments were made by former Haaretz's Palestinian Affairs correspondent Arnon Regular. Regular, so it seems, contradicts himself when stating that Abu Sway, “under certain conditions supports normalization with Israel”, and at the same time a member of Hamas, a movement that strongly rejected normalization (HAARETZ 16/02/06).

<sup>256</sup> At the time Husseini was the long-time director-general of the Islamic Waqf in Jerusalem, an institute known for its civil and administrative management of Al-Aqsa Mosque, strongly affiliated with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

<sup>257</sup> In 2007 Adnan al-Husseini left his office as director-general of the Islamic Waqf (a position he filled since 1989). The following year he assumed the role of Governor of the P.A. Jerusalem District, and in

This could very well result from conditions put forward by PA president Abu Mazen on the composition of the government, to preserve his power and to prevent Israeli and international sanctions.

Let us now turn to elements pointing in the other direction - that is, elements which seem to indicate that Abu Sway is not in fact a member of Hamas. First, we note that Abu Sway's second article examined here appears on Hamas' virtual library alongside other writers who are not members of Hamas.<sup>258</sup> No evidence is provided that connects Abu Sway institutionally or ideologically to Hamas. Second, his position at al-Quds University under the presidency of Sari Nusseibeh, a prominent member of Fatah in the past and a well-known political dove, is another indication pointing against direct affiliation to Hamas. Moreover, shortly after the second intifada ended Abu Sway gave several talks about Islam in a Jewish orthodox synagogue in West Jerusalem, a step far from Hamas' anti-normalization approach.<sup>259</sup>

It could be that an outspoken representative of Palestinian political Islam and national-religious thought in eloquent English is seen as posing a threat, and that an attack of delegitimization is required to limit and silence him. His engagement with Westerners and with Israeli Jews doesn't seem to be taken into account. This repeated (yet unsupported) affiliation of Abu Sway to Hamas is another indication of his importance and relevance as a public intellectual. It also proves that Palestinian Islamic religious nationalism can exist outside Hamas, while keeping some sort of indirect connection with the movement.

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2012 he also became the Minister for Jerusalem Affairs. At the same time Abu Sway remained an academic and was not directly involved in politics. A diplomatic source that working closely with Abu Sway told me that Abu Sway refused Hamas' proposal (conversation with confidential source, 28/08/2018), since he wanted to maintain his intellectual independence as an Islamic thinker. This source also pointed to me that Abu Sway is influenced by Sufi teachings.

<sup>258</sup> <https://hamas.ps/ar/library/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9>, Hamas' virtual library (in Arabic). The original article was published in Arabic in 2014 and was available on the websites of both Hamas and al-Zaytouna Center. I first worked with the Arabic version, yet in the meanwhile an English version of the article was published in Beirut by al-Zaytouna as part of their comprehensive compilation on Hamas, first published in Arabic (2015) and two years later in English. For the sake of facilitation, I will refer here to the 2017 English version (MOHSEN, 2017b)

<sup>259</sup> Ofer Zalberg, analyst of the International Crisis Group attended several of these meetings which took place at the Yakar liberal orthodox synagogue. Conversation with Zalberg, 28/08/2018. More than anything such activity would indicate the influence of Sufi doctrines.

Sami Khater is another Muslim-Palestinian NR public intellectual and polemicists, he is a founding member of Hamas' branch outside Palestine and a member of the movement's politburo.<sup>260</sup> Khater's profile page on Hamas' official website provides some biographical details (also in the Arabic version of his article available on Hamas' and al-Zaytouna's websites, but not in the English version). Khater was Born in 1949 in the West Bank town of 'Aqraba and obtained his academic degrees in economy and political sciences from Baghdad University. He is involved in much of the organization's political activity and at the same time appears as a commentator on different media platforms and authored numerous articles, op-eds and political analysis. Khater is also involved in training political media cadres for Hamas. He carries different titles such as member of board of trustees of the international al-Quds Institute and a member of the National Islamic Congress.

Another public intellectual is Yusuf Rizqa, a professor of literature at IUG and former Hamas' politician (who served as Palestinian minister and political adviser to Ismail Haniyeh, Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau since May 2017 and former Hamas' Prime Minister). Khater and Rizqa, whom we already mentioned in chapter three of this dissertation, are both public intellectuals who are also officially member of Hamas.

Several other Palestinian Muslim clergymen and intellectuals who appear in the chapter are Sheikh Ekrima Sai'd Şabrī from Jerusalem (born 1939), Muhammad Diab Abu Saleh (born 1946) from Hebron, and Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh from Gaza (1952-2003). Sabri is a senior Islamic clerk who served as General Mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories between 1994 and 2006.<sup>261</sup> He is currently a preacher at the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council (reestablished in Jerusalem in 1967). Today Sabri is considered to be the most prominent Palestinian voice identified with the Muslim Brother's ideology in East Jerusalem (KOREN, 2017).

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<sup>260</sup> <https://hamas.ps/ar/politicalofficemember/27>, accessed on 08/08/2018.

<sup>261</sup> Sabri was a teacher and a Principal in the Islamic Al-Aqsa Secondary School in Jerusalem starting from the late 1960s. He learned Islamic Shari'a at the Universities of Baghdad and al-Najah in Nablus and obtained a PhD in General Fiqh from the famous al-Azhar University of Egypt in 2001. He was appointed by Arafat as the General Mufti of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories in 1994 and was dismissed from this position by Abu Mazen in 2006 as part of the general change in political attitude in the post Arafat era. His full bio is available online in his official website: <http://ekrimasabri.ps>.

Despite his affiliation to the MB, Sabri is not connected officially to Hamas, since, like Abu Sway, Sabri is a Jerusalemite and cannot legally be affiliated with organizations rendered illegal by Israel. However, it is reasonable to estimate that Sabri represents the mainstream of Palestinian-Islamic religious-nationalism, most identified with Hamas in the WB and the GS.<sup>262</sup> Abu Saleh is a preacher in the al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and a writer. He is not as high profile as Sabri, but nevertheless represents Palestinian Islamic RN in Hebron – the second holiest city to Palestinian Muslims and Israeli-Jews in the Holy Land. His writings on Hebron resembles Sabri’s arguments regarding Jerusalem – we were here first – thus he is mentioned only in the relevant chapter dealing with the myth of autochthony. Al-Maqadmeh, about whom we already wrote in the thirs chapter, was a dentist and a famous Hamas ideologist. He was a senior member of Hamas’ military wing, a prominent radical Islamic thinker and a popular lecturer in the GIU. Al-Maqadmeh had significant influence on Hamas’ policy. He appears in the chapter as representing Hamas’ official standpoint of the 1990s, and at times to exemplify the ideological bond shared by the entire spectrum of Islamic RN, both liberal and conservative, similar to the way RZ rabbis share some basic ideas throughout the RZ spectrum.

#### Polemics vs academics

##### **Polemics**

Famous inter-religious polemics between Judaism, Christianity and Islam took place throughout the Middle Ages (LIMOR, 2010). In those polemics it was common to manipulate the scriptures of the other religion. For example, scholars used Jewish writings to prove the truthfulness of their religion, be it Christianity or Islam, and Jewish scholars, on their part, in their polemics with Muslims at the time, used to highlight contradictions in the Quran to prove it wrong, thus proving the truthfulness of Judaism. Such selective and manipulative use of the other’s scriptures was not necessarily aimed at convincing members of the other religion (the religion whose

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<sup>262</sup> Sabri first published the book in 1978. An updated seventh edition was published in 2011 and since 2016 is available online: <http://ekrimasabri.ps/2016/09/11/%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86/>

scriptures were being quoted), but mainly to convince members of one's own religion of the rightfulness of their path.

The current debate, for example on the sanctity of Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (Temple Mount/ al-Aqsa Mosque) or on Israeli and Palestinian national authenticity, echoes these medieval inter-religious polemics. In such national-religious polemics, self-proclamation alongside negation of the other side is used regularly by popular Muslim Palestinian and Jewish RZ actors who shape the common knowledge of Palestinian Muslims on Judaism and of national-religious Jews regarding Palestinian-Islamic traditions respectively.

In that regard, one important difference between the sides is the fact that Palestinian Islamic discourse on the Jews is based not only on polemic reading of Jewish scriptures, but also, if not mainly, on the Quranic corpus and other Islamic traditions called *Isrā'īliyyāt*, who deal with the Jews and the ancient Israelites.<sup>263</sup>

In the Israeli-Palestinian sphere, like (possibly) elsewhere, the discussion over national-religious identities is not strictly theoretical. Rather, it is a lively debate constantly present in the public sphere. This constant and somewhat obsessive presence of identity, politics, and national-religious discourse, that constant reinforcement of the self, is accompanied by the negation of the other. In other words, constituting the "authentic" Israeli/Palestinian self occurs through a dual negation of both the others side's religious sanctity and national authenticity (which are interdependent).

In a nutshell, the arguments of both the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalists follow a similar line: we are the most authentic nation here.<sup>264</sup> They (the other, the enemy) are a fake nation, an invented and "fabricated

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<sup>263</sup> *Isrā'īliyyāt* (اسرائيليات) derives from *Isrā'īl* (إسرائيل) which is Arabic for Israel. The term *Banū Isrā'īl* ( بنو إسرائيل ) – "the children of Israel" – also appears. Historically, Quran commentators use this term to describe the rich Islamic traditions regarding the Jews, the Israelites and the biblical narratives in the Quran and the Islamic sources. On *Isrā'īliyyāt* see E12 (VAJDA, 2006).

<sup>264</sup> Jewish religious-nationalists argue Israel is the most authentic nation of all, since its founding story became the prototype of modern nationalism per-se and thus for all nationalities to come, see for example Assaf Malach's introduction to the Hebrew translation of Hastings' "The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism" (MALACH, 2008, p. 17-18).

community”, lacking authenticity. We hold the true religion, which is the base of our national authenticity. Their religion is false; they are not a nation. Moreover, this land is not holy to them, nor was it promised to them. We are the chosen people; this is our promised land. Their mere pretension of national existence robs us, in its essence, from our own national identity, which is justly ours and ours alone.

Notwithstanding some exceptions, this dynamic of self assertion and negation of the other is the organizing principle of the Israel-Palestinian NR polemics. Furthermore, in analyzing this polemics, we can notice a common pattern of indirect dialogue, in which each side responds to assertions about its own self and to the assertions made by the other side, but without explicitly stating that this is their objective.

### **Academics**

Objectivity is considered a desired academic virtue. Max Weber’s famous essays on the methodology of social sciences from the beginning of the previous century lay down the predominant tone on that matter. This approach asserts that academic research should not determine the truthfulness of religious sanctity or reach political conclusions (WEBER, 2011, p. 49-65).<sup>265</sup> With time, this approach was challenged by the understanding that science is always based on values and a moral worldview (LONGINO, 1990). In SRN polemic, public intellectuals make political and religious assertions while wearing academic garments, building on the alleged virtue of objectivity of the academia. In other words, they build on the capital of “objective science” in order to promote a non-scientific particular national-religious argument. To illustrate our point, we now examine the writings of two scholars who at least strive for academic objectivity (in contrast to polemicists who use pseudo academic argumentation).

Zvi Werblowsky, an Israeli scholar of comparative religion, is an example of such an intellectual. Shortly after the 1967 war, in which Jerusalem was reunited under Israeli rule, Werblowsky wrote about the meaning of Jerusalem to Jews,

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<sup>265</sup> I specifically refer here to Weber’s chapter on objectivity in *Social Science and Social Policy*.

Christians and Muslims (WERBLOWSKI, 1997). Werblowsky started with Islam despite it being chronologically later, since, he explains, the problem it poses is

*“in some respects the most intriguing [...] The problem that interests us here is how the city came to acquire that place in Muslim consciousness, and in a religion the founder of which exercised his ministry in south-western Arabia” (Ibid.).*

However, before delving in, Werblowsky makes two important introductory remarks that ground his academic research, unlike polemics, on understanding processes and not on refuting or confirming contemporary sanctity based on historical assertions. First, he asserts that “the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam is a fact.” Second, he makes it perfectly clear that he addresses this problem as an unbeliever,<sup>266</sup> stating that “what are facts to the believing Muslim, are not necessarily so to the critical historian and student of comparative religion.” After this introduction it is not polemic to claim that “There is little doubt - in the eyes of the aforementioned unbelieving historian - that the Prophet Muhammad never was in Jerusalem.” Or that “the Prophet and his message were profoundly indebted to Christian and Jewish influences.” Werblowsky does not set out to refute one sanctity to assert another; he is on a quest to understand. Thus, for him political motivations of sanctity have little importance: “Islam, therefore, provides us with perhaps the most impressive example of how a holy city can acquire a specific holiness on the basis of what - to the unbelieving outsider at least - is mere legend, superimposed, no doubt, on an earlier, traditional, sanctity of the place.” (*Ibid.*). In his approach Werblowsky draws a clear line between the quest for understanding and polemics:

*Whereas in the case of Christianity historic facts (i.e., the life and death of Jesus) created religious facts (e.g., the resurrection and ascension), and both combined to create “holy places”, the Islamic case is the exact opposite. Beliefs and piety created religious facts and these, in their run, produced historic facts which, for the contemporary student of religion, culture and even politics, must be deemed, to all practical intents*

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<sup>266</sup> Another researcher of comparative religion, W. C. Smith, called it the “criticism of the nonbeliever”, affirming that indeed “it is not obvious that people who see no point in religion are the most qualified to generalize about its essence” **Invalid source specified.**

*and purposes, as real as any other kind of "hard" fact. Certainly in Islam, which does not make the distinction between the religious and the secular (including the political) spheres in the way Christianity has made it, religious facts have implications which legitimately spill over into the political sphere. This remains true even where the religious dimension is subject to abuse and manipulation by purely political interests.*

In Hillel Cohen's work comparing the place of the Temple Mount and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Zionist and Palestinian national consciousness, he mentions that the purpose of his work is "neither to reinforce nor challenge the claims of either nation or religion, as is sometimes the case in popular Israeli and Palestinian polemics." (Hillel COHEN, 2017, p. 1-2). This dissertation follows Cohen's approach on the concept of holiness, "according to which a site is holy because people believe it to be so, and its believers imbue the depth of that holiness in the site in accordance with their views of history". Such an understanding dictates the methodological toolbox used for the study, as Cohen asserts:

*"the scholar's toolbox does not contain devices that can measure transcendent sanctity or determine whether God hallowed a shrine, chose one nation over another, or imbued a particular prophet with his spirit. What a scholar can do is examine how believers of different faiths have understood the site's holiness in different eras." (Ibid., p. 2).*

As it seems, some national-religious intellectuals draw authority from their academic titles and positions, and use academic language and references, yet they go beyond the position of the researcher, into the realm of national-religious and political polemics.<sup>267</sup> For example, Mordechai Kedar's builds pseudo academic argumentation out of some real academic dilemmas such as the question sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam, which has fascinated and embarrassed scholars from an early stage on. Another

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<sup>267</sup> Not every academic that belongs to the NR sector is considered here a polemicists of course. NR polemics refers here only to intellectual products that are serve SRN polemics. When academia, national-religious discourse and polemics intertwine, RN academics or public intellectuals reflect the intellectual discourse of their society and sector. Hegemony is reflected in bureaucracy, in the army and other institutions, it is similarly reflected in academia and the discourse it produces.



reference used by Kedar is that scholars have always connected the study of Palestinian nationalism to the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam: for example, Israeli historian Yehoshua Porath who was a modernist in his approach to Palestinian nationalism opens his seminal and pioneer two volume work on the Palestinian national movement with an introductory chapter on the religious status of Jerusalem and Palestine in medieval Islam and *Filastin* as a military administrative unit in Muslim history (PORATH, 1974).

### **Public intellectuals as agents of (common) knowledge**

Sami Khater's article " Hamas' vision for managing the conflict with the Zionist enemy" (KHATER, 2017), explains that Palestinian national identity is a consequence of the sanctity of Palestine in Islam (*Ibid.*, p. 2-3). Similarly, Asaf Malach argues that Jewish Israeli nationalism is a direct continuation of the ancient Israelite nation mentioned in the Bible (MALACH, 2016, p. 166). Both these national-religious writers echo their society's common knowledge as they point out to the widely accepted narratives of their societies.<sup>268</sup> From the point of view of political science and the study of nationalism, this common knowledge is what national narrative is made of.<sup>269</sup> It is this modern national (and so-called secularized) interpretation of religious ethos and myths which generates both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim nationalisms. These religious grounds pave the way for religious-nationalism to claim its hegemony through agents of culture and knowledge.

Importantly, some of these writers use their academic titles and publications as a means for establishing public legitimacy and disseminating their message. For this reason, this dissertation considers them as "public intellectuals". Paul Johnson defined intellectuals as a western secular and modern phenomenon (JOHNSON, 1988). Shils does not bind together the intellectuals with secularism, despite mentioning the suspicion with which intellectuals address religion. By highlighting certain elements

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<sup>268</sup> In common knowledge I refer here to bodies of knowledge, narratives, and unquestioned assumptions shared by members of a social group. It relates to what scholars such as Geertz (1982) and Bourdieu (1972) refer to as what is taken for granted, naming it "common sense" or "doxa". Philosophers such as MacIntyre refer to this concept when discussing how narratives shape the virtuous act. I would like to thank my companion, the anthropologist Yael Assor, who explained to me the issue of common knowledge as common sense.

<sup>269</sup> Anderson called it national consciousness based on print-capitalism (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 37-46).

from the traditional and cultural basis from which the intellectual ideology deviates, Shils emphasizes continuity rather than disruption (SHILS, 1972, p. 17,30). According to Shlomo Zand intellectuals are manufacturers of knowledge, symbols, and values; their presence and strength is determined according to the public awareness and not by their effective power (SAND, 2000, p. 18-19). If exposure and reactions define the intellectual's status, then thinkers such as Malach and Khater are influential intellectuals indeed, national religious thinkers, and significant contemporary agents of knowledge in their societies.

In observing the work of Israeli and Palestinian public intellectuals, we can notice a common pattern of indirect dialogue, in which each side responds to assertions the other makes, but without explicitly stating that this is their objective. We will see this for example in the indirect dialogue between two NR public intellectuals, the Israeli-Jewish Mordechai Kedar, and the Palestinian-Muslim Mustafa Abu Sway.

Kedar and Abu Sway differ in many ways from one another. Nevertheless, they are both SRN public intellectuals. They both echo the narrative of the NR Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim sectors respectively, they carry impact on the popular level, are heard by decision makers and influence NR education. Both can be considered as NR preachers (Abu Sway more than Kedar, since he preaches at times in the al-Aqsa Mosque wearing the traditional Islamic mantle).

While Abu Sway's arguments are more religious in nature, Kedar purports to harness a more academic tone. For over a century Western orientalist have been conducting a critical debate on the history of Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam. However, Kedar's rhetoric differs from this debate, since it uses a different kind of logic, it is based on different axioms. If we were to apply Kedar's logic the other way around, we would use the critical academic approach to Bible Studies in order to refute Jerusalem's sanctity in Judaism, concluding from this that the Zionist-Jews do not merit political rights in the Holy Land. Kedar makes polemic religious and national argumentations and draw political conclusions, while covering this SRN rhetoric in objective academic clothing.

## The holiness of Jerusalem

One of the preferred topics of these national-religious polemics concerns the sanctity of Jerusalem and of the Holy Land. We have seen already that Jerusalem concentrates and reflects the conflict as a whole, it is only natural that the fiercest debate should occur on this subject.

Kedar's first meaningful appearance was on June 6, 2008 when he was interviewed on al-Jazeera by journalist Jamal Rayyan, as an Arabic speaking Israeli expert on East Jerusalem and the peace process.<sup>270</sup> When asked about the Israeli constructions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Kedar ignores the question and respond with NR polemics instead:

*[...] Jerusalem has been our capital for 3000 years. We were here when your forefathers were drinking wine, burying their daughters alive and worshiping idols [...] This has been our city for 3000 years already and forever it shall be so.*

"We", meaning the Israeli-Jews, were here worshipping the one God when your ancestor were still worshipping idols. While Kedar refers to the cultural and religious norms of the pre-Islamic Arab peninsula, Rayyan urges his guest to remain in the field of politics, answering Kedar: "[...] if you want to talk about history we'll talk about the Quran. You cannot erase al-Quds (Jerusalem) from the Quran!" reciting the famous Quranic verse mentioning the al-Aqsa Mosque (literally, the furthest place of worship): "Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to *al-masjid al-aqṣā*" (Quran 17:1). Kedar replies:

*Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Quran [...] not even once! And you cannot re-write the Quran here on al-Jazeera [...] Jerusalem is out of the negotiations. Jerusalem belongs to the Jews. Period! There is no way to talk about Jerusalem. No way!*

Yet on the ground Jerusalem has been on the negotiation table ever since 1977 (KLEIN, 2001), in the Annapolis Conference that took place months before the interview, and in the ongoing discussions at the time of the interview between Prime

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<sup>270</sup> Uploaded to Youtube on 12/06/2008 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHpMhAzj-Tk>

Minister Ehud Olmert and PA President Mahmoud Abbas, that included the division of Jerusalem (NYT 07/02/11).<sup>271</sup> Thus more than reflecting reality, Kedar's arguments reflected his national-religious vision, using pseudo academic discourse for popular (populist) and polemic purposes.

Mustafa Abu Sway's polemics is subtle and more apologetic than Kedar's, yet similar motives can be traced. "Islam recognizes the fact that the Holy Land is sacred to the People of the Book [...] the "Land of the Prophets", certainly the prophets of the Children of Israel are included and constitute a continuum in the line of prophecy, which culminated with Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them all)." (ABU SWAY, 2000, p. 1). Abu Sway does not indicate whether he considers the modern Jews and Zionists as a direct continuation of those aforementioned "Children of Israel", a claim Palestinian Islamists tend to deny (SABRI, 2011, p. 6-12). Abu Sway continues: "Almost every prophet lived in the Holy Land, or had a special relationship with it, including those who were born elsewhere. An example of the latter is Prophet Abraham, the prototype iconoclast [...] he was destined to go to the Holy Land." (ABU SWAY, 2000, p. 1). Abu Sway's article quoted here was originally published in the the Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR, Fall 2000, 60-68) as part of an interreligious dialogue. Thus, by quoting the Bible alongside the Quran, Abu Sway makes his argument easier to comprehend for his original readers. Abu Sway advances gradually, citing the Quran's inclusive language describing Abraham's new home, the Holy Land, as promised to all nations and not to one specific nation (Quran 21: 71). This paves the way for Abu Sway's following arguments: first, that the Holy Land was not perpetually promised by God to one particular ethnic nation, but that the criteria for the divine promise is based on submission to God's will (the literal meaning of the word "Islam").<sup>272</sup> Second, based on the Abrahamic topos, Abu Sway establishes the connection of the Prophet Muhammad to the Holy Land. Abraham was born outside the Holy Land and came to in answer to a divine calling, so did the Prophet Muhammad, "who had a special relationship with the Holy Land and Jerusalem."

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<sup>271</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/magazine/13Israel-t.html>

<sup>272</sup> As we shall see below, this argument is based on Sayyid Qutb's Quranic interpretation adopted by Aby Sway. Qutb was a famous ideologist of the MB admired by Hamas' ideologists such as Hamas' founding member Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh.

In 2007, close to the Annapolis peace talks, Kedar published a blog-post arguing that Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam started as an attempt of the prophet to win the support of al-Medina's Jewish community.<sup>273</sup> Kedar further argues that the Islamic sources were faked and distorted later on to enhance Jerusalem's sanctity for political reasons (KEDAR, 2007):

*Jerusalem in Islam is no more than a political issue. Today the Palestinians adopted Jerusalem as a religious justification of their inspiration for a state. Today Jerusalem is back on the headlines due to the intentions of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to include it in the upcoming agreement of principles with Mahmud Abbas. In addition, we are told that the Waqf continues to destroy the Jewish remains on the Temple Mount. Despite the fact that Jerusalem, at least the Old City and the place of the Temple, appears as a Palestinian political demand since its liberation from the Jordanian occupation more than 40 years ago, it is important to remember that the city was never a capital of any Islamic entity, not even the capital of the region of Palestine after the Muslim occupation of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.*

In this blog post Kedar reveals his motivation – the threat of a political and territorial compromise posed by the Annapolis peace conference, which would include the division of Jerusalem. The article opens with the words “Jerusalem in Islam is no more than a political issue”, reducing its sanctity to a narrow and mundane political pursuit of power. But Kedar's own motivation, as it stems out of his post, is also political. He continues and explains that Jerusalem provides the Palestinians with the religious justification of their demand for a state. Thus, Kedar's words, more than they reflect the Palestinian reality, reveal Kedar's own worldview, political aspirations and fears. His blunt style gives Kedar a populist aura among many Israelis, of one who is not afraid to say the truth regardless of the liberal demand of political correctness.

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<sup>273</sup> Originally published on the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs' Hebrew website (<http://jcpa.org>) it is no longer available there but like other of his writings the article became viral and is still available on different platforms (for example <http://cafe.themarker.com/post/203807/>).

Recognizing the Palestinian political rights in Jerusalem, as proposed by Olmert to Abu Mazen, will give cultural depth and legitimization to the idea of Palestinian self-determination. At this point Kedar mentions the Waqf's destruction of antiquities on the Temple Mount as an attempt to erase the Jewish heritage and refute the Jewish bond to the city; once again mirroring his own negation of Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam. Kedar argues that the Palestinian demand for political sovereignty in Jerusalem is new, only since the 1967 war, thus undermining the historical depth and authenticity of the Palestinian national movement. It overlooks the fact that the Palestinian national movement was born in Jerusalem and led by the Jerusalemite elites of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the bulk of the literature on the topic indicates (GERBER, 2008; PORATH, 1974; KHALIDI, 1997b). Kedar gives importance to chronological precedence. Yet he ignores the fact that the short-lived "All Palestine Government" established in Gaza in September 30, 1948 actually declared Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Palestine two months before the Israeli government made a similar declaration on December 5, 1948 (SHLAIM, 1990, p. 43; Hillel COHEN, 2011, p. 4).

Kedar repeats this dual negation of Jerusalem's political and religious significance to Islam and to the Palestinians in many of his lectures and writings up to the point that it became his professional trademark.

Kedar demonstrates here a recurring pattern of Israeli-Jewish RN argumentation (which also resonates strongly with the general Israeli public):<sup>274</sup> Claiming self authenticity, blaming the other side in negating this authenticity, and at the same time negating the authenticity of the other side.

Abu Sway answers Kedar's argument: "Some critics of Islam have claimed that because Jerusalem was never a political center of the Islamic world, it could not have been held in high esteem by Islam. This is a false argument, for even Mecca, the most

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<sup>274</sup> See for example Nadav Shragai's 2015 book "Jerusalem: Delusion of Division" which warns from the dangers of politically dividing Jerusalem: it similarly present the Jewish antique sacredness of Jerusalem for the Jews, then points to Palestinian negation of this sacredness immediately followed by an undermining the Islamic sacredness of Jerusalem **Invalid source specified**.. See books' first chapter: "The Jewish People's Right and Birthright in Jerusalem (the Historical-Religious Dispute", available online: <http://icpa.org/jewish-peoples-right-jerusalem/>.

sacred religious site of the Islamic world, was never the capital of any Islamic state. This certainly does not negate the importance of sacred religious sites.” (ABU SWAY, 2000, p. 10). He continues to state that “no Muslim ruler took any of the three sacred cities, Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem as a capital.” (*Ibid.*) .

Physical absence and political marginality can exist alongside central religious importance. Kedar and Abu Sway’s indirect polemic dialogue is of inherent strong-national-religious nature, in which the two components are completely interdependent. Abu Sway argues that it was exactly the religious importance of these cities that prevented the Muslims from making them political capitals, while Kedar’s logic argues that (alleged) political and religious marginality in the past weakens the Palestinian political claim for Jerusalem as a national and religious capital in the present. Once again, implementing Kedar’s logic categorically, might lead to the conclusion that almost two millenniums long Jewish absence from the Jerusalem and the still ongoing absence of most Jews from the Temple Mount similarly weakens the Israeli political claim over the city and its holy sites. But using Abu Sway’s opinion that religious importance itself can be the reason for physical absence and political marginality, we get a different explanation for this reality. In fact, this is exactly what we see in the writings of Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, a prominent conservative SRN clerk who prohibits Jewish worship on the TM. Aviner asserts, in accordance with the school of Har HaMor Yeshiva and Rabbi Tau, that the Jewish absence from the TM and political marginality over it, is actually a sign of stronger religious connection to it: longing for the Temple Mount signifies our bond to it: “[...] it is ours by displaying reverence to the Temple and awe of the holy. This is what will bring us closer to it. Proximity is achieved by distancing.” (AVINER, 2015, p. 8). We therefore see that internal Jewish SRN discourse itself can contain such contradiction.

Yitzhak Reiter demonstrates how contemporary Islamic academics and intellectuals tend to negate the Jewish history in Jerusalem and reject the existence of a Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount (REITER, 2008b, p. 31-48). On the background of the fear of losing the Islamic hold over *al-Quds* (القدس), Jerusalem in Arabic, literally The Holy) and al-Aqsa Mosque, dozens of books and articles are published in recent years on the topic; indicating an Islamic effort to weaken the

Jewish connection to Jerusalem and to the holy sites. This negation is widely accepted in the Arab and Palestinian street, among intellectuals and politicians and it receives institutional expressions (*Ibid.*, p. 47). It is common knowledge.<sup>275</sup>

Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, a distinguished Islamic clerk from Jerusalem, provides a different aspect of the Islamic approach to Jerusalem and the Jews. In his book *Haqunā fī filastīn* (Our Rights in Palestine) he argues that the Jews have forgotten Jerusalem and forsaken it from the antiquity and up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, arguing that they were comfortable in their communities and had no need for it. According to his argument, they only remembered Jerusalem again when they were persecuted by the Russians in response to their plots (SABRI, 2011, p. 12). Ignoring for the moment Sabri's anti-Semitism and misunderstanding of the continuous Jewish longing to Jerusalem throughout the generations, we will focus on the comparison of Sabri's argument with that of Malach and Kedar (KOREN, 2017). Sabri provides a response to the claim of continuous national and territorial Jewish identity from David (the King) to David (Ben Gurion). Sabri uses Zionist history to argue that Herzl didn't specifically ask for Palestine, but was content to demand any piece of land upon which the Jews could exercise sovereignty, and that this will answer their needs: "we don't ask for the Holy Land" Sabri quotes Herzl (SABRI, 2011, p. 13). Second, Sabri mirrors Kedar's argument that the Muslims have no religious and longstanding connection to Jerusalem, but rather their connection to the city it is based on political needs: "only when their situation got worse in Europe, they remembered Jerusalem" (*Ibid.*).

It is not a coincidence that these arguments correspond so well with one another – they were created as mirror images at the outset. In this case comparing between an alleged academic and a religious clerk make sense, since Kedar's arguments, more than academic, are in the realms of religious polemics. When an academic crosses the line of an external observer and polemizes with religious beliefs, comparing him or her to a religious clerk becomes valid. Therefore, comparing Kedar

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<sup>275</sup> There is a minority of Palestinian and Arab academics and religious figures who do affirm the Jewish history and affiliation to Jerusalem (NUSSEIBEH, 2010). Pakistani imam and scholar Muhammad Suheyl Umar argued that this negation altogether is not rooted in Islam but is a consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (SUHEYL UMAR, 2015).



and Sabri here makes sense. Reiter, as an Israeli scholar (not a polemicist), builds a case for a reciprocal dialogue with the Muslim and Palestinian side in regard to Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (REITER, 2008b). Another Israeli scholar, Hillel Cohen, further develops this claim (Hillel COHEN, 2017), yet both focus on the dynamics around the Holy Sites. At the same time both Cohen and Reiter understand that Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade represents the national-religious issue as a whole. Connecting these two arguments falls well with our argument of a reciprocal national-religious discourse that goes beyond the Holy Esplanade to include the national-religious idea altogether.

Historians of Islam (many of them Jewish and Israeli) dealt with this issue as well. H.Z Hirschberg (1903-1976), a historian, a rabbi, and one of the founders of the RZ Bar Ilan University, wrote that considering the multitude of testimonies on the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam "it is quite astounding that Jerusalem played such a small part in the political framework of Islam. No important political events in the history of Islam happened there. As far as we know, the only important event that happened in Jerusalem was the declaring of Mu'awiya as Caliph [...] Jerusalem never served as the capital of any of the Arab countries. Further, it was never a national center or an important district [...]. The famous constructors of the Umayyad dynast, who erected splendid palaces in different places in Palestine, did not construct one single secular building in Jerusalem." (HIRSCHBERG, 1978, p. 58). Amikam Elad, a historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem studying the Levant during the early Islamic period,<sup>276</sup> points out that Hirschberg wrote this article long before the discovery of Umayyad Palaces in the archeological excavations at the Western Wall (ELAD, 1999, p. 149). Elad argues that Hirschberg, like Shlomo Goitein before him, argued that traditions concerning Jerusalem were purely religious and do not originate in Umayyad politics. Yet Elad argues that "scholars had sharply conflicting viewpoints as to the relative importance of political and religious motivations in determining the sanctity and status of Jerusalem. It should be noted, however, at the outset of this discussion, that

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<sup>276</sup> The period between the first Islamic conquest of Syria from the Byzantines in the seventh century and up to the crusades in the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century is usually referred to by historians of Islam in the Levant as "the early Islamic period". The period that started after Saladin defeated the crusaders in 1187 and re-Islamized the region is called "the late Islamic period" **Invalid source specified.**

religion and politics are inseparable in early Islam. Every political activity in Islam had to have a religious basis.” (*Ibid.*).<sup>277</sup>

Kedar’s most viewed and influential video is of a debate from December 12, 2017, in the popular Arabic television show on al-Jazeera “The Opposite Direction” (الاتجاه المعاكس) hosted by Faisal al-Qassem.<sup>278</sup> The debate took place at the time when the USA moved its embassy to Jerusalem. In the debate, Kedar confronted Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Saeed Kuki, an Islamic researcher and scholar of Syrian origin. The discussion demonstrates how mass media, later disseminated on social media, becomes the contemporary arena for Middle Ages style interreligious polemics with a modern national and political twist (AL-QASSEM, 2017).

Kedar tells Kuki that according to the Muslim historian and geographer al-Waqidi, the original and true al-Aqsa mosque is in al-Ju'ranah, a village between Mecca and Ta'if (this is a repeated argument in Kedar’s confrontations with Muslim scholars). Quickly the debate becomes a purely religious polemic in which both speakers recite different sources to refute their opponent’s arguments while the host al-Qassem keeps urging the two to remain in the field of politics. Sheikh Kuki replies that Jerusalem is not a political issue but a religious one and that it should interest the entire Islamic Ummah. Jerusalem is the most important issue of our time, says Kuki, since it is an ideological and faith related issue. On this last point, so it seems, Kedar and Kuki both agree. Following the metal detectors saga of July 2017, in which Israel backed from its attempt to impose new security measures on the Muslim Palestinians

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<sup>277</sup> Elad actually goes further and claims that “[...] that the Umayyads intended to develop Jerusalem into both a political and religious center which, if not intended to surpass Mecca, would at least be its equal. (ELAD, 1999, p. 160)”.

<sup>278</sup> The full debate is available on Al-Jazeera Arabic website: <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/opposite-direction/2017/12/8/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B3-%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8> and on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALM6seskn6Q>; an edited version is available on Kedar’s website: <http://mordechaikedar.com/telling-arab-world-truth-jerusalem-al-jazeera/>.

entering the Holy Esplanade,<sup>279</sup> Kedar appeared as a commentator on the Israel's national-religious television channel explaining that Israeli control over the holy sites in Jerusalem is more of a theological issue than a political one.<sup>280</sup> Listening carefully to the heated argument between Kedar and Sheikh Kuki reveals a deep conflict of multilayered meanings. It is worthwhile to analyze this debate by breaking it down to its components.

Contra to Kedar's polemic use of the Quranic term "*asatir al-awwalin*" (see below), Abu Sway argues that based on Muhammed's miraculous night journey mentioned in the Quran (17:1) the Muslims have established "a sublime and perpetual relationship with Al-Aqsa Mosque." It also marks the "twining relation between the two mosques", of Mecca and Jerusalem (ABU SWAY, 2000). Abu Sway continues the narrative, describing how the people of Mecca did not believe that the prophet's night journey actually took place. They used this story to mock and undermine him, since due to their trade expeditions they knew the region's geography and religions. Abu Sway explains that the people of Mecca "knew that the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem would take several weeks [...] they were considering Prophet Muhammad's abilities, not that of the Omnipotent God!" Sheikh Ekrima Sabry explain the Palestinian religious right over Palestine, arguing that, "the nocturnal journey and the ascension are a miraculous event, are an out of the ordinary. It is not subjected to the rule of nature or a scientific experiment. Believing in this wonder, mentioned in the Quran (17:1) is part of the Islamic faith." (SABRI, 2011, p. 19). Thus, contemporary Palestinian-Muslims and Israeli-Jewish polemics, created on the background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are framed in the light of Muhammad's arguments with the unbelievers of Mecca. In this way, the Islamic quarrel with Jews receive a cosmic and meta-historic dimension. It is this dimension that Jewish religious-nationalists such as Kedar target as a weak point. Thus, while Jewish religious-nationalists use these Islamic traditions to undermine Islam, the Palestinian religious-nationalists use these same traditions to strengthen the Islamic connection to the Blessed Land- Palestine.

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<sup>279</sup> Miriam Berger, "What's the issue with metal detectors in Jerusalem?" (Reuters 24/07/17): <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-metaldetectors/whats-the-issue-with-metal-detectors-in-jerusalem-idUSKBN1A919P>.

<sup>280</sup> See Channel 20: <https://www.20il.co.il> 28/07/17 (01:33).

In the television discussion featuring Kedar and Sheikh Kuki, the latter recounts the sources of Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam. Kedar interrupts him shouting "Beit HaMikdash" - the Jewish Temple. "Faith" says Sheikh Kuki to the interviewer Faisal al-Qassem, "does not end with politics, it persists with humans". It is interesting to see how both men represent rival ideologies and at the same time similarly interpret contemporary world politics through religious lenses. On his end, Kedar states that:

*[...] the Arabs and Muslims know that the origins of the Arabic word "al-Quds" comes from the Islamic name "Bayt al-Maqdis", which is nothing more than the Arab version of "Beit Ha-Mikdash", the Jewish Holy Temple. This is a proof from the Arabic language that the Jewish Temple was located there and was translated to Arabic as "Bayt al-Maqdis". Anyone with minimal common sense knows this [...]*

Israeli Scholar Hillel Cohen wrote about the RZ Jewish thinkers' polemic reading of the Quran. Cohen describes how certain verses from the Quran (and other Islamic traditions) were interpreted in the circles of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook to support the return of the Jewish Israelite nation to the Holy Land (Hillel COHEN, 2002, p. 13).<sup>281</sup> From Cohen's article we understand that Kedar's arguments regarding Bayt al-Maqdis draws inspiration not from the orientalist intellectual tradition but rather from the RZ Kookist school of thought. Cohen demonstrates how following the 1967 war, the Kookist school adopted this Zionist reading of the Quran to support the new settlement movement. This Jewish national-religious reading of Islamic traditions corresponds well with the universal aspect of the Kookist approach: "the national resurrection of the people of Israel is for their good, and for the good of the land, its inhabitants, its neighbors and for the good of all mankind, in truth and justice." (*Ibid.*, p. 14). These traditions took one more step in the Kookist ideology in order to claim that the "return to Zion" is anchored in Islam. It resurfaced with the peace process

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<sup>281</sup> In his article Cohen demonstrates how these traditions reached Mercaz HaRAv circles through the mediation of key Zionists figures of the second *Aliyah*. According to Cohen such Jewish-Zionist readings of Islam is not backed in any real textual Islamic tradition. It rather reflects the second *Aliyah*'s settlers' society orientalist view and echoes the inter-religious polemics of the Middle Ages (Hillel COHEN, 2002, p. 13). Cohen presents another angle, the need of these early Zionist Jews to receive recognition from the Muslim Arabs that inhabited the land. This is especially true for those Jews who were morally sensitive and feared that the Arabs might be harmed by this Jewish immigration.

and the “threat” of territorial compromises (*Ibid.*). Kedar’s RZ reading of the Islamic text represents another metamorphosis of this Jewish religious-nationalist reading in Islamic sources, this time with a polemic intention camouflaged with academic shades.

Of a particular importance within this polemic is the debate about the location of holy places in Jerusalem and beyond that, on the mere sanctity of the city to the other religion. As we have seen, Kedar argues that the Islamic tradition itself tells us that al-Aqsa Mosque was not in Jerusalem but somewhere near Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. Here as well Kedar echoes an existing academic discourse in the field of early Islamic historiography, but he distorts it and abandons the scholarly tradition.<sup>282</sup> As mentioned previously in this chapter, Kedar’s relies on eight/nine century Arabic source, "*Kitab al-Maghazi*," written by the Muslim historian and geographer al-Waqidi (YNET 15/09/08), accepting unequivocally this tradition and adopting it as a seminal proof for his thesis. Al-Waqidi’s claims, that al-Aqsa Mosque is in Arabia and not in Jerusalem, accord perfectly to Kedar’s world view. While most Western scholars agree that there might have been a gap between the construction of the Dome of the Rock in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century and the association of Jerusalem as the site of the Quranic al-Aqsa (see footnote), other, like Uri Rubin,<sup>283</sup> claim that “al-Aqsa” mentioned in the Quran referred to Jerusalem at the outset. Rubin published a new article titled “Muhammad’s Night Journey (isra’) to al-Masjid al-Aqsa: Aspects of the Earliest Origins of the Islamic Sanctity of Jerusalem”, in 2008, at about the same time that Kedar started to make such public arguments (RUBIN, 2008, p. 164). It could it be that Rubin and Kedar, the former as an academic, the latter as a RZ polemicist, both addressed the issue of Jerusalem in Islam at the same time, due to the renewal of the peace process in Annapolis and the talks about dividing Jerusalem between the sides.

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<sup>282</sup> In his encompassing work “Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship” Amikam Elad summarizes the scholarly debate on the issue (ELAD, 1999). See also Heribert Busse’s “The Sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam”, *Judaism*, Vol. XVII (1968), pp. 441-468; Goldziher, Ignac, “Muslim studies,” (*Muhammedanische Studien*): edited by S.M. Stern; translated from the German by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern. London, G. Allen & Unwin, 1967-1971. Vol. 2, pp. 44-47; S.D. Goitein, “The Historical Background of the Erection of the Dome of the Rock,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol. 70, No. 2 (Apr. – Jun. 1950), pp. 104-108.

<sup>283</sup> Rubin is an emeritus professor in the department of Arabic and Islamic studies in Tel Aviv University.

Beyond the abundance of Islamic sources undermining al-Waqidi's reliability (as mentioned to Kedar by Sheikh Kuki for example), Rubin also refers to al-Waqidi's mentioning of al-Aqsa Mosque, stating that "it is clear that the mosque itself is not necessarily identified with the one mentioned in the Quran (17:1)" (*Ibid.*, p. 150). According to Kedar, the motivation in setting the first direction of prayer in Islam towards Jerusalem was to reach out to the Jews so they will affirm and adopt Muhammad's message. Changing the direction towards Mecca and forsaking Jerusalem is an indication that it was all a political motivation to begin with. Kedar ignores the Islamic theological interpretative tool of abrogation (in Arabic النسخ والمنسوخ, *al-Nāsikh wa'l-Mansūkh*), through which Muslims understand and explain such changes.<sup>284</sup> In his 2014 book "Misquoting Muhammad" Jonathan Brown refers to abrogation as specifically connected to the status of Jerusalem (Quran 2:143-150), describing:

*[...] Naskh [abrogation] either as God replacing a ruling established by the lawgiver's address with another ruling' or as 'a temporal indication of a ruling's duration.'*

Kedar goes on to claim that the Dome of the Rock was built by the Umayyad Calif Abd al-Malik since he needed to establish an alternative site for pilgrimage. Thus, he "sanctified" Jerusalem, because Mecca was already under the control of his opponent Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr.

While there is much to scrutinize and explore on these argumentations, confronting them with Islamic and professional scholarly debates (see for instance Lecker, 2014),<sup>285</sup> we can also take the words of former coordinator of the Holy Esplanade for the Israeli secret services Ami Metav, who said:

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<sup>284</sup> Abrogation (*al-Nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*wa 'l-Mansūkh*) is "a prominent concept in the fields of Qur'ānic commentary and Islamic law which allowed the harmonization of apparent contradictions in legal rulings" (Burton, EQ 2001). For more information on abrogation in Islam see Burton's article "*Naskh*" in the Second Edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam (IE2) and the same writer's article "Abrogation" in Brill's Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān (EQ, both accessible online).

<sup>285</sup> For example Shaykh Hamza Yusuf at the Marrakesh Declaration Forum in 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6Lt-fr1bcl>

*These academic discussions do not concern all the billions of Muslims around the world who simply believe that al-Aqsa Mosque is in Jerusalem.*<sup>286</sup>

As if conducting an indirect dialogue with Kedar, Abu Sways asserts that “Jerusalem or Bayt Al-Maqdis [House of the Holy] is, by definition, a holy place” based on the Quran (17:1), “either by referring to the Al-Aqsa Mosque or to its precincts about which God said: ‘We did bless’.” (ABU SWAY, 2000). Relying on previous Muslim scholars, Abu Sway builds a case to argue that Al-Aqsa Mosque is indeed Bayt Al-Maqdis. Abu Sway ignores Kedar’s reference to the etymological proximity between the early Islamic name of Jerusalem Bayt Al-Maqdis, which he translates as House of the Holy, and the Jewish Temple – Beit HaMikdash. Yet he quotes the work of Ibn Kathir, a renowned 14<sup>th</sup> century Muslim scholar, asserting that “Al-Aqsa Mosque is Bayt Al-Maqdis” and that the two terms are “used interchangeably whereby one of them is used as a metaphor of the other”. Abu Sway then quotes a Hadith demonstrating both the synonymous use of the two names that stresses religious obligation of Muslims all over the world to Al-Aqsa Mosque “both physically and spiritually” (*Ibid.*, p. 3-4). The idea that Jerusalem is an all Arab and all Islamic issue, is a well-known argument repeated by various Palestinian political and religious figures and by senior Islamic clerks. Sheikh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī’s, an influential figure in the religious thought on the Muslim Brothers, published in 1998 a book titled “Jerusalem is the issue of all Muslims” (AL-QARADAWI, 1998).<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Ami Metav’s words in a public even held in a restaurant in downtown Jerusalem on 09/03/2016 held by the NGO: 0202 Point of Views from Jerusalem (0202updates.org). I am one of the founders of the NGO and served in its executive board. I was present at the event and hold an audio and video recording of it.

<sup>287</sup> The book was published in Arabic under the title *al-Quds Qaḍiyya kul Muslim*. The chapters dealing with Jerusalem in the Islamic faith were translated from Arabic to Hebrew by the author of this work (TZIDKIYAHU, 2009). Al-Qaradawi describes the status of Jerusalem in the Islamic faith (*al-Quds fi i’tiqād al-muslimīn*), presenting the city’s sanctity as an Islamic consensus (*ijmā’*). The book presents the following argumentation: Jerusalem was holy to the Muslims even before they got to it, since it was their first direction of prayer (*’ūlaā al-qiblatayn*), before it was changed to Mecca by the prophet following one of his Quranic revelation; Jerusalem is the land of the prophet’s night Journey and ascension to the skies as mentioned in the Quran 17:1 (*al-’Isrā wal-wal-Mi’rāj*); based on a famous *Hadith* (saying of the prophet) al-Qaradawi demonstrates that Jerusalem is the third holiest place for Muslims after Mecca and al-Medina; al-Qaradawi brings five Quranic quotes to demonstrate that all of Palestine, and Jerusalem first and foremost, is a holy land and that it is the blessed land of the prophets; finally al-Qaradawi describes Jerusalem as the land of *Ribāt* and of *Jihad*, in the meaning of a military post remote from the center, a place of war against the infidels.

Based on a Hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad encourages Muslims to pray in al-Aqsa Mosque, and if they can't reach it that they should donate to its maintenance ("a gift of oil to it in order to be lit in its lanterns, for the one who does so"), Abu Sway concludes that while the Islamic connection to Al-Aqsa Mosque is "primarily fulfilled through acts of worship [...] the physical maintenance of the Mosque is also part of the responsibility of all Muslims."<sup>288</sup> Adding that the "fulfillment of both duties will be impaired as long as al-Aqsa Mosque remains under occupation!", Abu Sway gives religious background to the political struggle over the maintenance and managements of Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade.<sup>289</sup> Moreover, due to the Israeli restrictions on free access of Palestinian Muslims to al-Aqsa (that Abu Sway counts), not only are their liberties such as freedom of movement and freedom of worship damaged, so is also their theological calling.

#### The void religion – a theological struggle

On various occasions, Kedar affirms how inconceivable it is in Islamic eyes that a Jew will rule over a Muslim. This echoes the majority-minority anomaly mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation. According to Kedar, this anomaly is even stronger when it comes to Islamic holy sites. For Muslims, according to Kedar, the Jews must remain humiliated under Islam. It is not the Nazis, but the Muslims that invented the yellow patch (Kedar's lecture on YouTube, 14/06/17).

Kedar accuses Islam of claiming Judaism to be a void religion, and at the same time, he sets out to prove that Islam itself is void and false. To prove his point Kedar repeatedly turns to the Quranic term *Asāṭīr al-Awwalīn*, (stories of the ancients) in order to undermine Islam. This term appears in the Quran nine times, always in the context of unbelievers who oppose the Quranic revelation (ROSENTHAL, 2006). Kedar adopts the polemic contexts in which this term appears in the Quran as if they are the simple truths, arguing that the Quran itself calls Islam "fake news" no less than 11

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<sup>288</sup> Interestingly, this hadith is written on a wooden monument in the entrance to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa Mosque in Arabic with English and Turkish translation. The message is clear, to highlight to non-Palestinian Muslim visitors the all-Islamic importance of the site and to encourage them to donate to the maintenance of al-Aqsa Mosque. I have seen this wooden sign myself in my last visit to the Dome of the Rock on June 3, 2021.

<sup>289</sup> The maintenance of the HE is part of the Status Quo in the site.



times. Thus, Kedar argue that the prophet Muhammad introduced no innovations, but took all of his knowledge from the Christians, the pagans, and mainly from the Jews (YNET, 15/09/08). Kedar treats Islam in his lectures as a fake religion, using modern terms such as “copy and paste” and “fake news” to demonstrate Mohammad plagiarism. According to Kedar:

*[...] In order to deal with these allegations Muhammad invented a mechanism in which Islam is the true religion, Din al-Haq (in Arabic), and Judaism and Christianity are Din Batil (Arabic for void religion), (YouTube, 14/06/17).*

By using the Quran to refute Islam per se, Kedar goes quite a distance from the scholarly norm of attempting to understand and extract meanings of religious phenomena, into the sphere of inter-religious polemic. In religious polemics participants affirm or refute religious phenomena as real or false. Loyal to the polemic tradition which manipulates the text, Kedar ignores the Quranic pro-Islamic context and the way Islamic scholars interpreted this term (e.g. al-Ṭabarī, to VIII, 31).<sup>290</sup> Kedar also disregards the scholarly tradition and discourse on Islam, which tackles in fact these issues directly from the very beginning of modern academic research on Islam (GOLDZIJER, 1910, p. 5):

*[...] Muhammad did not proclaim new ideas. [...] None of this diminishes, however, the relative value of his religious achievement. When the historian of civilization appraises the effect of an historical phenomenon, the question of originality does not claim his principal attention. [...] The Arab Prophet's message was an eclectic composite of religious ideas and regulations. The ideas were suggested to him by contacts [...] and they seemed to him suited to awaken an earnest religious mood among his fellow Arabs [...] External impressions and experiences confirmed this sincere conviction.*

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<sup>290</sup> For further reading on *asatir al-awwalin* see the article “légendes du passé” in *Dictionnaire du Coran*, ed. M.A. Amir-Moezzi, pp. 477-479, and also Claude Gilliot’s article that is cited in the bibliographic list there.

## Whose promised Land?

Sheikh Ikrima Şabrī exemplifies the classical Islamic Palestinian national-religious approach of self-proclamation and negation of the other (SABRI, 2011). Sabri explains there have been:

*repeated false allegation by Israeli senior official regarding their historical right [...] in Palestine. For this reason, we must go back in time since the past is connected to our present situation. We, the Palestinians, have historic, religious and political rights over this land, this is a historical fact (Ibid., p. 6).*

Through philological analysis and allegoric reading of the scriptures Sabri's clerical approach draws meaning from mythological events on the contemporary politics of the Israeli-Palestinian relations - a Palestinian-Islamic prefiguration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Christian theology, prefiguration is a typological reading of the Old Testament as types pre-figuring the events of the New Testament that superseded them. Sabri's prefigurative reading of the scripture refers directly to the modern conflict, framing it in the meta-history of redemption. For example, when dealing with the Biblical story of the twelve spies sent by Moses to scout the Land of Canaan (Quranic version (5:24-26), Biblical version in Numbers 13:1-33), Sabri mentions in a footnote that the Israelites wanted to enter "a land without a people", a clear reference to the famous Zionist slogan. However, the scriptures recount the spies tell of a "fearsome people" residing in the land – the ancestors of the Palestinians according to Sabri. Their presence in the land and the fear they cast on the Israelites were among the reason God banned them from the Holy Land forever (*Ibid.*, p. 9). Another prefiguration is the story of Joshua, leading the Israelites in a brutal occupation of Palestine, conducting atrocities such as the massacre of Jericho. The orthodox Jewish reading of this event is as a manifestation of the will of God. Sabri describes it as a despicable Jewish crime against the Palestinians (*Ibid.*, p. 10). Indeed, the mainstream of religious-Zionism uses the Biblical terminology from the story of Joshua. "Conquest and settlement" are the positive commandments to fulfill sovereignty over the entire land (*Eretz Yisrael Hashlema*, the negative one, is not to

give it back, Fischer 2007, 172).<sup>291</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the section about RZ approach to violence and war, RZ rabbis also correlate between the Biblical religious wars and the contemporary Israeli-Arab conflict (LUBITZ, 2012, p. 49-148). They prefigure the Arab Palestinians to constitute a contemporary embodiment of the ancient Philistines, and other biblical nations hostile to the Israelites.

Sabri continues to examine the Jewish Biblical narrative: judges and kings, David and Solomon, the division of the kingdoms of Israel and Judea, the destruction and exile. His reading leads him to the conclusion that historically and religiously Palestine is not the Promised Land of the Jews. From here Sabri moves to treat the Zionist movement – leaping over thousands of years of Jewish history, existence and yearnings in exile. This recalls some Zionist periodization that similarly ignores 2000 years of Jewish existence in diaspora (seen as disgraced exile) and two millennia of non-Jewish rule over the Holy Land, jumping from the end of the great Jewish rebellion against the Romans in 70 AD directly to the Jewish-Zionist immigration during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such a time scale was presented for example at the City of David, an archeological and national heritage site and an Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem managed by the Zionist-religious organization “Ir David Foundation” also known as El'ad.<sup>292</sup> Sabri asserts that “contemporary Zionist though is a revival of the ancient thought that goes back to King David” (SABRI, 2011, p. 12). In adopting this logic and periodization, even if for polemic purposes, Sabri unconsciously accepts Malach’s claim for a national lineage from antiquities to the modern era.

Several Muslim and Palestinian writers tend to break this lineage and undermine the Jewish-national claim of an ongoing ethnic connection with the ancient Israelites by adopting Arthur Koestler’s thesis published in his 1976 book “The Thirteenth Tribe”. Koestler argued that most contemporary Jews are the descendants

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<sup>291</sup> Within the national education system there are some voices of perplexity regarding how to teach the stories of Joshua, the brutal occupation and extermination of peoples, that are compared with modern genocide. See for example: <https://mikranet.cet.ac.il/mikradidact/pages/item.asp?item=7553>

<sup>292</sup> I was first exposed to this kind of Religious-Zionist periodization and mindset when I worked as a tour guide for Israeli Schools in the Jewish Quarter, the Old City of Jerusalem and the Holy and Archeological sites around it. Due to public criticism the City of David Time Line was changed: <http://www.cityofdavid.org.il/en/virtual-tours/city-david-time-line>

of the Khazars (a Turkic people that converted to Judaism in the 8th century), thus they are not “Jews” from the tribe of Judah, they are not the descendants of the Children of Israel that can claim the divine promise (KOESTLER, 1976). As Reiter shows, adopting this abruptness between antiquity and modernity of Jewish history allows the Jordanian writer Muhammed Abdul Hammed Al-Khateeb to accept the Jewish ancient narrative in a way that does not justify Zionism (REITER, 2008b, p. 60). Similarly, to Abu Sway, al-Khateeb claims, “Judaism was once a form of Islam” (AL-KHATEEB, 1998; REITER, 2008b, p. 60). Such claims also relate to a critical academic discourse used by Israeli modernist scholars such as archeologist Israel Finkelstein and constructivist historian Shlomo Sand. Yet this usage of critical academic discourse for polemic purposes is intellectually inconsistent, when applied one-sidedly by accepting the traditional narrative of one’s self while scrutinizing the narrative of the other using critical tools. Israeli historian Haim Gerber pointed out to a similar failure by Zionist scholars who write on Palestinian nationalism (explained below).

The name given (or not) to the other people reflect the legitimacy (or lack thereof) one grants them. For example, Jewish religious-nationalists usually refrain from using the word “Palestinians”, and prefer to say “Arabs”. Referring only to the wider identity of the local Arabs. This represents a lack of willingness among national-religious Jews to acknowledge the existence of a particular Palestinian identity. Abu Sway on the other hand mentions that Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, Hamas’ founder and spiritual leader, used the terms “Israel” and “Jews” alternately and pragmatically, and that the use of the word “Israel”, as done by Sheikh Yassin, does not mean recognizing or legitimizing it (ABU SWAY, 2017, p. 8).

#### Perception of the other

Palestinian Islamic religious-nationalist perception of the Jews, the Zionists and the Israelis has changed dramatically since the inception of Hamas in 1988 as the leading national-religious Palestinian movement. Hamas’ classical anti-Jewish narrative and language is well known: the Jews are conceived as the eternal enemies of Islam, of the Arabs and of the Palestinians. Hamas’ founding covenant contains clear anti-Semitic messages, as for example in article 22 (HAMAS, 1988). In his book on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process from an Islamic perspective, written shortly after the

Oslo agreement, Hamas' ideologist Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh describes the conflict between the Jews and Muslim as a cosmic rift (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994a, p. 133):

*[...] no doubt the hostility between the Jews and the Muslims will not end, and this despicable peace will not be accomplished. 'You [Prophet] are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God'(Quran 5:82). The Jewish hostility is a fundamental attribute in their existence. This hostility will persist despite the willingness of those peace supporters among us to sacrifice much in order to reconcile the Jews. But they will not be reconciled until we will forsake our religion. 'They will not stop fighting you [believers] until they make you revoke your faith, if they can' (Quran 2:217). [...] The conflict between the Jews and the Muslims is fundamental. The Muslims will never forget their rights in Palestine. The spark of Jihad will surely be lit and God's victory is close. 'God always prevails in His purpose, though most people do not realize it' (Quran 12:21).*

While the Jewish RZ treatment of the Muslim (Arab) other is somewhat indirect and general, using biblical metaphors (LUBITZ, 2012), the Muslim writings on the nature of the Jews and Judaism is often detailed and specific. "The most obvious reason for this difference of course," according to historians Nettler and Taji-Farouki, "is that Islamic tradition contains its own built-in essential Judaica." (NETTLER et al., 1998, p. XV). Indeed, the polemic character of Islam towards Judaism and Christianity is rooted in Islam's later appearance. For this reason, a similar corpus of formative Jewish sources on Islam does not exist. Thus, modern Palestinian, Arab and Islamic animosity towards the Jews in general and Israel in particular is anchored in formative Islamic scriptures. An accusation both side throw at each other is that of considering that their supposed religious superiority allows them to mistreat other people. Kedar, representing Jewish NR thought, repeatedly claims in his lectures that Muslims argue to be the only true religion and that all other religions are inferior to them and must be subjected to their rule. Abu Sway, quoting a sermon by former Israeli Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, in it Yosef argues that the gentiles, including the Palestinians, exist only to serve the Jews (ABU SWAY, 2017, p. 2). Sabri argues that Jewish ethics is inapplicable to non-Jews, that they allow themselves to conduct crimes against non-Jews (SABRI, 2011, p. 15). Sabri anchors his claim in Quranic verses (3:75),<sup>293</sup> to assert

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<sup>293</sup> In this Quranic verse (3:75) the Jews are portrayed as applying their moral and ethics only on Jews, saying "We are under no obligation towards the gentiles". The verse goes on to contradict this claim by stating: "[...] They tell a lie against God and they know it" (Quran 3:75, Abdel Haleem translation, 2005).

that Jews do not see themselves obligated morally to non-Jews. This Jewish principle, according to Sabri, enables Jews to tear peoples of their lands, to corrupt governments around the world, and to deny stability to anyone but themselves. True to his approach Sabri did not read any Jewish jurisprudence - had he read *Shulchan Aruch* and *Mishneh Torah*, the two foundations of Jewish law, he might have learned otherwise.<sup>294</sup> At the same time, in the margins of contemporary Jewish national-religious writings, such extreme ideas do appear.<sup>295</sup>

Another interesting example is how the story of the Hodaybiyya agreement is used by both sides as an example of the other's side being untrustworthy. This ceasefire agreement between the prophet Muhammad and his enemies in Mecca in the year 628, which was subsequently broken and ended in Muhammad's conquest of the city, became a model for accords between Muslims and non-Muslim groups. Reiter dedicates an entire chapter to the way Islamic scholar interpret peace, war and international agreements with non-Muslim based on the Hodaybiyya precedent

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<sup>294</sup> The *Shulchan Aruch* (Hebrew for "Set Table", also known in English as "the Code of Jewish Law"), written in 1563 in Safed by Rabbi Joseph Karo, is considered to be one of the pillars of Jewish Halakha. In the part dealing with finance and damages (*Choshen Mishpat*), 228/6, it is ruled that it is strictly forbidden to deceive anyone in business, even if that person is an idolater. Similarly, Rambam (Maimonides), in yet another pillar of Jewish law, his *Mishneh Torah* (Hebrew for "Repetition of the Torah") completed in 1180, part 1.2, *De'ot*: general proper behavior, chapter 2, halakha 6 states that it is strictly forbidden to deceive all people including gentiles.

<sup>295</sup> Such an example is the book *Torat Hamelech* (the King's Torah) published in 2009 by the rabbis Yitzhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur and endorsed by more prominent rabbis like Ya'akov Yosef (1946-2013), son of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, and Dov Lior. The book allows extenuating circumstances for the killing of Gentiles. According to the authors, while in the framework of the "Seven Laws of Noah" (Genesis 9) all humanity is prohibited from bloodshed in general, the Biblical prohibition of murder - "thou shalt not murder" - which appears in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16) - applies only to Jews and refers only to the murder of Jews (Yitzak SHAPIRA et al., 2009). The book justifies killing of gentiles in order to save Jews, killing of gentile children if it is clear that they will grow up to fight Jews and, in a footnote, also justifies acts of individual terrorism against non-Jews (*Ibid.*). A public outcry followed the publication of the book and its endorsements by several prominent rabbis. The protest against the book involved Jewish Israeli civil society initiatives and youth movements alongside national-religious and ultraorthodox rabbis such as Rabbi Yaakov Madan, Rabbi Benny Lau, Rabbi Menachem Froman and Yoel Bin Nun (FINKELSTEIN, 2010, p. 14). They condemned the book for incitement to violence, racism and misunderstanding Jewish sources. The authors of *Torat Hamelech* and the rabbis who endorsed it were all detained for questioning by the Israeli police, causing protest by their followers and launching a public debate on the legitimacy of investigating rabbis for writing their religious positions (Walla 26/07/2010).

The 1995 book titled *Baruch Hagever* (Blessed is the man) which praised Baruch Goldstein and encouraged violence towards gentiles (the book's title is Hebrew pun with double meaning. Baruch, the first name of the Hebron killer means in Hebrew "blessed". The name of the book quotes from Jeremiah 17:7 "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose trust the LORD is", and at the same time hailing Goldstein).

(REITER, 2011). At the same time, Israelis use the Hudaybiyya precedent and the Islamic-Palestinian reference to it in the context of the Oslo accord as a proof to the untrustworthiness of the Palestinians and their vile intentions. Thus, while Sabri claims that Jews are dishonest, unreliable and break contracts with non-Jews, similar claims are made by Jews opposing the Oslo Accord, that Muslims are unreliable and that they break their contracts with non-Muslims, and both sides rely on the story of the Hudaybiyyah agreement for proof.

Sabri is a religious clerk of high esteem. He held and still hold senior positions in the Palestinian Islamic establishment. He is widely accepted, his positions represent the MB's ideology and the NR Palestinian popular sentiment. His attitudes towards the Jews as treacherous (SABRI, 2011, p. 14-16), echo the classic Islamic anti-Jewish approaches which corresponds with the thought of early Palestinian RN as evoked by Hajj Amin al Hussein and that of Hamas' traditional ideologist from the 1990s such as al-Maqadmeh (quoted above). However contemporary Muslim-Palestinian NR public intellectuals such as the Mustafa Abu Sway and Hamas members Yusuf Rizqa and Sami Khater, represent a different tendency. Even if it seems that they partly identify with Sabri's negative opinions regarding the Jews, their entire intellectual efforts are dedicated to proving Hamas' inter-religious tolerance. Similar to Sabri, all three distinguish between Zionism and Judaism, yet they differ from the former in distancing themselves, and Hamas, from antisemitism and overt anti-Jewish sentiment. Rizqa highlights the rights and freedoms of religious-minorities under Hamas, bridging between Islamic political thought and international democratic standards (RIZQA, 2017), Abu Sway and Khater polemize with Palestinian Islamists' anti-Jewish expressions, also from within Hamas, trying to portray them as wrong and exceptional by highlighting Islamic universalism. They anchor the anti-Jewish sentiment in Hamas' thought, in the ongoing conflict and not in deep antisemitic feelings. Khater proves his point by highlighting the Jewish-Muslim shared history of co-existence (under Islamic rule). All three clearly distance Hamas from the 1988 charter in general and especially from the blunt anti-Jewish articles in it (ABU SWAY, 2017; KHATER, 2017; RIZQA, 2017). This is a strong indication that Hamas understands that in order to relabel itself as a legitimate actor in the local, regional and international political arena it must

distance itself from antisemitism and traditional religious polemics and adopt a more pragmatic and inclusive tone. In short, Palestinian Islamic political thought shifted in recent years from the antisemitism of traditional clergymen towards political pragmatism which dictates a more inclusive ideology. We shall now examine in more details the arguments of Abu Sway and Khater in the matter.

Abu Sway first connects what he calls Judeophobic expressions to the stereotypes fueled by the existence of the conflict. He goes on to present the racial tolerance of the Quran. Abu Sway states, reminding RAYH Kook's humanistic and universal worldview, that "beyond the oneness of humanity, almost everything else is a 'social' construct, including colonial, anthropological, and racial categories." (ABU SWAY, 2017). Abu Sway's preference of "Judeophobia" over anti-Semitism" explained by the fact that "Arabs are Semites" (*Ibid.*, p. 1), can be seen as another expression of the new Islamic-Palestinian tendency of revoking anti-Semitism as foreign to the Arab and Islamic experience. Before treating Hamas' Judeophobia, Abu Sway gives an example of Jewish Islamophobia, quoting Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (spiritual leader of the large ultraorthodox political party - Shas) Saturday night sermon from August 2000, shortly after the failure of the Camp David peace negotiations. Abu Sway quotes Rabbi Yosef saying in his sermon that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has "no sense" since he is trying to make peace with the Palestinians, who are "snakes", interested mainly in murdering Jews (*Ibid.*, p. 2).<sup>296</sup> Abu Sway argues that Rabbi Yosef believes that

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<sup>296</sup> Abu Sway quotes Rabbi Yosef's comments as they were published by ABC News' website on 06/08/2000 (<https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=96252>). Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920-2013) was one of the most influential Ultraorthodox rabbis in Israel in the last decades. He was well known for his harsh language and blunt yet popular style. As Israel's Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Yosef approved in 1979 Israel's peace agreement with Egypt, asserting that it is religiously permissible to withdraw from parts of the Land of Israel in return for peace and prevention of bloodshed. Rabbi Yosef repeated his ruling on various occasions, causing a rift between him and his Ashkenazi counterpart Chief Rabbi of Israel Shlomo Goren and more generally with the Religious-Zionist sector. Rabbi Yosef approved the Oslo Accords from a religious perspective and Shas party joined Rabin's government in 1992, serving as the Jewish orthodox backbone of the peace process. This decision was not popular among Shas politicians and supporters who pressured Rabbi Yosef to change his mind. These efforts bore fruits and Shas left Rabin's government once the Oslo Accords were signed. Thus we see a gap between Rabbi Yosef's blunt language and his relatively moderated political positions. It also indicates to a gap between Rabbi Yosef dovish position and his more hawkish congregation and constituency. Similarly Shas party joined Ehud Barak's government in 1999 and left the government upon Barak's departure to Camp David Summit in July 2000, causing a political crisis which eventually toppled the government. Following the second intifada Rabbi Yosef changed his mind, asserting that his ruling regarding "territories for peace" still stand, but now it is not the time since we have no partner on the other side. After the 2003 elections in Israel Shas became a right wing party and Rabbi Yosef excluded Judea and Samaria (the West Bank)



gentiles, including the Palestinians, exist only to serve the Jews". Abu Sway creates a balance, arguing that similarly to Rabbi Yosef, some Muslim leaders use derogatory terminology against the Jews in their sermons, giving the example of a Friday sermon delivered in Khan Yunis' grand mosque in the Gaza Strip and broadcasted on Hamas' TV, calling the Jews "a bunch of grandchildren of apes and pigs" (al-Aqsa TV 24/02/12). From an Islamic perspective such Muslim preachers distort the Islamic message. It is actually aimed at teaching the Muslims a lesson through an allegoric reading, a fable, through an example of a story about the Jews (*Ibid.*). Abu Sway then gives another example of Islamic tolerance. Such distortions, argues Abu Sway, are caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is fueled by the Israeli occupation and aggressions.

This message indeed indicates the will of Palestinian Islamic religious-nationalism and of Hamas in particular, to move to a more pragmatic discourse. At the same time Abu Sway does not deal with this phenomenon through. He compares one of Israel's leading religious figures with that of an incidental unnamed preacher in a mosque, neglecting many anti-Jewish writings and expressions of leading Islamic figures, from Hamas and beyond, like that of Sheikh Sabri or the famous work of Sheikh al-Azhar Muhammad Sayyid Tantawy, the latter arguing that the characteristics attributed to the Jews in the Quran applies on them in all times and places.<sup>297</sup> Nevertheless, Abu Sway's assertion that stereotypes attributing negative nature to the Jews based on Islam are more a result of the political conflict than of the Islamic message carries meaning on its own, all the more so when it is written in a book that is obviously a Hamas publication. Abu Sway repeats the well-known Palestinian-Islamic equation: the Quran is tolerant, Jews enjoyed protection and harmony in the Islamic world, anti-Semitism is a European phenomenon that was replaced now with Islamophobia (*Ibid.*, p. 3-4). Thus, in Western terms, the Muslims are the "new Jews".

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from his ruling. For a detailed account on Rabbi Yosef's positions see his 2004 biography (CHEN et al., 2004). Israeli sociologist from BIU Nissim Leon also wrote about Rabbi Yosef and the peace process (LEON, 2015).

<sup>297</sup> *Tantawi, Banū Isrā'īl fī al-Quran wa al-Sunah (Banū Isrā'īl [the Israelite] in the Quran and Sunnah)*, Cairo, 1967. This massive work was studied by Suha Taji Farouki, which asserted that al-Azhar's Mufti Sheikh Tantawi's approach towards the Jews is essentialist and unchangeable throughout the generations (NETTLER et al. (eds.), 1998, p. 15).

Abu Sway's 2014 article in Hamas' book was translated to English in 2017. Almost half of the article is dedicated to an apologetic introduction, describing the injustice of Zionism, legitimizing Palestinian resistance, and connecting some of its more chauvinist expressions to this historic injustice. Maybe this apologetic introduction is necessary to prepare the Arab reader to the following pages, in which Abu Sway denounces the 1988 Hamas charter, arguing that "one can say with a degree of certitude that for the last twenty years, some articles of the charter have fallen out of favor." (*Ibid.*, p. 6). Abu Sway delineates a gradual process of ideological change alongside the structural, organizational and political changes within Hamas, from the Charter, via the political platform of the Change and Reform Bloc introduced in the 2006 elections, paving the road to the 2017 document. To make his point Abu Sway quotes Hamas' ideologist and political adviser Ahmad Yousef's article "the Charter of Hamas [...] the Reality, the Vision, and the Narrative",<sup>298</sup> and senior Political figures such as Khaled Mash'al. In other places Abu Sway protects the 1988 charter, arguing it was misunderstood. Indeed, already in 2005 Musa Abu Marzuq, a Hamas top political leader, declared that Hamas is willing to remove the *Protocols* from its website as a gesture of good will (*Ibid.*, p. 8). While Abu Sway quotes Mahmoud al-Zahar overruling in 2006 the revision of Hamas charter, he also quotes Palestinian ambassador to the UK (2005-2018) Manuel Hassassian saying in 2009 on al-Jazeera that there is a clear contradiction between the 1988 Charter and Hamas' pragmatic policies (*Ibid.*).

Abu Sway's 2014 article is aimed at proving that Hamas' conflict is with Zionism and the Israeli occupation and not with the Jewish religion. Abu Sway goes through an effort to prove that Hamas is not anti-Semite. For this Abu Sway needs to use some textual acrobatics, to pinpoint those comments demonstrating that Hamas' leaders are not anti-Semites. For example, when Mash'al says that the Palestinians are paying the prices of somebody else's sins, referring to the Holocaust, Abu Sway choose to highlight the fact that Mash'al said that the Holocaust was indeed a sin. Another example is Abu Sway's reference to a book of one of Hamas' senior officials (Mahmoud

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<sup>298</sup> *Mithaq Hamas ... al-Waqi' wa al-Ro'yah wa al-Riwayah* (al-Quds newspaper 12/01/2011).

al-Zahar's 2010 book "No future among the nations"),<sup>299</sup> written as a reply to Binyamin Netanyahu's 1994 book "A Place among the Nations". Al-Zahar's book surveys the history of persecution of the Jews, claiming that they occurred due to the vile nature of the Jews, which leaves the Jews no place among the nations (AL-ZAHAR, 2010). While Al-Zahar's book is deeply and clearly anti-Semitic, Abu Sway argues that al-Zahar fails to understand the roots of European anti-Semitism, "which has its roots in Christian theological constructs about Jews being responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, something that the Quran denies categorically" (ABU SWAY, 2017, p. 9). Abu Sway embodies the larger process of Hamas' efforts to distance the movement from anti-Semitism and closer to the acceptable standards among nations and international legitimacy.

A note on comparison: Kedar represent the mainstream tendencies of the RZ public towards the Palestinian Muslims, as evoked by leading RZ rabbis such as Aviner, Melamed, Lior and others, and the opinions of senior RZ politicians such as Naftali Benett and Rafi Peretz. Abu Sway, on the other hand, both as a Muslim clerk but mainly as an academic and a public intellectual, differs from Sabri's traditional negative approach towards the Jews. Thus, Abu Sway reflects the shift within Hamas towards a more inclusive approach, opposite to the exclusive tendencies of RZ.

Let us now analyze Khater's attitude towards the Jews and Israel. Khater's understanding of Hamas' attitudes towards the Jews, the Zionist movement, and the State of Israel, distinguishes between the three.<sup>300</sup> Khater argues that Hamas holds a deep understanding of the State of Israel, the background and circumstances that led to its inception, and the role of the West in this process. But just like in the Jewish-Israeli national-religious case study, this understanding reveals more about Hamas itself than it does on the actual Israeli reality. It is clear, argues Khater (echoing the Grand Mufti from the 1930s), that the motives to establish the State of Israel were both national and religious (KHATER, 2017, p. 511).

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<sup>299</sup> Al-Zahar's book published in Beirut in 2010 under the Arabic title *La Mustaqbala Bayna al-Umam*. It was originally published in 2008 in Algiers.

<sup>300</sup> In his article, Khater also delineates Hamas' political and operative approaches.

For the European colonial powers, it was “killing two birds in one stone”: Israel is of geo-strategic importance and at the same time it answered their desire to get rid of the so-called “Jewish question” (KHATER, 2017). Kater’s arguments indicates both the deep scar Western colonialism left in Palestine and the deep anti-Semitism of Palestinian Islamism, which is a cocktail of European anti-Semitism and Islamic anti-Jewish bias fueled by the conflict with Israel. Khater understands Israel as a tool to “impose hegemony and control at the heart of the Arab and Muslim countries. Western powers wanted to prevent the development of these countries in order to keep the region’s wealth and resources under their control thus precluding it from becoming an autonomous active and influential force.” This anchors the local conflict in a wide, global, context, echoing a conspiracy well known in the Arab world. At the same time Khater asserts, “One should not neglect the fact that some leading Western powers had religious and cultural backgrounds supporting the so-called “return of the Jews” to Palestine.” (*Ibid.*). Again, despite the attempt to color it with diplomatic language, Hamas’ understanding of the conflict as cosmic, religious and meta-historical, emerges from in-between the lines (mirroring in this way Kedar’s arguments).

Khater also mentions that while historically Muslims treated Jews with tolerance, Jews pay the Muslims with an unjust occupation (*Ibid.*, p. 512-513):

*Fighting the Jews in al-Madinah and its environs only occurred after their aggression and conspiracy against the Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad (SAAWS), and their emerging state. The Jews of Spain (Andalusia) took refuge in Muslim countries after the Inquisition tribunals. Additionally, throughout time, Palestinian history has recorded tolerance between Christians, Jews and Muslims, as no conflict had taken place between Muslims and Christians on one hand, and the Jews on the other until the Zionist gangs emerged in Palestine and began their brutal massacres against Palestinians [...] Hamas believes that the Zionist project is one that targets the present and future of the whole Arab and Muslim Ummah, regardless of its direct aim at seizing Palestinian land and displacing its people. Consequently, in Hamas’s Vision for Managing the Conflict with the ‘Zionist Enemy’ the whole Ummah should be playing a role in the conflict with the ‘Zionist occupation’ and not just the Palestinian people.”*

At the same time, in line with Hamas' new discourse, Khater asserts that "according to Muslim beliefs, Christians, Jews and all other human beings were created from one essence and all are brothers in humanity. They all share the right to live in freedom and dignity without exception or discrimination. Humans are, by creation, honored beings regardless of their religion, color, sex, or race." (*Ibid.*, p. 515). Thus, Khater goes back to his argument that "Palestine has been an example of tolerance and coexistence between its Muslim, Christian, and Jewish residents", asserting that "conflict and fighting had never been present before the Zionist movement gangs' aggression."

Based on this understanding, Khater also presents a vision for the future: "Once Palestine is liberated and the 'Zionist occupation' terminated, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Palestinians will live in tolerance, coexistence, peace, and security as they did before the beginning of the systematic migration campaigns of the world's Jews to Palestine that were organized by the Zionist movement." (*Ibid.*). Khater's political and practical ambiguity is persistent throughout this article.

Khater, like other writers in the 2014 compilation, paves the way to Hamas' withdrawal from the 1988 covenant and towards the 2017 "Document of General Principals and Policies". It is not done overtly of course but in a subtle and indirect way. Khater's way to distance Hamas' from the blunt anti-Semitism within the 1988 covenant is by arguing that Zionist scholars distorted and deliberately misinterpreted the covenant in a way that can be understood as anti-Semitic. Khater completely denounces such allegations, adding that the mere concept of anti-Semitism first emerged in Europe and is not even known to Muslims in the first place (*Ibid.*, p. 515-516). Thus, according to Khater, the West created antisemitism, and by doing so it also generated the Palestinian problem.

As the 1988 charter is indeed an anti-Semitic document expressing hostility towards the Jews,<sup>301</sup> Khater is faced with a certain problem which he needs to explain:

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<sup>301</sup> For example, article 7 of the 1988 Hamas Covenant ends with the following Hadith: "The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree, would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews" (al-Bukhari and Moslem). This is article Twenty-Two in Hamas Charter word for word: "For a long time,

“Any loose terms in Hamas’s Charter are due to the conditions of origination of the movement where this style dominated Arab and Islamic rhetoric in general and was not intended on religious, political or legal grounds.” (*Ibid.*). Similarly, as mentioned above, Rizqa and Abu Sway also denounce the charters in their articles in the same publication (ABU SWAY, 2017; RIZQA, 2017). Khater finalizes his move by disconnecting the movement’s action from the ideology expressed in the 1988 charter, asserting that Hamas’ real attitudes towards the Jews should be examined only according to its practical record and political policy towards the Jews (KHATER, 2017, p. 516).

Concerning Zionism, Khater states clearly that “Hamas differentiates between Judaism as a heavenly religion and Zionism as a political, racist, aggressive movement aiming at the occupation of Palestine and expelling its people, in addition to establishing a nationalist state for the Jews [...] while Hamas believes that any Jew is not its enemy because of his religious belief, it considers every Zionist an enemy,

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the enemies have been planning, skillfully and with precision, for the achievement of what they have attained. They took into consideration the causes affecting the current of events. They strived to amass great and substantive material wealth which they devoted to the realisation of their dream. With their money, they took control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations, and others. With their money they stirred revolutions in various parts of the world with the purpose of achieving their interests and reaping the fruit therein. They were behind the French Revolution, the Communist revolution and most of the revolutions we heard and hear about, here and there. With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions and others in different parts of the world for the purpose of sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests. With their money they were able to control imperialistic countries and instigate them to colonize many countries in order to enable them to exploit their resources and spread corruption there. You may speak as much as you want about regional and world wars. They were behind World War I, when they were able to destroy the Islamic Caliphate, making financial gains and controlling resources. They obtained the Balfour Declaration, formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state. It was they who instigated the replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations and the Security Council to enable them to rule the world through them. There is no war going on anywhere, without having their finger in it. "So often as they shall kindle a fire for war, Allah shall extinguish it; and they shall set their minds to act corruptly in the earth, but Allah loveth not the corrupt doers." (Quran 5:64). The imperialistic forces in the Capitalist West and Communist East, support the enemy with all their might, in money and in men. These forces take turns in doing that. The day Islam appears, the forces of infidelity would unite to challenge it, for the infidels are of one nation. "O true believers, contract not an intimate friendship with any besides yourselves: they will not fail to corrupt you. They wish for that which may cause you to perish: their hatred hath already appeared from out of their mouths; but what their breasts conceal is yet more inveterate. We have already shown you signs of their ill will towards you, if ye understand." (Quran 3:118). It is not in vain that the verse is ended with Allah's words "if ye understand." English translation, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, 18 August 1988. Retrieved 15 February 2009: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp)

whether Jewish or not.” (*Ibid.*). Regarding the state of Israel, it is considered by Hamas “as an invalid entity, which is the outcome of a ‘Zionist aggression’ on the land and people of Palestine.” (*Ibid.*).

*Hamas believes that it is an enemy that should be fought and faced with all legal and legitimate means according to principles of Islamic jurisprudence and rules of international law, as well as the values of freedom and justice universally agreed upon. The calls in the West for the Palestinian people in general, and for Hamas in particular, to recognize “Israel” is a further oppression that accentuates the injustice the West committed in supporting the establishment of the ‘Zionist entity.’ Ultimately, it is not part of Hamas’ vision to legally recognize ‘the state of Israel,’ or in any way legitimize its occupation. For this would invalidate the right of the Palestinian people to its land and holy sites as well as their right to self-defense, liberation and self-determination, a natural right secured by international conventions.*

Khater uses the language of international law and the values of freedom, liberty, self-determination, human rights and equality. But he also presents a rigid and dichotomic national-religious world view, in which one side is a completely just, a victim of a conspiracy on a cosmic scale, while the other side is a complete villain, throughout history, cursed by God and men. Like Sabri, Khater cannot present a balanced approach to history (and of reality), not because he is a Palestinian nationalist, but because his Palestinian nationalism is deeply anchored in a RN transcendental and cosmic understanding of the universe. For example, the past harmony with the Jews was always under the rule of Islam. Khater cannot understand the national existence of the Jews and their will not to be subordinated to other nations, cultures or religions. His perception of the past ignores the rifts between the Arabs and the Ottoman Muslims on national grounds. Khater’s view of the future is similarly particularistic. His aspiration for self-determination for the Palestinians is hence not a universal value but a particularistic one. While Israel’s current application of Jewish national self-determination comes on the account of the Palestinian’s right for national fulfillment, in Khater’s vision the Palestinian self-determination completely overrules the Jewish national existence. Thus, despite Hamas’ call for a

two-state solution, on the philosophical level at least, so it seems, there is no room for both. In order for Khater's approach to exist, it must subordinate history, politics, and in fact the entire conception of reality, to an ideal past and a utopian future.

Hamas makes a clear distinction between Jews and Judaism on the one hand and Zionists and Zionism on the other. This distinction is clearly part of the movement's shift to power and its understanding of international norms. In the 1990s Hamas' ideologists treated all Jews as eternal enemies of Islam and Zionism as the contemporary embodiment of this cosmic animosity. It is important to note that a similar shift took place in the Fatah movement as early as 1970. At the time several Fatah ideologists published a text in French media titled "La révolution palestinienne et les Juifs" (the Palestinian revolution and the Jews). The authors of the pamphlet stress that the enemy is Zionism and not the Jews. moreover, Jewish individuals are invited to participate in the Palestinian struggle for liberation (El Fath, 1970). This led to a new Palestinian vision of a new Palestine, within which there will be a place even to the Israeli Jews. the authors anchor this change in the geopolitical changes of the 1960s, especially the results of the 1967 war, and in deep process of ideological examination that took place in the years before the publication of this text (1970). The text was republished in mid-2021 by the French Journalist Alain Gresh (AL FATH et al., 2021), just when another Israeli-Palestinian wave of violence was coming to an end.

#### [We Were Here First \(The myth of Autochthony\)](#)<sup>302</sup>

The polemics around the myth of autochthony is perfectly exemplified in the December 2017 debate between Kedar and Kuki already mentioned. At some point in the 45-minute-long political discussion, the following exchange takes place:

*Sheikh Kuki: No person can deny the Arabic and Islamic nature of Palestine. It was the land of the Canaanites who lived there for thousands of years, the Zionists and the Jews only passed by as Bedouins and did not build a civilization there.*

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<sup>302</sup> On the myth of autochthony see the special issue of *Critique Internationale* (no. 10, 2001/1) under the title *J'étais là avant* - "I was here first" (BAYART et al., 2001).



*What proves this is the fact that 80% of all archeological findings in Jerusalem and Palestine are Islamic findings, 18% Christian and only 2% Canaanite. In all the unjust diggings done by the Zionist regime they did not find even one stone or one archeological finding. It is all forgery, lies and fabrications. They're trying to find history where they have no history [...]*

**Kedar:** *[...] We were in Jerusalem more than 3000 years ago when the forefathers of Islam were drinking wine and booze, burying their daughters alive and worshipping (the goddesses) Uzza, al-Lat & Manat in the Arabian desert. We were in Jerusalem worshipping the one and only God while you were worshipping idols in the Arabian deserts [...] David, Solomon, all the prophets were Jews. Even Jesus son of Mary, was born Jewish and lived as a Jew!<sup>303</sup> When did Islam come to the world? Only in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, with the purpose to take over the world and to impose the culture of the desert over civilization.*

*We came back to the land of our forefathers, to rebuild our country, rebuild our independence and our freedom far from Islam's grasp. We are not protégés of anyone and are not the offspring of the apes and pigs, as you would like to believe! We are not the "murderers of the prophets",<sup>304</sup> we do not live under your rule, and we will not be humiliated and pay the Jizya tax, even to Muslims. Why not? Because we are a nation! Our religion is not a void religion, just as Islam is not the religion of truth!<sup>305</sup>*

**Kuki:** *Trump gave something he did not own to someone who does not deserve it. Just like the Balfour Declaration; 100 years after the Balfour Declaration, along came the Trump Declaration [...] Trump's decision will turn the Zionist entity from the "Kingdom of Heaven" to the "Kingdom of Hell". [Expressing these last words in English]*

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<sup>303</sup> Both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalists attitudes towards the Christians and Christianity merits a separate discussion.

<sup>304</sup> Kedar refers here to Islamic traditions and fables involving Jews which will be explained hereinafter.

<sup>305</sup> Kedar concluded this part with the saying: "Every religion has its place. Every nation has its religion. You have to recognize the rights of others, since after you occupied the Middle East geographically, you occupied the past of the Middle East, its history and the religions of the Middle East!"

Sheikh Kuki argues that Palestine was always Arab, referring to its Canaanite pre-Islamic past. He declares that only 2% of Palestine's archeological findings date back to the country's pre-Islamic and pre-Christian past. Kuki refers to the Palestinian Canaanite myth of origin, which has its roots in the late ottoman period and during the formation of the Palestinian National movement under the British Mandate. However, this myth of autochthony moved from the margins and was consolidated into the mainstream Palestinian national narrative by Palestinian intellectuals following the 1967 war, from the 1970s onward (ZILBERMAN, 1993b). This narrative is presented in Palestinian school books as simple truth that needs no proof.<sup>306</sup> Abu Sway criticizes the Balfour declaration for reducing the Arab Palestinian people of the Land of Canaan to the "nameless 'non-Jewish communities' [...] forgotten are old Jericho the first city in the world [...] and Jabus, the city of the Arab Canaanites before the old and new testaments were revealed" (ABU SWAY, 2017, p. 5). Zilberman argues that while the Islamic Palestinian myth goes back only to the formative period of Islam in the seventh century, it was secular Palestinian nationalists who revived the Palestinian national myth of Canaanite origin, which is based on pre-Islamic and even polytheistic past (ZILBERMAN, 1993b). Yet already in the first edition of his 1978 book Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, already a senior Islamic clerk at the time, based the Palestinian historical rights in Palestinian on the Canaanite-Jebusite pre-Islamic myth, describing the Jebusites as "a Canaanite tribe that came from the Arabian Peninsula to Palestine" (SABRI, 2011, p. 14).<sup>307</sup> This is a Palestinian national-religious anomaly, in which Muslim scholars turn to pre-Islamic history, which are usually seen as *jâhiliyya* (age of ignorance and polytheism), for legitimacy.

Indeed, throughout the 1990s, the Fatah controlled Palestinian Authority referred on several occasions to the Palestinian Canaanite origin as a tool to construct and strengthen Palestinian national identity. Yet, as Palestinian sociologist Salim Tamari noted, "it is also a *reactive* nativism that sees itself as an instrument of the

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<sup>306</sup> See for example the 2004 Palestinian 5<sup>th</sup> grade book "History of Ancient Cultures" (*tarikh al-khadarat al-qadimah*) p. 30.

<sup>307</sup> In this case I have examined the original manuscript from 1978 of Sabri's book (SABRI, 2011).

nationalist struggle with little concern for historical nuance.” (Salim TAMARI, 2009, p. 111). Tamari demonstrates this through the Palestinian festival “Yabus”. Quoting one of the festival’s brochures, titled, “Why Was the Name Yabus Chosen?” Tamari reveals the motivation behind the name of the annual international music festival in Jerusalem (quoted in: (*Ibid.*)):

*Yabus is the primordial name of Jerusalem. It is derived from the Jebusites – a Canaanite tribe that built the first city that evolved into modern Jerusalem almost five thousand years ago. We have selected the name in 1995 at the founding of the festival in a contentious political atmosphere that responds to the [Israeli-initiated] campaign of Jerusalem 3000.*

The mentioned campaign: “JERUSALEM 3000 – City of David”, refers to an Israeli government decision from 1993: “The year 1996 (5756-57) has been declared the “Trimillennium of Jerusalem, the City of David,” with the city of Jerusalem and the figure of King David at the center of the planned events.”<sup>308</sup> It relies on the Biblical narrative of King David taking over the city from the Jebusites (described in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 11). Tamari notes that the Palestinian campaign was clearly aimed to polemize with Jerusalem’s Israeli mayor at the time (and later Prime Minister) Ehud Olmert, who led a municipal campaign which publicized the Israeli claims for the Hebraic origins of Jerusalem and ignored its antecedent pre-Israelite roots. However, according to Tamari, the Palestinian campaign, just like the Israeli campaign, “also ignored claims for historical accuracy about the Jebusites, whose origins are dubious and whose language and culture is most likely to have been non-Arab and even non-Semitic.” (*Ibid.*). Tamari’s work is a manifestation of academic integrity and critical thought.

The Yabus festival has evolved into one of the biggest Palestinian cultural institutions located in East Jerusalem . The center’s website explains that “today and after more than 5000 years, the descendants of the Jebusites still live in Jerusalem and

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<sup>308</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Archive, 1993, JERUSALEM 3000- City of David 1996; accessed on 09/10/2018 11:20: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archive/1993/pages/jerusalem%203000-%20city%20of%20david%201996.aspx>

continue to revive their city culturally and artistically by organizing activities in the field of performing arts.”<sup>309</sup>

In a similar vein, in 1996 the PA’s Ministry of Culture initiated a festival in the West Bank village of Sebastia honoring the Canaanite Deity *Ba’al*.<sup>310</sup> Israeli historian Meir Litvak points that this “pagan celebration” aroused only a faint protest from national-Islamist circles like Hamas, compared with the “virulent opposition the glorification of the pharaonic past elicited in Egypt” (the only exception being the Islamist opposition of the Salafi Hizb al-Tahrir who had always rejected Arab or Palestinian nationalism (Meir LITVAK, 2012b, p. 117)).

Another example of this Palestinian NR anomaly in the context of SRN polemics was given in a televised debate which took place following a controversial UNESCO resolution. The resolution came to highlight the sanctity of Jerusalem to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but was perceived as anti-Israeli and as undermining the sanctity of Jerusalem for the Jews.<sup>311</sup> In the debate between Mordechai Kedar and Masud Ghnaim, a history teacher and member of the Israeli Parliament active in the Islamic Movement in Israel (ideologically affiliated with the Muslim Brothers), the latter counters Kedar’s arguments that Jerusalem doesn’t appear in the Quran and does appear in the Hebrew Bible with the claim that David conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites. Ghnaim thus affirms a Palestinian Canaanite origin that preceded David, fusing together the Islamic and Canaanite myths. In response, Kedar replies that the Muslim geographic occupation of the region was followed by an occupation of the region’s theology and history.<sup>312</sup> Bound together with Sabri’s arguments it can be argued that the Palestinian national myth of Canaanite origin was Islamized and fused

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<sup>309</sup> [http://yabous.org/en/?page\\_id=1855](http://yabous.org/en/?page_id=1855) accessed 09/10/2018 11:30.

<sup>310</sup> Ehud Ya’ari, “The New Canaanites” (The Jerusalem Report, 19/09/96, p. 32).

<sup>311</sup> UN UNESCO Resolution 200 EX/25, “the Occupied Palestine Resolution” from 13/10/2016, formally ratified on 26/10/2016: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-199847/>. In the resolution the Holy Esplanade is referred to only as Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, while the Jewish name “The Temple Mount” is completely missing. The “Western Wall” appears in quotation marks after the Islamic name of the site “Al-Buraq Plaza”. UNESCO’s Director-General Irina Bokova attacked the resolution, stating it is offensive towards the Jews and that erasing religious sanctity of holy sites goes against the organization’s spirit. Despite Bokova’s reservations, Israel’s minister of education at the time Naftali Benett, the soon to be first Israeli RZ Prime Minister, decided to suspend all Israeli cooperation with UNESCO.

<sup>312</sup> Channel 20, 14/10/2016, uploaded to YouTube on 15/10/2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBatpOLcblM>

into the national-religious narrative. This myth provides the Palestinians with historical *longue durée* which precedes the Jewish presence in the Holy Land. Similar to the Jewish narrative, from Sabri's point of view the land was taken from the Arabs in the antiquity, and they merely returned to it in the seventh century with the Islamic conquest, and it remained Arab ever since, except for a short crusader episode in the Middle ages. Moreover, the struggle with Israel is compared to the Canaanite's struggle against the ancient Israelite occupation, giving the current Palestinian struggle with Israel a meta-historic meaning.

In the Sebastia festival in 1996, while the participants reenacted the wars of the Canaanites gods, the narrator emphasized the warnings against the approaching Hebrew tribes and refers to the struggle against the Biblical leader Joshua. Yasser Arafat was proclaimed "*Sayyid Kan'an al-Awwal*" the First Lord of Canaan". As one Israeli academic who followed the festival pointed out, "the message conveyed was that the present-day struggle against Zionism continues the conflict that began more than three millennia ago" (*Ibid.*, p. 116).

Hamas' willingness to accept the Palestinian Canaanite myth of national origin distinguishes it from other Islamic movements. Hamas goes as far as integrating this pre-Islamic narrative into the movement's historical timeline (*Ibid.*, p. 216). Some Arab countries used their pre-Islamic past to strengthen the legitimacy of their national territorial state confronted by the supra/sub-national Islamic identity, while Islamists fought this trend vigorously. Yet in Palestine the ancient Arab and pre-Islamic national myths does not replace the Islamic past as the first frame of reference of the masses. It is rather provided as an answer to the historical claims of Zionism. In doing so, claims Litvak, Hamas subjugates its religious starting point to the national consideration (*Ibid.*).<sup>313</sup>

At the same time, Hamas islamizes this Arab past. Unlike in other Arab countries where the pre-Islamic past competes with Islam as a frame of identity, the Biblical stories of the Holy Land appear in the Quran and are part of the Islamic corpus.

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<sup>313</sup> For example Hamas' website included a short overview of Palestine's history prior to Islam describing Palestine as an Arab land from the dawn of history and the Canaanites as an Arab nation (Meir LITVAK, 2012b, p. 217).

Muhammad Diab Abu Saleh, an imam and a Hebronite intellectual argues that Hebron, whose Arabic name *al-Khalīl* derives from Abraham's Quranic epithet *Khalil Allah* (خليل الله, Friend of God, see Quran 4:25), was an Arab and Muslim city already 6000 years ago (*Ibid.*, p. 217). It is indeed an easy task for Abu Saleh, ideologically close to Hamas, to Islamize the ancient history of the Holy Land, since many of the early Jewish Christian myths correspond with the Islamic *Isrā'īliyyāt* corpus (see below). Muslims revere Abraham the Patriarch as a prophet and accept the Jewish and Christian beliefs that he is buried in Hebron. Echoing the Biblical narrative in Islamic Palestinian NR dressing, Abu Saleh claims that Abraham bought his grave from an Arab Hebronite of the Tamim clan, one of the city's largest families today. Abu Saleh thus delineates a straight line from the antiquity to the present times, from the pre-Islamic past to contemporary Hebron.<sup>314</sup>

The Jewish settlers of Hebron do the same. They claim that their story in the city starts with the Biblical narrative of Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah (also known as the Ibrahimi Mosque) from Ephron the Hittite (Genesis 23:16). A reenactment of this Biblical scene opens the 4D Movie called "Touching Eternity" screened at the visitor's center of Hebron's Jewish settlement (Beit Hadassah).<sup>315</sup>

Jewish national-religious discourse takes for granted such direct link between the antiquity and modern nationalism. Assaf Malach's work is especially interesting in this regard, since it make national-religious claims through the academic study of nationalism. His 2008 PhD thesis, mentioned in the "Interlocutors" section, constitutes a prominent example of the RZ discourse through academia. In his work, Malach strives to build a solid base for the legitimization of the state of Israel as a Jewish nation-state, through two main approaches: the study of nationalism and discussions in political philosophy to justify the Jewish nation-state.

In both disciplines, Malach examines the particular characteristics of the Jewish-Israeli case study. Malach applies general scholarly theories onto the particular

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<sup>314</sup> For an interview with Abu Saleh see: al-Tayeb Ghanayem, "Hebron will be Either Ours or Theirs", *Eretz Acheret*, no. 32 (Feb-Mar 2006, in Hebrew), p. 60.

<sup>315</sup> As a geopolitical guide I have visited the site numerous times, seeing and hearing how different speakers of the Jewish settlement in Hebron refer to this biblical story. Also see: <http://en.hebron.org.il/culture/551>.

case study of a Jewish nation-state, examining the possible influences they might carry (MALACH, 2008, p. 1, κ). Malach's theoretical framework starts with the claim that ancient Israel, including the first and second Temple periods (1000BC to 70AD),<sup>316</sup> was already a nation-state. To make this claim, Malach needs to prove that nationalism is not a modern but rather a wide and encompassing human phenomenon; an embodiment of human nature. For Malach, nationalism is a cosmological phenomenon, not only something that always existed everywhere. Nationalism is also necessary for the proper application of religious life in general and especially for the proper Jewish national-religious existence (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

According to Malach, ancient Jewish nationalism was kept in various forms among Jewish communities throughout the Middle Ages (MALACH, 2016, p. 151; MALACH, 2008, p. 7-9). Lacking territory and political power, the Jews became “a nation of religion”. In this the Jews are an anomaly, a deviation from the regular definition of religion and nation (MALACH, 2016, p. 155). Malach remains vague regarding the time frame and geographical spread, but one can conclude that he means all Jews everywhere, from the year 70 A.D (the year of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans) and up to modern Zionism and the state of Israel. Malach presents the Zionist movement and the modern State of Israel as a straight continuation of the ancient Jewish nation, revived in its historical homeland (*Ibid.*, p. 149). After posing these assumptions as the basis of his study, in the second part of his work Malach examines the approaches of the different schools of thought on nationalism towards the Jewish-Israeli case study.

In this latter part, Malach deals with justifications for a Jewish nation-state based on the general justification of the nation-states in political thought. Here Malach takes the argument posed in the first part – the existence of national-political dimension in Jewish tradition already in antiquities – to justify the State of Israel as a nation-state of the Jewish people. Unlike the common approach, argues Malach, in which the particular past of a certain group must not influence the preferred current

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<sup>316</sup> According to the Israeli-Jewish historical periodization the First Temple period starts at approximately 1000 B.C.E. and is related to by researcher also as the Iron Age period of the ancient Levant or the Israelite Period.

political order, such particular past can have an influence, also from a universal point of view. Malach concludes that there is a high validity to the existence of an ancient national-political dimension in Judaism, and that this dimension must be taken into account when we examine the arguments for a Jewish Israeli nation-state (MALACH, 2008, p. 1). Malach specifies in details: the state of Israel, with its Hebrew calendar, the Sabbath as official day of rest, the special place of the Hebrew law in the justice system, the official status of the Hebrew language and the place of traditional and national values in the education system, etc., all these according to Malach, justify the contemporary Jewish-Israeli nation-state (*ibid.*, p. 276).

In his dissertation, Malach asserts the importance of the national phenomenon by emphasizing, among other ways, how widespread nationalism is in the current era. Malach specifically relates to new nation-states, national agitation and national conflicts. To establish his case, he brings examples from around the world, from Europe, Asia and Africa. He even dedicates a paragraph to the national conflict in the 1990s between Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Island, a small island located in the Solomon Islands Archipelago in the western South Pacific Ocean, within the Melanesia sub-region of Oceania. Yet one national movement is bluntly absent from Malach's work, one much closer to the Jewish-Israeli case study than the remote archipelago. The Palestinian national movement, which is not only the closest national movement to the Jewish nation-state, but one that is entangled in a long and intensive national-religious conflict, is not mentioned once. While Malach does not refer to the Palestinians directly in his PhD or other articles, they are "present absentees" in his work. Their existence, or non-existence for that matter, does appear through hints. For instance, he writes, "It is possible that the experience of many third world countries indicates that artificially imposing the model of the nation-state and of 'the right to national self-determination' on a population that is not unified and lacks the adequate cultural infrastructure is doomed to fail and requires an alternative political thought." (*ibid.*, p. 6). Some of these hints apply more directly to the Palestinians: "Strong and fundamental traditions within the Islamic world contradict in their spirit the possibility of building their political order on a national basis, and this is enough



to cast doubt on the adequacy of such an order to this culture for the long term.”  
(*Ibid.*, p. 6-7).

Malach argues that it is obvious that the state must safeguard the civil and human rights of minorities that do not partake in the culture of the majority:

*but as much as this culture is summed up by a flag, a symbol and a hymn, the question arises whether it even merits the definition of a culture [...] The justification for the identification of the state with a certain culture becomes clear as long as we are faced with a full and advanced culture that is expressed in the structure of the public systems in a manner that is impossible in other states (Ibid., p. 276).*

Yet the identity of those cultureless minorities that do not merit a state of their own remains a mystery that unfolds only outside Malach’s dissertation. Indeed, an article published in 2006 in the national-religious newspaper *Makor Rishon* reveals Malach’s philosophical and moral approach to Palestinian nationalism, under the title: “Not Every Nation Merit a State”. Malach use Hobsbawm’s modernist theory to argue that founding a Palestinians state is immoral and impractical, even if the Palestinians where to be considered a nation (MAKOR RISHON 27/10/06).

In this article, Malach offers a new direction of thought to this longstanding motivation within the Israeli right to maintain Israel’s former Prime Minister Golda Meir’s mythological stand that “there is no Palestinian nation”.<sup>317</sup> For this purpose Malach uses Hobsbawm’s critical ideas on nationalism to refute the authenticity of the Palestinian nationalism. This is manipulative, because Malach himself does not accept Hobsbawm’s approach to nationalism and would not apply it on Zionism. Moreover, it is very reasonable to assume that Hobsbawm himself would have rejected Malach’s approach to the topic completely. Furthermore, Malach argues that defining a group as a nation is not enough for a statehood. Basing the right to

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<sup>317</sup> Golda Meir, Israel’s former Prime Minister of the Labor Party used to declare there there is no such a thing as a Palestinian people. See for example Meir’s quote in Sunday Times (15 June 1969): “There is no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the first world War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.” See also in The Washington Post (16 June 1969).

statehood on this sole criterion, according to Malach, is impractical, not realistic and immoral. In order for a nation to merit a nation-state it needs to stand up to several other criteria, mainly the benefit of such a political act to the members of its own nation and its contribution to the political stability of the regional order” (MAKOR RISHON 27/10/06). Malach, so it seems, does not connect between his own RZ identity and political stand and his analyses regarding Palestinian nationalism and their collective right for statehood.

In other words, to sum up Malach’s approach, the right to a nation state is not automatically given, but rather a nuanced case by case examination is required. According to Malach’s examination, the Jews merit a nation-state since they are not only a real nation, they also stand up to all the required criteria. The Palestinians on the other hand, are not really a nation. As we have seen, for Malach it is uncertain that his neighbors even fall under the definition of a culture. Yet even if the Palestinians would fall under the definition of a nation, they still do not merit a state and national self-determination due to other, political and moral, considerations.

All this brings us to what we can term "the primordial failure." In his examination of Zionist historiography of Palestinian nationalism Haim Gerber traced an intellectual inconsistency among several Zionists writers (among them Porath and Litvak). Gerber shows “how Zionist historiography of Palestinian nationalism takes advantage of the insights of the constructivist school to make fun of the claims made by the Palestinians” (GERBER, 2008, p. 34-37). The inconsistency lies in a particularistic use of the modernist approach – asserting that all nationalisms are modern constructs – in regard to the Palestinian nationalism, while not placing Zionism under the same theoretic lens, but rather taking the national authenticity of Zionism for granted, not even bothering to attribute it a *longue durée* of historical and cultural continuity. Gerber argues that this discourse of national negation of the Palestinian by Zionists thinkers and leaders was an important building block in both Zionist ideology and in influencing the British policy in Palestine (*Ibid.*, p. 30-31, 37-41). Nevertheless, despite its problematics, this discourse remains within the boundaries of academic literature and discussion and is part of an ongoing academic dialogue in which Israeli and

Palestinian historians and researchers take part alongside their colleagues from around the world.

Malach takes his work one step further. He surveys the well-known scholarly dialectic evolution on nationalism, from the primordial approach of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through modernist deconstruction of nationalism and up to the ethno-symbolist synthesis. Malach re-shuffles this categorization in a thematic and non-chronological order, starting with the modernists (Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm etc.), he continues with the ethno-symbolists (Smith, Hastings, Connor etc.) and only then he deals with the primordial approach (see footnote below), placing himself with “those who see nationalism as a broad human phenomenon that is not limited to the modern era” (MALACH, 2016, p. 136). Malach does not use the term “primordial” to describe this group, stating that it is a term unjustly used by those opposing this approach in order to describe it as a-historic. Such thematic division of scholarly approaches to nationalism is problematic on its own. It reverses the chronological evolution of the research in a way that carries meaning.

Modernists tend to emphasize the voluntary and political aspects of modern collective identities, it is a reaction to the primordial approach to nationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>318</sup> The ethno-symbolic approach was a kind of synthesis – accepting the modernity of nationalism but finding its roots in ancient (sometimes embryonic) identities. This thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectics has its own inner logic which is dictated by the chronological evolution of the research. Malach’s reshuffled the presentation of these approaches, starting with the approach that bothers him the most, the modernist, and ending with his own approach, the primordial. He presents the traditional and somewhat old-fashioned third approach, as new and innovative. Placing it last and calling nationalism “a wide human phenomenon”

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<sup>318</sup> The primordialist perception is evident in the works of the famous German intellectuals Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803, the latter was not a nationalist himself but his work was used in the 19th century by nationalist intellectuals). Later, primordialism entered the emerging historical discipline as seen in the works of the nationalist English historian E. A. Freeman (1823-1892), the German Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), and the French historians François Guizot (1787-1874), Henri Martin (1810-1883) and Augustin Thierry (1795-1856). For more information on European primordialist historians of nationalism see Oded Steinberg’s work (Oded STEINBERG, 2019).

instead of primordial gives the feeling he is shaking the foundation of the acceptable research instead of going back to the old norms. This methodology leaves us with some unanswered question – what construction exactly the modernists set out to deconstruct, who built it and why?

Malach's unequivocal approach to Zionism is of a primordial and superhistorical national movement based on theology, holy scriptures, and divine election. Inevitably, such a position is polemics painted in pseudo academic shades, whether self-conscious or not. In an article from 2016 Malach's message was somewhat refined (MALACH, 2016). Wrapped with academic undertones of general (universal) theories on the phenomenon of nationalism, it is particularistic in nature. Its bottom line is: the Jewish-Israeli nation is the most authentic and real among nations and the only one to draw a straight line from antiquities to our days. True, according to the ethno-symbolists the biblical narrative of the Israelites became an allegorical prototype of national formation, chosenness, sacred pact and territorial belonging to a promised land (HASTINGS, 1997; Anthony SMITH, 2003a; BEN-ISRAEL, 1986a). Malach goes further, by treating the Hebrew Bible not as an allegory but rather as the direct and real historical source and justification for contemporary Jewish nationalism. This argument is taken for granted all throughout Malach's work and is mentioned as an obvious truth, without any references or methodological use of critical Biblical or Ancient Near East studies, or history of the Jewish thought and life throughout the Middle Ages, which are an indispensable tool for making proper academic arguments on such issues. Malach deals with the way the three academic schools of nationalism treat the Jewish-Israeli case study. While doing so he quotes widely from the Bible and other ancient, sacred and liturgical Jewish scriptures, leading to the conclusion that the Jewish nation, who gave the world the national idea, is the direct historical heir of the biblical narrative and must be the most authentic of all nations (MALACH, 2016, p. 148-173).

Malach criticizes the modernist scholars for ignoring the national aspect of ancient Israel, for treating Judaism only as a religion, one of many, overlooking its uniqueness and national aspects. While Anderson saw pre-Zionist Judaism as an ancient religious community (*Ibid.*, p. 151), in accordance with his general theory,

Malach attacks him for ignoring in his seminal 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, what he calls Judaism's national characteristics in antiquities and the Middle Ages. Malach claims that the pre-modern Jew saw himself not only as a "wandering devotee," but also "a descendant of King David and of Judas Maccabeus, praying and longing to renew his days as of old" ("to renew his days as of old" - לחדש את ימיו בקדם [...]), is a Biblical proverb in Hebrew which Malach took from the Book of Lamentations 5:21).<sup>319</sup> In Benedict Anderson's only reference to Zionism (in a footnote, another reason for Malach's criticism) as a modern re-imagination of an ancient religious community to a nation, he describes it as "an alchemic change from a wandering devotee to a local patriot" (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 149 note 16). As the historian Yaron Tsur demonstrates in his introduction to the Hebrew translation of Anderson's book, a careful reading of Anderson's short comment on Judaism illustrates an interesting insight. In this almost sole reference to the question of Jewish nationalism, Tsur argues, "it can be understood that the birth of modern Jewish nationalism is not a completely new act of imagining a nation, but rather a 'reimagination'." (TSUR, 1999, p. 15).

Based on this nuance Tsur goes as far as claiming that:

*from his brief wording it can be understood that the Jews were maybe once a body that resembles a nation, and that the appearance of Zionism means that they re-imagine themselves anew as a nation, in a similar status. In this regard it seems that Anderson does not differ from the primordialists [...] regarding the ancient status of the Jews as a nation; he differs from them only in the question of the continuity of this status and in estimating its influence on the development of the Jewish national movement (Ibid.).*

Shortly afterwards, Tsur moderates his comment by claiming that Anderson uses the words "alchemic change" to highlight the gap and discontinuity and to reflect the dramatic change that enabled the transformation of the old Jew, the "wandering

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<sup>319</sup> The context of this term in the Bible is of renewing past glory of the Jews following the destruction of the Temple: "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. Thou canst not have utterly rejected us, and be exceeding wroth against us!" (Lamentations 5:21-22). The Jews call God back into their lives, and into the world, by asking aspiring to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

devotee” to the new Jew, the national. Yet in his criticism Malach does not refute or even debate with Anderson’s arguments. Rather, he treats his own arguments regarding the ancient world and the Bible as axioms that need no proving and simply points at what he sees as other writers’ failure to understand. For Malach, the ancient Jew, besides being a devotee (wandering or not) was always a local patriot and a Zionist, and this truth, for him, is so profound and simple that it requires no further proof (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 149 note 16; MALACH, 2016, p. 151). It seems that Anderson, the modernist historian of nationalism, is becoming under Malach’s scalpel a primordialist, against Anderson’s own intentions.

In this sense, Malach treats nationalism as a phenomenon of the ancient world. In his examination of the Palestinian myth of Canaanite origin Ifrah Zilberman set an academic standard, stating that “only a research based on the scientific study of the ancient Near East can deal with questions related to ancient Canaan and the Canaanites and to inquire on their essence and culture” (ZILBERMAN, 1993b, p. 1). For this reason, Zilberman, an Israeli scholar of the Palestinians (who wrote his PhD in Cambridge under the supervision of Ernest Gellner), examined only the historical roots of Palestinian society in its contemporary national form. Zilberman adds to this point that “it seems as if the central question in the study of national myths in the Middle East is not if a certain myth is indeed historical, a-historic, an invented tradition or a literary fabrication. The important research question is rather what are the social-national needs and the ideological background to the appearance of a national myth” (ZILBERMAN, 1993b). Malach obviously does not confine himself to the boundaries of academic and scientific scrutiny, he deals with absolute truths.

The political problematics of autochthony and the polemics regarding “who came first” is shared by many national and religious-national conflicts throughout the world (BAYART et al., 2001). During the 1980s and 1990s, a heated debate over the “true theory” of nationalism took place. Observing this debate, from the perspective of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems that a more flexible and nuanced approach can be applied. Different nations can fall under different models of nationalisms (LATOURET, 1993), be it the modernist-constructivist (ANDERSON, 2006; GELLNER, 1983; HOBSCAWM, 1991) or the modernist ethno-symbolists (Anthony

SMITH, 1986; CONNOR, 1994). Some national movement can have more or less historical, cultural and/or religious “depth” than others. It is possible to see it as the next phase, going beyond the famous Hegelian dialectics. But the crucial difference between this nuanced approach and the approach of the Palestinian-Muslims and Israeli-Jewish SRN public intellectuals surveyed here, is in regard to the scholar’s role when approaching the authenticity of a nation, utilizing these theories to draw political conclusions, negating some nation’s right for self-determination – not surprisingly that of your national rivals – while cementing the political rights of one’s own nation. More than anything this approach reminds the writings of the pre-modernist recruited national intellectuals, only with a contemporary national-religious twist.

In applying a nuanced case-by-case approach towards theories of nationalism, as well as in drawing political conclusions, we might find it useful to keep in mind Ernest Renan’s famous assertion that eventually a nation is “a daily referendum”.<sup>320</sup> In this sense, as long as members of the nation reaffirm their collective identity it is a valid one, based on a shared ethos, beliefs or actions, regardless of any historical truth, blood connection or transcendental promises. Once a scholar chooses to affirm or negate contemporary collective identities and draw conclusions regarding the collective political rights, he or she crosses the thin line separating academia from polemics. This is even more so when it comes to transcendental truths and religious beliefs, fused with nationalism.

Finally, arguing that the works surveyed here are pseudo academic polemics is not a judgmental comment. It aims to draw a clear line between academic discourse and polemics, which are two different disciplines. Indeed, when polemicists use academic terminology, harness the academic aspiration for (at least a minimal level

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<sup>320</sup> “The existence of a nation (you will pardon me this metaphor) is a daily referendum, just as the continuing existence of an individual is a perpetual affirmation of life.” un plébiscite de tous les jours, also translated as “daily plebiscite”. Renan gave his talk under the impression of the French-German conflict, but his example can also be applied onto the Palestinian case: “A nation never has a veritable interest in annexing or keeping another region against the wishes of its people [...] If doubts arise about national borders, consult the population of the area in dispute. They have the right to an opinion on the issue.” (RENAN, 1887).

of) objectivity and mobilize the academic prestige to serve polemic ends, their work can be described as pseudo academic polemics.

#### Israel and Palestine- Names Under Debate

Israel and Palestine are two names describing the same land. The “State of Israel” was named after Biblical *YisraEl* (יִשְׂרָאֵל), the name given to Jacob the patriarch, son of Isaac (Yitzhak), grandson of Abraham (Avraham). It was later bestowed on the Land of Canaan. Thus the biblical term “Israel” *per se* carries deep religious signification, literally meaning to persevere with God.<sup>321</sup> Throughout history it was used, along other forms, by Jews and non-Jews alike, to describe those who belong to the Jewish religion. The Hebrew term *Eretz Yisrael* (אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל), the “Land of Israel”, appears in four Biblical verses (1 Samuel 13:19; Ezekiel 40:2; Ezekiel 47:18; 2 Chronicles 34:7), describing an undefined area in the southwestern Levant off the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Religiously the Biblical “Land of Israel” refers to a land promised by God to the people of Israel, “a holy term, vague as far as the exact boundaries of the territory are concerned but clearly defining ownership” (Anita SHAPIRA, 1992, p. ix).

Shortly before Israel’s declaration of independence in May 1948, the name “The State of Israel” (*Medinat Yisrael*) was chosen, emphasizing the Jewish character of the new state. The term was coined by the Jewish author Yitzhak Fernhoff in a utopian novel from 1896, in which he translated Herzl’s famous manifest *Der Judenstaat* “The Jewish State”, published earlier that year, into “The State of Israel”.<sup>322</sup> Consequently, since 1948 “Israel” is most commonly understood as synonymous with

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<sup>321</sup> The Hebrew word “Israel” is a compound of “striven” (in Hebrew *Saritha*), in a special tense – *Yisra*, and of the word God, in Hebrew *Elohim* or simply *El*. The literal meaning of the word Israel is driven from the phrase – “struggled with God” or simply “has been with God”, *YisraEl*. Jacob was named Israel following a nocturnal struggle with an angel on the Eastern bank of the Jordan River – upon his return to the Land of Canaan that was promised to his grandfather. At dawn, after Jacob survived the struggle the angel blesses him: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32, 29). “Israel” appears in the bible 1877 times, referring to Jacob, to his descendants – the Israelites (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *Bnai Yisra’el*) and the Children or Sons of Israel. The first historical extra-Biblical record of the word “Israel” was found during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Egypt, inscribed on the Merneptah Stele, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. **Invalid source specified..**

<sup>322</sup> Davar 05/05/1957.



the State of Israel. Israel's declaration of independence is a text carrying quintessential national-religious meanings (NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE BODY, 1948):

*The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books [...]*

The declaration appeals to the Jews around the world, calling them to unite around the new state in order to fulfill “the age-old dream - the redemption of Israel” (*Ibid.*). The declaration was signed “with faith in the rock of Israel” (*tzur yisra'el* צור ישראל), one of God's titles in the Bible. The ambiguity in selecting this term was intentional,<sup>323</sup> as Israeli historian Tom Segev explains, to satisfy both the demand of the head of the *Hapoel Hamizrahi* national-religious party Moshe Shapira that “Almighty the Lord of Israel” would be mentioned, and the leftist MAPAM party's objection (SEGEV, 1998, p. 258). Ben Gurion called it “a nice compromise of Jewish fellowship”, and the declaration could be approved and signed before the Sabbath, on the eve of the British departure from the country (*Ibid.*, p. 259).

“Israel” also appears in the New Testament. Applying replacement theology (supersession) the term was expropriated from its older, Jewish meaning by the Christians, who considered themselves the true successors of the divine covenant:<sup>324</sup> the Jews remained “Israel in the flesh” while the Christians became the true Israel (*Verus Israel*) – Israel in spirit. Israel also appears 41 times in the Quran, in its Arabic form *Isrā'īl* (إسرائيل) and most notably in the aforementioned expression *Banū Isrā'īl* (بنو اسرائيل - “the children of Israel”). We have seen that the Arabic term *Isrā'īliyyāt* (اسرائيليات) is historically used by Quran commentators to describe the rich Islamic traditions regarding the Jews (Vajda, EI2). *Banū Isrā'īl* was also used to name *Sūra XVII* of the Quran, referred to also as *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (سورة الاسراء, the Night Journey). The first verse in this chapter mentions *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, the “al-Aqsa mosque” (المسجد الأقصى),

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<sup>323</sup> The English translation is available on wikisource.org (accessed 02/05/2014). The declaration ended with the Hebrew date “[...] SABBATH EVE, THE 5TH DAY OF IYAR, 5708 (14TH MAY, 1948).”

<sup>324</sup> Rev. Brian W. Harrison, *The Liturgy and 'Supersessionism'*, [www.catholicculture.org](http://www.catholicculture.org) (accessed 30/04/2014).

Quran 17:1) – the first and foremost testimony to the sources of Jerusalem’s sanctity among Muslims, charging Palestinian nationalism as a whole with a deep religious dimension.

The name **Palestine**, in Arabic *filastin* (فلسطين), is used by the Arabs to describe the same land. The Declaration of Palestinian Independence, adopted by the Palestinian National Council in Algiers on 15 November 1988, mentions God clearly at the head of the document. It opens with the Islamic preamble “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” (بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ), followed by an opening statement that seems to somewhat answer the Israeli declaration of independence: “Palestine, the Land of the three monotheistic faiths, is where the Palestinian Arab people was born, on which it grew, developed and excelled. The Palestinian people was never separated from or diminished in its integral bonds with Palestine. Thus, the Palestinian Arab people ensured for itself an everlasting union between itself, its land and its history” (ABDUL HADI, 2007, p. 30) Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, a professor of Modern and Contemporary Arab History and the manager of the Beirut based Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations affiliated with Hamas, states that:

*Palestine is the name given to the southwestern part of Bilad al-Sham located in western Asia, on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean (Mohsen Mohammad SALEH, 2014, p. 11).<sup>325</sup>*

The name Palestine is mentioned by Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E. to describe the eastern coast of the Mediterranean as the land of the Philistines, one of the ancient peoples of Canaan, while the central mountain strip of the country was called “Judea” at the time and was inhabited predominantly by Jews (FELDMAN, 1990, p. 553). According to one historical narrative the name Palestine was politically applied for the first time to describe both the coast and the mountain areas by the Roman emperor Hadrian in the thirties of the second century A.D. after suppressing a large scale Jewish rebellion. This was a “deliberate attempt to eliminate all traces of Jewish sovereignty [...]” (*Ibid.*, p. 576).

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<sup>325</sup> Bilad al-Sham is Arabic for the Levant, including the contemporary states of Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon.

For this reason, many Israeli-Jews consider at the outset that the mere name “Palestine” is an attempt to eliminate the Jewish sovereign existence. One example of such a polemic attitude is the 2008 book “The Fabrication of Palestine” by an Israeli lawyer and political activist Elon Jarden,<sup>326</sup> which calls the name Palestine “Hadrian’s curse”. Jarden asserts that “The identity of the land determines the national identity of the nation settling it or linked to it spiritually” and that “there is a tight connection between the name of the land, its national identity and the right of its nation over the land” (JARDEN, 2008, p. 10,15). Jarden further asserts that nowhere in the Bible is the Land called “Palestine” (ארץ פלשת), only in the context of a narrow strip on the southern coast, where the ancient Philistines settled (*Ibid.*, p. 19). Jarden concludes that “Palestine” was always used in a negative sense, depicting a foreign nation that trespassed and invaded the land. He also anchors his argument in the etymological proximity in Hebrew between the name Palestine (פ ל ש ת) and the Hebrew verb “invade” (פ ל ש, *palash*) (*Ibid.*, p. 18). During a parliamentary discussion on “two states for two nations” that took place on February 10, 2016, Member of the Israeli Parliament Anat Berko from the ruling party Likud similarly declared that there is no such term in Arabic as “Palestine”, thus “this borrowed term merits further study”.<sup>327</sup> Later that day she explained herself on social media: “the word Palestine (פלסטינה) is part of the name given at the time by the Romans to this land (Syria-Palestina) [...]” Berko then explains that “the Palestinian national consolidation was entirely designated to pull the rug out from under the Zionist enterprise”. According to Berko when the Palestinians adopted this name it was used by the Zionist movement (she brings as an example the Anglo-Palestine Bank, which later became Bank Leumi – the national bank, founded by the Zionists in 1902), and started to express their

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<sup>326</sup> Elon Jarden is an Israeli lawyer, political activist and publicist. He is an experienced social activist and authors of several books, all of them affiliated with the ideology of the Israeli political right. For more information Jarden’s website: <http://www.jardensworld.com/>

<sup>327</sup> M.K. Berko is Prime Minister Netanyahu’s special political appointment to the 23<sup>rd</sup> seat in Israel’s ruling party Likud. She holds a PhD in criminology from BIU, her dissertation titled “The moral infrastructure of chief perpetrators of suicidal terrorism: cognitive and functionalist perspectives” (2001). She is a lieutenant colonel (res.) at the IDF and considered an expert in the fields of counter-terrorism. Her husband, Dr. Reuven Berko, is himself a former intelligence officer and considered to be an expert on the Palestinian issue. The full speech was filmed by the Knesset Channel and is available in M.K.’s Berko Facebook page uploaded on the same day: <https://www.facebook.com/301325946716996/videos/511937228989199/?fallback=1>

nationalism using the word Palestinian.<sup>328</sup> Jarden's popular opinions are also expressed by Israeli senior legislators. According to this approach, the mere name Palestine carries significance at its base, which come to erase Israel.

Israeli historian Haim Geber traces the foundations of a rudiment local Palestinian identity, an antecedent of a national identity, back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Gerber explains that "much of the discussion on the existence of any meaningful antecedents to Palestinians' nationalism centers on whether they called their country 'Palestine' at all" (GERBER, 2008, p. 48). According to Gerber and other historians of the Palestinian National Movement, the first modern appearance of the term Palestine (in the context of the Palestinian national movement) was in 1911 with the appearance of Isa al-Isa's newspaper *Filastin*. But, Gerber explains:

*this could not have been more than re-invention [...] historical documentation indicates that the name existed as an administrative term in the classical Islamic period. The Arabs themselves clearly did not invent it but took it from the Romans, who divided the country administratively into Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Secunda (Ibid.).*

Throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods, the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean was referred to by several names, among them Palestina, Judea and Syria alternately, depending on culture and geopolitics. In the seventh century, after the area was brought under the rule of the Muslim Empire, the province of Southern Syria or Palestina, roughly, was called *Jund Filastīn* (جند فلسطين), meaning the military district of Palestine. Arab writers described the land as Palestine throughout the fourteen centuries of Arab Islamic rule.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Source: <https://www.facebook.com/301325946716996/videos/511937228989199/?fallback=1> last accessed 18/11/2018 15:48

<sup>329</sup> From the Early Muslim Period we can mention here the 9<sup>th</sup> century Muslim geographer Ahmad al-Ya'qubi (died 897/8) which described Palestine in his "Book of the Countries" (Kitab al-Buldan). In the 10<sup>th</sup> century the Jerusalemite geographer Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn al-Maqqisī (died 991) brings a detailed description of *Jund Filastīn* in his famous book *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions). One of the prominent Muslim geographers of the Crusader and Ayyubid periods (12-13 centuries), Yaqt al-Hamawi (died 1229) provides in his "Dictionary of Countries" (Kitāb Mu'jam al-Buldān, معجم البلدان) a detailed description of Palestine. From the Mamluk period (1250-1517) I will only mention the prominent work of the Qadi of Jerusalem Mujir al-Din (died 1522), describing Palestine in great details in his comprehensive work "The glorious history of Jerusalem and Hebron" (*al-Uns al-Jalil bi-tarikh al-Quds wal-Khalil*) published in 1495.

Both officially and unofficially, the name Palestine continued to describe the geographical area of southern Syria (i.e., the Levant) until the British Mandate over Palestine began after the First World War and the establishment of the Palestinian National Movement. As we can see, at the outset, both names – Israel and Palestine – are contested terms that are infused with historical, cultural mythological and religious meanings. Religious-national concepts are at the heart of both Palestinian and Israeli mainstream national discourse.

This debate on the origins of names is not an intellectual amusement; it is rather a central element in the ongoing national-religious polemics, in which history is recruited to serve the narrative and to construct the images of the self and the other.

#### Land, Territory, Borders

The territorial aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stems out of the fact that both sides claim the same land as their own. The legal and diplomatic discussion on the borders of the country leans on the borders of British Mandatory Palestine, as defined by international agreements. Yet both sides define their national territory in deeper terms, based on religious, cultural and pseudo historic justifications. For instance, David Ben Gurion, the political leader of the Zionist movement and Israel's first Prime Minister, opened his 1943 introduction to *compilation of political documents on Zionism* with the divine biblical promises of the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. Ben Gurion mentions next the Biblical narrative of the Israelite occupation of the Land by the Israelites led by Joshua (MERCHAVIA, 1943, p. 1-4). The book continues with the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem and with the Jewish attempts throughout history to restore the Jewish presence and rule over their long-lost land. The 1917 Balfour Declaration appears only in page 107. This modern and national interpretation of a religious ethos paves the road for Jewish-Zionist religious-nationalist ideology.

While Zionists regard the Biblical promise as their primary source of political legitimization, the Islamic and Palestinian understanding of this biblical inheritance is different. According to the Quran, Israelites did receive a divine promise, but due to

their sins the promise is no longer valid. As Abu Sway mentions, “Islam recognizes the fact that the Holy Land is sacred to the People of the Book.

The Palestinians also anchor their national identity in the mythical history of the ancient Near East. Mustafa al-Dabbagh,<sup>330</sup> a prominent Palestinian educator and historian, wrote during the British Mandate in his voluminous encyclopedia *Biladuna Filastin* (Our Country Palestine) that “Palestine, our beloved country, is one of the ancient kingdoms and cultures of the ancient East. Located [...] in Western Asia, it is the South-West part of Bilad a-Sham” (AL-DABBAGH, 1965, p. 15). Al-Dabbagh generally describes Palestine’s borders: from the Mediterranean in the west to Syria and Jordan in the east, from Lebanon and Syria in the north to Egyptian controlled Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Aqaba in the south (*Ibid.*). According to Al-Dabbagh these borders were set by the Anglo-French agreement of 1920.

Three years before 1967 he wrote: “Needless to mention that Israel considers its current borders as temporary. It aspires to uproot the Arabs from Palestine, and to wipe the name Palestine from the world map and to replace it exclusively with the traditional name “the Land of Israel” (ارض اسرائيل) (*Ibid.*, p. 11). Al-Dabbagh demonstrates an approach of a zero-sum game; according to him Israel knows that if it remains in its current borders, it will sooner or later disappear.<sup>331</sup> For that reason, he asserts, Israel will exploit every opportunity to expand, until it will realize its dream of becoming a global Jewish empire stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, and from *al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah* (i.e. the Islamic Holy city in the Arabian Peninsula) to Kuwait (*Ibid.*). According to al-Dabbagh, who echoes the maximalist borders of the Biblical promise (see below), Israel’s true aim is to steal most of the Arab lands for its *Lebensraum* (مجالهم الحيوي). Hamas’ 1988 covenant ascribes similar expansionist intentions to Israel in article thirty –two:

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<sup>330</sup> Born 1897 in Jaffa, died 1989 in Beirut.

<sup>331</sup> By saying this, from an Israeli perspective al-Dabbagh justifies the Israeli territorial expansion of 1967 as an existential need. Some Israeli politicians, mainly from the political right, have used the term “the borders of Auschwitz” to describe the Green Line, saying that returning to the 1967 borders is an existential threat on Israel and the Jewish People and therefore the Israeli presence in the West Bank is a necessary existential need.

[...] Today it is Palestine, tomorrow it will be one country or another. The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion [...]

This article in the Hamas covenant reflects the Palestinian understanding of the Zionist territorialism, but also indicates that the frontiers of the Holy Land, of both Israel and Palestine, go beyond the legal and political debate on borders and sovereignty, into the realm of divine promises.

On the Jewish Israeli side, the RZ understanding of territorial borders, that are man-made and fixed through a political process, reflecting the human understanding of space, is subjected to a religious understanding of a divine promise given in the scriptures. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, whom we mentioned in the section on interlocutors above, explains the two dimensions of the Promised Land's borders through two Biblical covenants made between God and the Biblical patriarch Abraham (Kipa 05/08/2005):<sup>332</sup> first, the covenant of the pieces (Hebrew: *brit beyn habtarim*) and second the Jewish circumcision (*brit milah*).

The covenant of the pieces (also called covenant between the parts, in Hebrew ברית בין הבתרים) is the first of a series of Biblical covenants between God and the Patriarchs. It appears in the Book of Genesis. In it, God promises to Abraham that his descendants will inherit the Land of Israel: "In that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates'" (Genesis 15:18). The *Brit milah* is another Biblical covenant between God and Abraham, signified by the male circumcision ceremony, in which God promised Abraham and his descendants the Land of Canaan: "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:8). Leibtag explains that in the *Brit milah* the geographic-territorial promise is far smaller. We also meet the term "land of Canaan" which is defined earlier in the Bible (in Genesis 10:19).

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<sup>332</sup> The web portal [www.kipa.co.il](http://www.kipa.co.il) operates since 2000, providing a range of Jewish Israeli national-religious services, contents, news and forums. In Hebrew *Kipa* (כיפה) is the traditional yarmulke, the skullcap observant Jewish men wear on their heads.

According to Leibtag, these two covenants represent the maximalist and the minimalist borders of the divine promise: the first covenant represents the maximalist borders, stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates. It refers to “The Land”, it represents the collective national destination and is achieved through inheritance, military occupation and rule. The second covenant, the circumcision, represents the minimalist borders by referring only to “the Land of Canaan”, from Beersheba in the south to Dan, in the northern end of the Galilee panhandle. It represents, Leibtag explains, the personal destination which is achieved through possession and settlement (Kipa 05/08/2005). It is not a coincidence that Rabbi Leibtag published this essay on this topic on the national-religious website ten days before the Israeli disengagement from Gaza.

Rabbi Leibtag is situated at the religious liberal end of RZ. Located geographically at the WB settlements block of Gush Etzion, he is affiliated with Rabbi Amital and Lichtenstein who combined the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a prominent RZ rabbi and the leader of the more liberal North American Jewish modern orthodoxy, with the traditional Kookist school of thought that evolved in Israel. However, Leibtag’s comments on the Land of Israel are no different than those of the ultra-conservative Kookist rabbis such as Eliezer Melamed and Shlomo Aviner.

Some Jewish ultraorthodox exegesis undermines Judaism’s national and territorial aspects.<sup>333</sup> However, two prominent HARDAL (ultra-conservative RZ) rabbis such as Aviner and Melamed, who are considered close to the ultraorthodox Jews, completely identify with Leibtag’s approach to the Land of Israel, its borders and settlements (Melamed 2012, *Nation and Land*, 3; Aviner, SHOT).<sup>334</sup> As it seems, the entire spectrum of RZ, from the liberal to the conservative ends, is united under the

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<sup>333</sup> A well known example is a 1961 book titled *Vayovel Moshe* published by Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the founder of the Satmar Hasidic movement. This ultraorthodox anti-Zionist book focus on three themes, the second theme, a treatise about settling the Land of Israel, refute the Zionist and RZ approaches to this topic from a halachic standpoint. Rabbi Teitelbaum’s approach towards RZ, as mentioned in his book, is as a "major desecration of God's name".

<sup>334</sup> SHOT is a Hebrew abbreviation of “questions and answers”, a religious genre especially preferred by Aviner and available on his website under the title “SHOT – Land of Israel” (N.D.) [http://shlomo-aviner.net/index.php?title=%D7%A9%D7%95%22%D7%AA\\_%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%A5\\_%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C](http://shlomo-aviner.net/index.php?title=%D7%A9%D7%95%22%D7%AA_%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%A5_%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C).



shared understanding of the borders of the Land of Israel and the national-religious command of settlement, as evoked above by Rabbi Leibtag.

Mustafa Abu Sway treatment of the Quranic verse most affiliated with the sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine (17:1) reflects the cornerstones of the Palestinian Islamic-national approach. Islamic scholars throughout the last 14 hundred years, claims Abu Sway, “take this particular verse seriously.” First, they “consider the Sacred Mosque to be in Mecca and the Farthest Mosque to be in Jerusalem. No Muslim scholar challenged this position throughout the Islamic intellectual history” (ABU SWAY, 2000, p. 2). Moreover, in regard to the segment of the verse stating “whose surroundings We have blessed” Abu Sways, representing the predominant approach of Palestinian Muslim Scholars, writes that “the parameters of this blessed land go beyond what is between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean” to include al-Sham – the entire Levant. This interpretation is in line with, for example, Sheikh Ekrima Sabri’s understanding of this verse (SABRI, 2011, p. 19) and with that of Sheikh Basam Jarrar.<sup>335</sup> This ambiguity between the sanctity of the al-Aqsa mosque itself, Jerusalem and its blessed surroundings can be compared with the ambiguity in the Israeli national-religious approach to the boundaries of the “Promised Land”, as depicted in the Bible. Interestingly, the Palestinian-Muslim and Israeli-Jewish maximalist geographical national-religious interpretations of the boundaries of the divine promised land include more or less the same area, that of the Levant/ al-Sham.

#### Right of Return – the mythology

Palestinian Islamic national-religious scholars do not accept the idea of the return to Zion. Abu Sway gives the Quranic version of the famous Biblical narrative of how Moses invites the Children of Israel, the Israelites, to enter the Holy Land after he delivered them from Egypt. But the Children of Israel refuse to enter the Holy Land,

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<sup>335</sup> Jarrar is head of the Noon Center for Quran Researches and Studies and a popular Islamic preacher based in the West Bank town of al-Bireh adjacent to Ramallah. He was among the 415 cadres of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad that Israel deported to Marj al-Zohour in southern Lebanon in 1992. Jarrar’s preaching are published on YouTube, including a long and detailed national-religious Palestinian Islamic interpretation of the Quranic verse 17:1 in four parts of about one hour each. Jarrar relates to the borders of the Blessed Land as including the entire Levant in the third part, minute 05:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwG2VWDF8rw>. Some of his preaching on YouTube is also translated to French: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcRtXw2s-QA&list=PLol2x4bXM2QxxxT5Ejc2bQ80lhLpgrj\\_7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcRtXw2s-QA&list=PLol2x4bXM2QxxxT5Ejc2bQ80lhLpgrj_7).

because it meant that they had to fight its people, who were known for their exceeding strength. This rejection earned them a divine punishment. Here Abu Sway not only describes the Israelites as sinners, but also refers to the original inhabitants of the land, describing them as strong and mighty. Besides the reference to Palestinians' pre-Islamic national past, it is interesting to follow Abu Sway's explanation of the following Quranic verse:

*God said: "Therefore will the land be out of their reach for forty years: in distraction will they wander through the land: but sorrow you not over these rebellious people." (Quran, 5: 26)*

This verse can be read in two very different ways, Abu Sway explains, each one arriving at a very different meaning: "The first way as shown above divides the verse into two parts, the first of which ends after "years." This way of dividing the verse indicates that the Children of Israel were forbidden to enter the Land temporarily because of their disobedience. The second reading also divides the verse into two parts, the first of which ends after "reach." Some scholars interpreted this way of dividing the verse to mean that the Children of Israel were forbidden to enter the Land in an absolute sense, again as a result of their disobedience." (ABU SWAY, 2000, p. 3).

Abu Sway, so it seems, doesn't even pretend to talk as a critical academic scholar. His language and terminology are completely religious, referring to the divine truth and proper interpretation of scriptures. In this sense, Kedar differs from him only in his academic pretension.

While Abu Sway indicates he prefers the first reading, the second reading is more popular among most Palestinian Muslim scholars (SABRI, 2011, p. 9). Abu Sway's position as presented in his article, published as part of an interfaith dialogue in a journal of Jewish rabbis, might seem more tolerant towards the Jews on first glance, as if he accepts the right of the Jews to return to the land under certain conditions. However, carefully reading his position leads to the conclusion that Abu Sway is building a sophisticated argument, hinting to the possibility that the divine election was actually removed from the rebellious Israelites and moved on to others who merit it due to their righteousness. For this, Abu Sway quotes the famous Egyptian Islamist

Sayyid Qutb's exegesis of the Quran (Shade of the Quran, 1954), claiming that, "the reason for this prohibition is to allow room for a new generation of Israelites to be brought up." Abu Sway then adds that "the new generation was ready to submit to the will of God, and therefore qualified for the entry to the Holy Land." (ABU SWAY, 2000, p. 3).<sup>336</sup> This reference to Qutb, so it seems, is an interpretational axis that connects Hamas' hawkish and conservative thinkers with the more liberal NR Islamic Palestinian intellectuals such as Abu Sway.

Indeed, Abu Sway is unequivocal that the meaning of the word Islam is complete submission to God. It can be understood that those who inherited the Divine promise of the Holy Land are the Muslims, the "Submitters" to God. This idea resonates with the traditional Christian replacement theology.<sup>337</sup> Abu Sway continues: "The Qur'an states in clear terms that righteousness is a prerequisite for inheriting lands", quoting different Quranic verses to base his claim, for example (Quran 21:105): "My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth" (*Ibid.*). Abu Sway concludes that according to these verses, submission (Islam) to God's will becomes the absolute criterion for inheritance of the Land. Moreover, the Qur'an highlights the fact "that genetic or biological descent is never sufficient in itself to merit such inheritance. It is a non-factor in this respect." (ABU SWAY, 2000). Here Abu Sway deviates from the more common polemics of Palestinian Muslim Scholars simply adopting the more severe interpretation of the prohibition, and claims that the Muslims have actually inherited the right from the Israelites thanks to their submission to God. This might indicate the inter-religious experience and Sufi influences in Abu Sway's line of thought.

This kind of replacement theology, so it seems, enables Palestinian Islamic thinkers to explain how the divine promise to the Jews is no longer valid, that it applies

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<sup>336</sup> As mentioned in the chapter on political ideology, Qutb influence on political Islam and the Muslim Brothers in general and on Hamas in particular was great. Qutb also influenced modern Islamic Jihadist thought. Abu Sway refers to Qutb's famous interpretation of the Quran, *fī zilāl al-qur'ān* (In the Shade of the Quran, 12th edition, Beirut: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1986.) most of which was written in prison. It is one of Qutb's most influential work and it covers 30 volumes. In it Qutb lays down his vision of an Islamic state and society.

<sup>337</sup> Rev. Brian W. Harrison, *The Liturgy and 'Supersessionism'*, [www.catholicculture.org](http://www.catholicculture.org) (accessed 30/04/2014).

now to the Muslim Palestinians. Hamas ideologists uses this replacement also as a warning for the Palestinian Muslims to remain God-fearing and religiously observant in order not to lose the divine promise like the Jews did. Ibrahim al-Maqadmeh argues that the Jews will not be reconciled until the Muslims will forsake their religion and revoke their faith (AL-MAQADMEH, 1994a, p. 133):

*[...] God willing, they will not succeed. And if the Muslims are destined to renounce their religion, "God will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach"(Quran 5:54).*

#### Coda: The Current State of Polemics

Since Kedar started to voice his explicit and polemic remarks, backed by so called academic knowledge, negating Palestinian nationalism and the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam, they have gained popularity. On July 27, 2009, Kedar spoke in a conference that was held in the Israeli Parliament – the Knesset. The conference was organized by Michael Ben-Ari,<sup>338</sup> at the time a member of the Knesset from the far-right National Union party, under the title “Jewish Sovereignty in the Temple Mount – processes and changes”, a first harbinger to the process of transformation of the struggle over the Temple Mount from the rabbinic sphere to the political arena. In his defiance of the Islamic sanctity of al-Aqsa mosque, Kedar used figurative language, describing how “the believers pointed their buttocks to Jerusalem and their faces towards Mecca after giving up on the possibility of convincing the Jews to convert to Islam and butchered them instead.” (TZIDKIYAHU, 2009; REITER, 2016, p. 59).<sup>339</sup> In November 2014 the then Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Army, Brig. Gen. Rafi Peretz, appointed in 2019 as the leader of the national-religious party the Jewish Home and

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<sup>338</sup> Ben Ari considers himself a disciple of the ultra nationalist messianic and racist Rabbi Meir Kahane. He was a member of Kach party, which was banned from participating in the 1988 elections because of its racism. Later on it was considered a terrorist organization by several states, including Israel. He holds a Ph.D. in Land of Israel and Archaeology from BIU, an interesting topic on its own.

<sup>339</sup> Kedar, in his style and manner, refers here to a famous Islamic tradition regarding the visit of the Caliph Omar to Jerusalem in the seventh century, dealing with the exact location on Omar's prayer on the Holy Esplanade. This tradition appears in all major compilations of “Jerusalem Praises” (*Fada'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*).

Israel's Minister of Education, gave a lesson about the Temple Mount at Otzem, a pre-army Torah Academy (affiliated with Har HaMor Yeshiva). In reply to a question from one of the students asking about the Islamic significance of the site, Rabbi Peretz answered (10tv.nana10.co.il, 27/11/14):

*Jerusalem in not mentioned in the Quran even once, not even by a hint. 90% of the Arabs have no idea what is written in the Quran. We know better than many of them, trust me. What is al-Aqsa, do you know? It means a sanctuary 'at the edge', at the edge of what? Of Mecca! At the end of the Arabian Peninsula. The Dome of the Rock is not at the edge, and so I say [...] It has no religious significance for Islam. They commit their religious rites at the edge of the Temple Mount, but to which direction do they pray? To Mecca! Their turn their buttocks to the Temple Mount. So what are they doing on the Temple Mount?*

After his words got published by the press, the IDF's spokesperson issued a clarification and an apology (the lesson' video is unavailable in the YouTube channel of the institute). We can only speculate where exactly did Rabbi Peretz get this information from, yet a month later, Dr. Kedar gave a series of lectures in the Yeshiva, referring in his opening remarks to the media scandal caused by Rabbi Peretz's comments, before delving in depth to prove each and every one of Rabbi Peretz remarks.<sup>340</sup> Kedar's popular preaching became a model for others, rabbis, educators and even academics and politicians.<sup>341</sup>

Malach, as it seems, is even more influential on policy making. In the summer of 2018 a heated debate took place in Israel over the recently legislated Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People.<sup>342</sup> The first draft of the law was presented in August 2011.<sup>343</sup> It seems as if a straight-line connects Malach's 2008 PhD dissertation and the 2018 Basic Law. Malach's work deals directly with the justifications for the

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<sup>340</sup> Otzem Yeshiva, Virtual Beit Midrash: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SO\\_nl8cXB1U&t=4800s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SO_nl8cXB1U&t=4800s) uploaded on 23/02/2015, lesson given in 31/12/2014.

<sup>341</sup> In 2016 David Bukay, a professor from Haifa University, published a pamphlet under the title Narratives vs. Facts, aimed at refuting Jerusalem's sanctity in Islam and cementing its importance in Judaism. The pamphlet was issued by *Hazon Leumi* (national vision), a national religious block within the Likud Party.

<sup>342</sup> Proposal of Basic Law: Israel – the Nation-State of the Jewish People, 18/07/18, 6057- מספר פנימי: א/768- (פ/1989/20): [http://fs.knesset.gov.il/20/law/20\\_Is2\\_503798.pdf](http://fs.knesset.gov.il/20/law/20_Is2_503798.pdf), accessed on 22/08/18 11:23.

<sup>343</sup> The draft of the fist bill from 3/8/11 is available in Hebrew on the website the Israeli Ministry of Justice: <http://www.justice.gov.il/StatelIdentity/ProposedBasicLaws/Pages/DichtersProposal.aspx>

state of Israel as a Jewish nation-state. The law's 11 articles resembles Malach's concluding remarks: from the basic justification for the mere existence of a Jewish nation-state, anchoring the nation-state in the public structures in a unique manner impossible in other states, public administration according to the Hebrew calendar, keeping the Sabbath as the official day of rest, allocating a special place to the Hebrew Law in the legal system by the legislator in the state of Israel, the official status of the Hebrew language, and the place traditional and national values and symbols receive in the public education system. All these Malach asserts, "are good examples of the connection between the state and the national culture, that has a volume that goes beyond the symbolic and that practically justifies the existence of the nation-state" (MALACH, 2008, p. 276). It is unreasonable to assume that this resemblance is coincidental. Moreover, within the heated debate which erupted since the first attempt to pass the law in 2011, those advocating for the law have extensively relied on Malach's writings.<sup>344</sup>

On Hamas' side, since the movement seized control over the Gaza Strip in 2007, its new narrative gradually consolidated with the aim to rebrand the movement as a pragmatic national liberation movement (TAUBER, 2018). As we have seen, this change was also expressed in Hamas' new "Document of General Principles and Policies" from 2017. Article 16 of Hamas document (HAMAS, 2017):

*affirms that its conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but against the Zionists who occupy Palestine. Yet, it is the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and the Jews with their own colonial project and illegal entity.*

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<sup>344</sup> See for example a 52 pages document written in Hebrew by Aviad Bakshi titled "Basic Law proposal – liberal justification" issued by the Institute for Zionist Strategies in October 2013, which quotes Malach extensively. Bakshi, a former Hesder Yeshiva teacher, is the head of the legal department at the Kohelet Policy Forum. He obtained all his academic degrees from BIU and lecturers in the center for Jewish statesmanship that Malach founded. His 2010 PhD deals with the "worthy constitutional meaning of the state of Israel as a Jewish nation-state". Bakshi and Malach both belong to a new clique of RZ young professionals, all born during the 1970s, who grew up in the ideological atmosphere of the RZ shift to power. In the last decade they have ripened and reached position of power, influencing the state mechanisms in various ways.

In the next article it is explained that:

*the Jewish problem, anti-Semitism and the persecution of the Jews are phenomena fundamentally linked to European history and not to the history of the Arabs and the Muslims or to their heritage.*

Despite the change embodied in the document, Hamas' visual messages continue to carry classical and blunt anti-Semitic symbols.<sup>345</sup> Classical anti-Semitic views as well as Islamic-based anti-Jewish hate discourse is regularly expressed by prominent preachers affiliated with Hamas in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.<sup>346</sup> Such overt anti-Semitism is usually indirect and limited to visual messages and is rarer in the direct and official discourse of Hamas. It is hard to claim that it is the product of an organized effort by Hamas (TAUBER, 2018).<sup>347</sup>

The 'Studies of Thought and Experience' book on Hamas already studied at length in this dissertation (original Arabic version: 2014, English translation : 2017), brings a collection of essays by Palestinian researchers and Hamas' members. As we have seen, the recurring theme in the essays is the "normalization" of Hamas and its transformation into a legitimate political movement (TZIDKIYAHU, 2018). Professor Yousef Rizqa, literature researcher at Gaza University, former minister in the PA government and political advisor to Isma'il Haniyeh, analyzed "The Political Ideology of Hamas", addressing issues such as religion and state, law and constitution, nationality, secularism, democracy and human rights; Sami Khater wrote about "Hamas' Vision for Managing the Conflict with the Zionist Enemy" and also Mustafa Abu Sway published an article on "Hamas' Views of Jews, Judaism, Zionism, Zionists

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<sup>345</sup> See for example a video clip that was released three months before the document itself (News Walla 08/02/17): [http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=772&fld\\_id=772&doc\\_id=469](http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=772&fld_id=772&doc_id=469).

<sup>346</sup> As mentioned previously, a Friday sermon delivered in Khan Yunis' grand mosque in the Gaza Strip and broadcasted on Hamas' TV called the Jews "a bunch of grandchildren of apes and pigs" (al-Aqsa TV 24/02/12). Ekrima Sabri and Bassam Jarrar regularly express anti-Semitic views, for example in regard to the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" (SABRI, 2011, p. 13). See also Jarrar referring to the cosmic Jewish influence on the international level, starting at minute 47 in the first part of his exegesis on the Quranic verse 17:1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvlxgcfF5I&list=PLwnczngxN2tbEsBilXrm15bvSviQStpNN&index=2&t=14s>

<sup>347</sup> In any case an examination of the anti-Semitism within Hamas requires scrutinizing a variety of sources, beyond visual and media, such as books written by Hamas' leaders. Such an examination merits a separate research.

and the State of Israel". As we saw above, it is clear from those and other articles in the book that Hamas is looking to drive away from the movement's traditional anti-Semitism. The texts reveal a consistent trend of apologetics, distanced from the 1988 charter, as well as a call for ideological change couched in new Islamic, academic and political rhetoric (*Ibid.*). Segments of the book also appear on Hamas's virtual library on the movement's official website.<sup>348</sup>

In his article in this book, Sami Khater keeps away from religious terminology, anti-Semitism and hate discourse. Khater strives to re-label Hamas as a legitimate political actor, far from its reputation of a radical religious terrorist group. Like the rest of the book, Khater move on a dual axis, between apologist explanations and simply expressing Hamas' views, as well as between victimization and conspiracy: "Hamas's ideology and conduct in managing its conflict with the 'Zionist enemy' is facing systematic distortion by the 'Zionist entity' supported by Western forces." (KHATER, 2017, p. 509). Thus, while seeking international legitimacy from the West and even from Israel, Hamas keeps accusing them of conspiring against the movement, against the Palestinians and against Islam. At the same time, Khater introduces a universal discourse, stating that Hamas still has hope that "the West will someday change its criteria for dealing with Palestine's occupation and the Arab-Israeli conflict, to act in accordance with the principles of international law, the values of freedom and justice, and for the sake of the future of international peace and stability." (*Ibid.*). This is a sharp change from Hamas' discourse of the 1990s and it represent Hamas' quest for international legitimacy. Khater's article, is in both structure and content a clear attempt to present a rational strategic discourse on Hamas' goals and vision. The spirit of *realpolitik* that arises from it denotes politicization and change on account of Islamic religious discourse. This is done not by abandoning the movement's old values, but by trying to present this earthly and political aspect as one of the movement's pillars (*Ibid.*, p. 510). Starting with presenting the Islamic background, Khater excuses Hamas' rational of Islamic provisions or the Shari'ah law in regard to the conflict with the "Zionist enemy", "due to the fact that the majority of Palestinians are Muslims belonging to an Arab nation where Islam is the predominant religion. Thus, it is only

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<sup>348</sup> <https://hamas.ps/ar/library/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9>



normal that Islamic values and legal provisions be present in Hamas's stances and policies, and this is how it will remain" (*Ibid.*). Yet the religious rationalization of the conflict remains attached to the national and territorial aspects. Thus, after surveying the sanctity of Palestine in Islam Khater assert that "[...] Hamas defends the land of Palestine not only because it is the Palestinians' homeland as well as that of their ancestors, or that it was overtaken by a cruel enemy, but because of the additional motive of this special position it holds among Muslims which distinguishes it from other Arab and Muslim lands." (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, this religious meaning distinguishes the Palestinian cause for the Arabs and Muslims, giving Palestinian nationalism its particular NR character. Misunderstanding the importance of these religious factors hinders efficient Western intervention: "Hamas believes that the failure of the pro-'Zionist entity' West to take all the aforementioned factors into account increases tension in the region regardless of the efforts that might be made to maintain stability." (*Ibid.*, p. 511).

Khater asserts Hamas' ideological proximity to the MB movement, described as the mainstream and moderate Islamic movement. "However," asserts Khater in a message aimed to calm regional actors, "on the organizational level, Hamas is a national liberation movement that has its own decision-making and policy-design mechanisms, the cornerstone of their foreign relations being non-interference in the internal affairs of states, parties, and organizations." (*Ibid.*).<sup>349</sup> Khater anchors these aforementioned provisions of Islamic law in the Palestinian resistance to Zionism and previously to the British Mandate. Thus, according to Khater, the Islamic Sharia obliges Muslim-Palestinians to fight the occupiers of their land, motivating the Palestinian struggle against Zionism and the State of Israel just as it previously motivated the Palestinian struggle against the British. Basically, Khater claims that there is no categorical call to fight the Jews, but rather that we have here a national and political conflict: "Palestinians fought those who occupied their land and assaulted them, and not for the fact that they were Jews. This goes in accordance with the Islamic rule that says that 'there is no compulsion in religion'." (*Ibid.*). This might be seen as somewhat

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<sup>349</sup> This comment on foreign relations and non-intervention seems as aimed more to the ears of the Jordanian and Egyptian regimes.

contradicting the writer's effort in the first two pages of the article, explaining Palestine's religious importance. However in his inner logic, it adds up to formulate a Palestinian Islamic NR argument.

We have shown above that SRN became hegemonic through a dialectic ideological discourse. Both RZ and Hamas advanced to center stage by posing comprehensive ideological worldviews, which interact with each other in some kind of an indirect discourse. The main interlocutors who lead this discourse are Jewish and Muslim clergy, alongside public intellectuals and politicians. These interlocutors represent the variety of the NR discourse, combining religious clerk and academics, both of them able to mobilize their titles for political goals.

In this chapter we have examined the ideological proximity and resemblance between RZ and Palestinian Islamic RN. We have seen how both ideologies conduct an indirect dialogue and polemics, and how they relate to the same stories, events and places from two opposite sides. We first established the criteria for modern national-religious polemics, distinguishing it from academic discourse. NR polemics deals with divine truth, asserting national authenticity and religious sanctity as true and valid. The main interlocutors examined here are NR religious clergy and politicians, but mainly public intellectuals of academic background, in many cases combined with political, public or religious activity. At first glance this choice might seem surprising, since it goes beyond the immediate suspects (being RN clergy and politicians). However, delving into the discourse of such RN public intellectuals reveals an interesting phenomena – these intellectuals represent, in a way, religious nationalism altogether, bridging between the “old” and the “new”, the modern academic (scientific) discourse and the religious polemic, between the national and the religious. Public intellectuals with both national-religious education and modern academic titles, combine both religious understanding, scientific thinking and policy making. In their sociological profile many of them resemble the religious fundamentalists, who often obtained modern academic high education while preaching for (allegedly) traditional and anti-modern values. These intellectuals often have significant influence, some on popular public opinion, others on policy making. Thus, public intellectuals are interesting and adequate agents of religious-nationalism,

that go beyond the “immediate suspects” of clerical and political levels, and in some cases they constitute the best embodiment of the NR sentiment.

All the different themes examined, the myth of autochthony, the definition of self and other through the names “Israel” and “Palestine”, the relations between the nation and its territory, Jerusalem and the true carrier of the ancient divine promise, exemplify the inner NR discourse of each sector, and at the same time highlights the indirect dialogue they conduct with each other. A common idea connecting all the examined themes is that of self-proclamation and the negation of the other using polemicist rhetoric, in many cases disguised by academic language and tools.

The argumentations examined constitute the ideal type of a national-religious ethos. Both ideologies are rooted in their own national and religious context, nevertheless, they echo one another, they conduct an indirect debate and more direct polemics. Both ethoses relate to the same land, to the same holy city and site, and thus each ethos build itself while negating the other.

Does the thematic review in this chapter reflect the NR shift to hegemony in Israel and Palestine? On their way to political and social prominence, highly ideological social groups must adapt their discourse to the changing political reality. The ideological framework of Hamas and RZ was expressed, manifested, and sharpened through constant inner dialogue and external polemics, both with the mainstream of their own side, the “secular” (thought based on a religious ethos) national movement, and with the other side. Striving for government requires pragmatism and ideological compromises. When ideological groups, whether oppositional or marginal, shift towards government, they must disseminate their ideas, making them the mainstream, the common knowledge and the central narrative of their national movement. Such movements must also adapt their ideological discourse to their pragmatic ideology, or at least generate an ideological buzz through constant polemics and dialogue. Such ideological agitation serves the political and social goals of Palestinian-Muslim and Jewish-Israeli religious-nationalists, creating an image of these movements as the true carriers of the national idea and interest, forsaken by the old, secular, elites. Even if at times this image is a misrepresentation, it

nevertheless serves the shift of the religious-nationalists towards political and social hegemony.



## Conclusions

In April 2017, an Israeli publicist declared that religious-Zionism is more dangerous to Israel than Hezbollah (Yossi Klein, “Our self-righteous elite”, Haaretz 12/04/2017). The comparison between RZ and the Lebanese Shia Islamist organization which wages Jihad against Israel caused a media scandal on national scale.<sup>350</sup> Klein described the rise of RZ to hegemony in Israel as a dangerous attempt to take over the state:

*The national-religious are dangerous. More dangerous than Hezbollah [...] What do they want? To take over the state and clean it from Arabs [...] their religious-nationalism is extreme nationalism wrapped with self-righteous piety. It penetrates the education system, getting stronger in the army and influences the Supreme Court. They are already on their way to us, in a moment they will burst through the door (Haaretz 12/04/2017).*

All senior Zionist politicians from left and right condemned Klein’s article and many defined it as hate-speech and antisemitic. Comparing between Israel-Jewish and Arab-Islamic religious nationalism (or other forms of fundamentalism) is considered a bold defiance against the axiom of separation between “us” and “them”. For many Israelis, comparing a legitimate Israeli sector, a group that partakes in all aspects of the Israeli public life, to “terrorists that want to kill us”, be it Hezbollah or Hamas, with its deadly bombings against civilians scorched in Israeli memory, is unacceptable, something that should not be done.

In May 2021, Amr Hamzawy, an Egyptian scholar and publicist, compared “Netanyahu’s bleeding Machiavellianism” to what he called “Hamas’ ongoing militarization of the Palestinian non-violent struggle” (alquds.co.uk 18/05/2021). Hamzawy’s article was published in the Arab language London based daily newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi (Arab Jerusalem) during the armed clash that erupted between Hamas and Israel in Ramadan of spring 2021. An Arab writer comparing Hamas to

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<sup>350</sup> “Israeli Politicians Condemn Haaretz in Response to Op-Ed” (Haaretz 13/04/2017).

Israel during an ongoing armed and bloody clash is considered a rare and exceptionally harsh criticism against Hamas in the Arab discourse. On the Arab side in general, more specifically among Palestinians, it is unconceivable to compare between the colonizers and the colonized.

According to the Palestinian narrative there can be no resemblance between the occupying Israel and the occupied Palestinians. According to the Israeli narrative, there is no place for comparison between Zionism and the Palestinians, between the Jewish refugees who came here seeking refuge and liberation, and the Arabs who attacked them and refused to accept their presence. It is a natural human phenomenon to believe that “our side”, the side we belong to, is the right and just side of a conflict, and that the other side, our rivals, are wrong and vile.

In comparing the two sides, the strive for power and political center-stage of both Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalism, this dissertation wished to somewhat break this dichotomy between two sides of a conflict, by pointing to possible resemblances between them. Such a comparison is controversial and unaccepted by both sides. Drawing inspiration from the small number of previous works who tried to adopt a similar approach, this dissertation does not seek to make the picture on one side prettier or more corrupt than on the other. It also does not seek to argue for complete resemblance. Instead, we offer here a unhurried and complex view on the ongoing process of politicization and move towards the hegemony of the NR elites in both societies, each rooted in its own context, however reacting to the same historical, social, and ideological challenges put forward by the peace process.

In the first part of the work, we have established the theoretical foundations for strong religious-nationalism. Based on the existing theories in field of nationalism and religion, it was laid at the outset of this dissertation that both religion and nationalism are treated as two independent phenomena in human experience, each “perfectly sui generis and irreducible to any other”. If there is a hierarchy between them, we must keep in mind that for the religious men and woman, especially outside the Christian West, nationalism is secondary to religion. When religious and nationalism merge, a hyphenated identity emerges – religious-nationalism. Conflicts

around the world which touch upon collective identities involve religious-nationalism. However in many of these RN conflicts, religion is but a marker between the rivaling sides, who argue about politics. In some cases, though, the political and religious completely intertwine and become inseparable. The conflict is as religious and theological as it is political. Such cases involve strong religious-nationalism (SRN). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a manifest example of a SRN conflict.

Zionism was a secular-national revolution, throwing away the yoke of traditional Judaism. It was perceived as breaking away from religion. However, the entire rationale of Zionism, its organizing principle – a national home for the Jewish people in Zion – was based entirely on the religious-theological concept of returning to Zion. Borrowing from the renowned Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem, in such a reality God cannot remain silent, in such a Holy Land, God cannot remain absent. He will find his way back into the reality of our lives.

Palestinian nationalism was religious at the outset, based in Jerusalem around the al-Aqsa mosque and for a time also led by religious clerks. The local Palestinian identity was forged by the shared collective destiny of Muslims in the Holy Land as custodians for the entire Islamic Umma of the al-Aqsa Mosque and of Palestine, the blessed land. After the trauma of 1948 and the disintegration of the PNM, Palestinian nationalism was reestablished anew in the 1950s and 1960s. In its second appearance the old elites were marginalized and the PNM contained and was even led by secular elements, which involved alongside particular Palestinian identity pan-Arabism and socialist left-wing ideologies. However, Palestinian identity remained at its base deeply national-religious.

Thus, despite the structural differences and gaps in its approach to religion during the British Mandate, both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism were built at the outset on religious foundations. Both movements constitute a form of modernized, at times secularized interpretation of a collective ethos that is religious at its base. It involves scriptures and holy places alongside modern and non-religious national development. This deep SRN is manifested in the early violent clashes between Jews and Arabs in the 1920s during the formative period of the Zionist-Palestinian/ Jewish-Arab encounter, clashes that carried a strong religious and national tone and that took



place in holy places and times, carrying SRN symbolic meanings. These latent forces were awakened following the 1967 war and with greater vigor after the Israeli-Arab peace process was launched. In the 1990s again, SRN clashes erupted in holy places and times, around the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

SRN on both sides, Religious-Zionism in Israel and Hamas on the Palestinian side, harshly opposed the peace process, from which they were both excluded and where the ones paying the heaviest symbolic, ideological and material price. Thus, RZ and Hamas became the strongest opponents to the peace process in their respective societies. Within three decades they have managed to halt the peace process and became the leading social and political powers in their societies, the new elites. This process is based on that basic resemblance in collective identity, which stem from the traditional religious ethos, scriptures and holy places. This religious seed prepared the ground for the growth of RN in the second half of the previous century in both Zionism and the PNM alike.

Religious-nationalism manifests itself in the world, like other big ideas, through institutions and organized human action. Both Palestinian Islamic nationalism and RZ are anchored in early institutions that date back to the early 20th century. Palestinian Islamic religious-nationalism existed at the heart of the national movement throughout the 1920s-1930s. The MB are officially active in Palestine since the 1940s, and after 1948 in the WB and the GS (and from the 1970s also in Israel through the Islamic movement). These institutions preceded the foundation of Hamas in late 1987. Thus, Palestinian RN Islamism existed throughout the previous century, albeit politically a marginal factor. The MB's institutions in Palestine and later Hamas, were never admitted into the PLO. Up until Hamas' 2006 electoral achievement it was considered by the mainstream Palestinian political hegemony as non-legitimate.

Although RZ was marginal, it was an integral and legitimate part of the Zionist movement from the foundation of the Mizrahi movement in 1902. Up until the 1967 war, RZ was a pale embodiment of modern orthodox Jews, religiously observant and at the same time Zionists, with modern academic education. They were in the grey zone, in between, not as Zionists as the secular pioneers and not as religious as the ultraorthodox. Politically they were dovish and supported the hegemonic secular labor

party through the NRP. Less than a decade after the 1967 war, RZ reinvented itself through the Kookist ideology as the new pioneers, taking the baton of settlement from the old secular elites and reimplementing them in the newly “liberated” territories, occupied from Jordan and Egypt and not yet officially annexed to Israel. After the 1977 political turnover and the rise to power of the political right in Israel, a pact was made between the national right and the Kookist RZ in Israel. The Kookist led settlement project in the occupied territories became the official policy. At the same time it was the expansionist right which retreated from Sinai, causing a trauma and cognitive dissonance amidst the Kookists. The equation was set – every Israeli territorial compromise shook RZ and pushed it to political action, violence and an ideological observance. The peace with Egypt in the 1980s, the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians in the 1990s, and the retreat from Gaza in 2005 – accumulated for RZ to the realization that the Zionism and state of Israel had lost their direction under the secular liberal leadership. That now is the time for RZ to take the lead and steer the boat. For this purpose, RZ mobilized all its institutions and ideological power, becoming the new elite. No longer in-between, but rather embodying the perfect Zionist – a God fearing and observant Jew, a pioneer and a fighter, learning from the Rabbis and the professors, imitating both the early Zionist pioneers and the heroes of the Bible.

Similarly, Hamas, albeit through quite a different trajectory, also decided in 2005 to strive political power and hegemony amongst the Palestinians in the territories, and later also within the PLO. In 1996 Hamas boycotted the PA’s first elections. It had no credentials and found its identity in placing itself as complete opposite to the Fatah led PLO, arguing that it was the true carrier of the armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine. At the time, Hamas’ political weakness correlated with its ideological separatism. In 2005 Hamas was in a different position. The peace process had collapsed and was followed by five years of violent clashes in which Hamas gained recognition and prestige amongst Palestinians. At this point Hamas was ready to participate in the political process. Hamas’ political participation signaled the change and its willingness to integrate into Palestinian politics. Surprised by its own electoral achievement, it gradually reached an understanding that it is actually ready

to take the lead and strive to steer the boat of the PNM, replacing Fatah and taking the leadership over the PLO altogether.

Throughout this process Hamas became a governing movement, ruling over a mini state of its own within the confined boundaries of the GS. It started to adopt a new discourse, distancing itself from antisemitism and terror, talking the language of international relations. At the same time Hamas refused demilitarization and disarmament. Through its rockets arsenal, Hamas holds some sort balance of deterrence with Israel. On two occasions Hamas demonstrated its willingness to use military power in order to maintain or promote its political goals – taking over the GS from the Fatah led PA in 2007, and firing rocket on Jerusalem in May 2021 following the cancellation of the Palestinian elections. From the 2007 attack Hamas emerged victorious, becoming from a terror organization to a government. From the 2021 attack Hamas emerged as the most popular movement in Palestine, the protector of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque and as a movement with agency that can dictate policy to the much stronger state of Israel. Hamas 1988 charter was replaced, first with the 2006 political platform and later with the 2017 document – labeling Hamas as a Palestinian national-religious Islamic hegemony.

The distinction between a sector (RZ) within a state, with some social and ideological characteristics, to a centralized movement (Hamas) that is treated as an illegal terror organization, dictates the methodological difference between chapters three and four of this dissertation. Moreover, while on the ground RZ acts within the existing institutions of the State of Israel, striving to influence them from within while battling with other sectors of cultural hegemony (for example religionization of the army), Hamas has its own separate institutional apparatus – a separate army and government. Such gaps were also taken into account in part two of this dissertation.

Israeli and Palestinian SRN strive to religionize the state. In this sense more than radical, they are statist and conservative. They wish to influence the state and work with the existing institutions. Such a deep institutional religionization of the state can stem from its deep religiosity at the outset. For example, on December 7, 2009 Yaakov Neeman, the Israeli minister of justice who oversees the Israeli judicial system, made the following comment in a public speech (YNET 08/12/2009):

*"Step by step, we will bestow upon the citizens of Israel the laws of the Torah and we will turn Halakha into the binding law of the nation [...] we must bring back the heritage of our fathers to the nation of Israel [...] The Torah has the complete solution to all of the questions we are dealing with."*

Hamas member and public intellectual Professor Yusuf Rizqa refers to the Palestinian Basic Law, stating that:

*Article 4 of the law identifies the relationship between religion and the state, and stated that "Islam is the official religion in Palestine. Respect for the sanctity of all other divine religions shall be maintained".*

Rizqa goes on to quote the articles in the Palestinian Basic Law which talk about democracy, party pluralism and the will of the people (RIZQA, 2017, p. 72). Rizqa also mentions that Hamas ideologist Jamal Mansour already accepted the Palestinian Basic Law in the 1990s and that the movement respected this law since its participation in the political system following the 2006 elections.

Hamas and religious Zionism are stronger than ever before in their respective society. While religious-nationalists still talk about establishing a theocratic religious state, on the ground the RN work with the existing institutions, adopting on the way some democratic norms and on the other hand influencing the system by shifting it towards the more traditional and religious values.

The thematic review on the last part of this dissertation demonstrates how the self is constructed and based on the negation of the other through a national-religious polemic discourse. Such a discourse plays on the strings of tradition and identity, generate a dynamic of radicalization in society that also penetrates the political discourse. They evoke deep emotions that are at the base of people's deep religious and national identities. Such a polemic discourse helps bring RN to center stage in Israel and Palestine. At the same time, it hinders the political resolution of the conflict, as for example with the failure of the Camp David peace summit in July 2000. The discourse around Jerusalem triggered and excused this failure, which was followed by national-religious decrees, mutual cultural negation and then a struggle in and around

the holy sites which culminated with the eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada that resulted with thousands of casualties, after which both Hamas and RZ decided to strive for political hegemony.

The similarity between the process of politicization that the Fatah movement underwent in the 1970s-1980s to the politicization of Hamas since the 1990s has been stated in this dissertation. This process stems from the changing circumstances of political history and geography and it is expressed in structures, institutions and ideology, in the approach towards the other side and in self-perception and the philosophical understanding of the Palestinian struggle for liberation as a whole.

For the Fatah, such ideological understandings, which stemmed from a new geopolitical reality, led to deep changes in the movement's approach towards Israel, and towards the preferred road for liberation. Two decades later the Fatah was ready to recognize Israel and reconsider its fundamental values such as the armed struggle as the only way for the liberation of Palestine. Such changes on the Palestinian side paved the road to Oslo and the attempt at solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the Two States Solution. In his preface from 2021 to a text issued by Fatah in 1970 regarding the Jews and the Palestinian revolution, French journalist Alain Gresh argues that the Two States Solution is dead (AL FATH et al., 2021). The Status Quo, he continues, means endless war. The changes, according to Gresh, all point in one direction – similar to the 1970 vision of Fatah – one open and progressive society to Muslims, Christians and Jews “that will replace the apartheid society of the occupation” (*Ibid.*). In other words, Gresh calls for a one state solution. Gresh relates to the pace allocated to the Jews in the Fatah vision from 1970, but he ignores the centrality of the armed struggle against Israel in it. More than a social message of a one egalitarian state for all, it is a vision of a one large Palestinian nation-state. However, the Fatah of 2021 is not the Fatah of 1970. In the last decades Fatah failed to lead the Palestinians towards liberation. Only time will tell if the new Hamas can, accepting some old ideological ideas in new, contemporary and national-religious dressing, while carrying the banner of armed struggle and Palestinian national liberation.

RZ in Israel and the Palestinian Hamas both shifted from an excluded and marginal opposition in the 1990s to a ruling hegemonic elite in the second decade of the current century. As this dissertation showed, this process did not suddenly appear at the turn of the millennium. It stems from the deep religious roots from which both the Zionist and the Palestinian national movements grow. This religious base, the fact that Zionist and Palestinians narratives are both national- at times secular - interpretations of a religious ethos, renders these national movements more liable to become strongly religious in reaction to a threat on the basic themes of their narrative.

This process is taking place simultaneously on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the differences between Israelis and Palestinians are clear, the NR religious movements on both sides underwent a similar process of becoming hegemonic through their reaction to the “existential threat” of the peace process which involved ideological and territorial compromises. While each side- the Palestinian-Muslim and the Israeli-Jewish - is rooted in its own context, examining this process as two separates moves, and not one complex dialectic dialogue, risks misunderstanding the process as a whole.

Many thinkers in recent years pointed to the centrality of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the absence of it in the peace process. Many concluded that in order to overcome the barriers to peace we must tune to the national-religious elements and engage them into the process. However, Western diplomacy is in constant confusion when faced with the religious. This trend is slowly changing: in November 2014 the EU Mediation Support Team officials aimed at providing tools for EU officials to better engage with religious and faith-based actors in mediation and dialogue contexts.<sup>351</sup> At about the same time, during Obama’s second administration, secretary of state John Kerry launched the Office of Religion and Global Affairs at the Department of State (RGA) headed by American diplomat Shaun Casey.<sup>352</sup> However,

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<sup>351</sup> In my professional capacity at the time, I was asked to proofread this 11 pages document titled: Factoring in the religious component in Mediation and Dialogue. On 4-5 May 2015 the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence launched a conference on the theme of International Politics, Diplomacy and Religion aiming to “clarify the role of the religious factor in international politics both from the perspective of professional diplomacy as well as from the perspective of religious and secular practitioners of international relations.”

<sup>352</sup> Casey is currently the director of Georgetown’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs.

as this dissertation points out, conflicts involving religion tend to be longer, more violent and harder to solve. Borrowing from Walker Connor, religious-based national movements and states are more liable to radicalization, fascism and totalitarianism and are more likely to commit atrocities in war (CONNOR, 1994, p. 98-99). Indeed, due to the centrality of religion on the conflict, and to the self-perception of each of the sides to the conflict, it is unwise to ignore the religious factor. It should be noted however that engaging it is no guaranty for success. It could very well be the case that the religious elements in the heart of the Jewish-Muslim conflictual encounter in the Holy Land are not the source for its resolution. Maybe the religious nationalists simply cannot go the distance required for peace, due to the strong religiosity of their national ethos, in which proclaiming the self is based on the negation of the other. Maybe engaging RN in the peace process will only enhance the barriers. According to Hamas member Sami Khater, "Hamas believes that the failure of the pro-'Zionist entity' West to take all the aforementioned factors into account increases tension in the region regardless of the efforts that might be made to maintain stability." (KHATER, 2017, p. 511).

It should be noted that while Hamas seems willing to take part in a political agreement with Israel, it is still not possible for the movement to officially and directly recognize the State of Israel. Since it is also clear that Hamas cannot be ignored in any future viable agreement, it seems that Israel and the West must make do with Hamas' indirect recognition, through participation in a Palestinian government that will sign a future agreement with Israel. Hamas' rhetoric is unpleasant to the Israeli-Zionist ear. However, Hamas is a strong potential partner, its national honor was not trampled, and thus it would be able to allow itself "painful compromises" when the time will be right. Israel should understand that it must suffice with a de facto recognition of Hamas by an agreement –such an agreement will force Hamas to take public responsibility and fully accept the political process. However, this is only one possible scenario in a very turbulent and unclear region, in which reality is constantly changing.

One significant lacuna this dissertation suffers from is the lack of women amongst the main interlocutors and the lack of attention gender related issues. There is a place to connect female Palestinian-Islamic and RZ to the RN shift towards

hegemony in Israel and Palestine, highlighting the role of women in this process. In this sense there is place for further research on this topic, connecting the focus of this study with the existing literature of Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim women.

An optimistic note maybe lies in the fact that the entire shift related only to the hegemonic framework in both movements, which is patriarchal and based on the socio economically distinct elites. Maybe from the margins of SRN, from the place of excluded classes and genders, a new movement might arise. Such movements might have the potential to steer the conflict towards new, maybe even more peaceful, or at least less violent future.





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## **Résumé**

### **Des marges vers le centre : le nationalisme religieux dans le conflit israélo-palestinien**

*Une approche comparative*

Cette thèse examine par le biais d'une approche comparative le glissement opéré par les mouvements nationaux-religieux israélo-juifs et palestiniens-musulmans depuis les années 1990, des marges politiques et sociales jusqu'au centre de la scène. Liés ensemble dans un conflit permanent, les deux mouvements sont en négatif l'un de l'autre. Les mêmes événements historiques ont ébranlé ces deux mouvements nationaux-religieux et les ont motivés à affirmer leur hégémonie politique et sociale dans leurs sociétés respectives: le processus de paix israélo-palestinien commencé au début des années 1990, et les tentatives de réconciliation par le biais d'un compromis territorial et idéologique, ont engendré une forte objection nationale-religieuse. Les deux mouvements ont agi contre le compromis territorial émergent, perçu par eux comme une menace existentielle. Le sionisme religieux et le Hamas ont tous deux mobilisé leurs capacités institutionnelles pour élargir leur pouvoir politique et affirmer leur hégémonie sociale. Les deux mouvements, chacun en fonction de ses circonstances particulières, ont également utilisé différentes manifestations de violence et de terreur pour atteindre leurs objectifs politiques.

*Malgré les évidentes différences entre eux (qui seront décrites dans cette thèse), au cours des années 1990, le sionisme religieux (SR) et le Hamas (de loin le plus grand mouvement national-religieux islamique palestinien) ont parcouru un chemin similaire à partir des marges et vers le devant de la scène. Ce travail souhaite examiner ce glissement, de ses racines historiques et idéologiques, à travers ses manifestations institutionnelles et politiques et par le biais d'une analyse idéologique et thématique de son discours contemporain.*

### Événements actuels

Le 13 juin 2021, Naftali Bennett est devenu le premier sioniste-religieux d'Israël à occuper le poste de Premier ministre. À peu près au même moment, selon le Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), le Mouvement de résistance islamique Hamas est devenu le mouvement politique le plus populaire dans

les Territoires palestiniens.<sup>353</sup> Les nationalismes religieux israéliens et palestiniens semblent plus proches que jamais de l'hégémonie politique.

Peu de temps auparavant, au printemps 2021, alors que cette thèse atteignait sa phase finale, une vague de violence nationale-religieuse et ethnique israélo-palestinienne avait éclaté. <sup>354</sup>A l'épicentre des événements, figuraient les organisations, institutions, idéologies et symboles nationaux-religieux. Les violents affrontements du printemps 2021 et leur conséquences politique semblent entériner la thèse présentée dans ce travail. De telles affirmations doivent bien sûr se faire avec la caution nécessaire afin de ne pas tomber dans un raisonnement circulaire. Néanmoins, nous ne sommes pas ici dans une pétition de principe, mais analysons plutôt le tissu vivant de la réalité israélienne et palestinienne contemporaine. Ainsi, il n'est pas étonnant que de nombreux volets des derniers événements fassent écho aux différents chapitres de cet ouvrage, écrit depuis 2014.

On notera tout d'abord le fait que les événements ont éclaté dans un lieu saint pendant un temps sacré, directement lié à Jérusalem et à l'unification autour de la mosquée al-Aqsa/le Mont du Temple (la Sainte Esplanade de Jérusalem). Ce phénomène est étudié dans la première partie de la thèse. Deuxièmement, le cadre politique et institutionnel du nationalisme religieux israélien et palestinien joue un rôle dans sa quête d'hégémonie, comme illustré dans la deuxième partie de cette thèse (chapitres 3 sur le Hamas et 4 sur le sionisme religieux). Dans la réalité actuelle en Israël et en Palestine, le nationalisme religieux, c'est-à-dire le sionisme religieux et le Hamas respectivement, dictent un programme de confrontation, qui intensifie le conflit, engendre plus de violence et élargit la division judéo-arabe. Une telle réalité découle de l'idéologie nationale-religieuse et en même temps, comme examiné dans le chapitre 5 de cette étude, la sert et la ratifie.

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<sup>353</sup> Selon le PSR, en juin 2021, suite au report des élections palestiniennes et aux événements violents qui ont éclaté pendant le ramadan et tout au long d'avril-mai 2021, la majorité des Palestiniens soutiennent que le Hamas, et non le Fatah sous la direction du président de l'AP Mahmoud Abbas, mérite représenter et diriger le peuple palestinien. Voir Communiqué de Presse : Sondage d'Opinion Publique n° (80) du 15 juin 2021 : <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/843>.

<sup>354</sup> Le reportage de Vice News du 19 mai 2021, « Inside the Battle for Jerusalem » donne un aperçu du début des événements, soulignant leur contexte national-religieux : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiSRCPiklhl>.

Cependant, une mise en garde est nécessaire. En effet, Naftali Bennett est devenu le premier représentant du sionisme-religieux à occuper le poste de Premier ministre d'Israël, mais ce succès s'est fait au prix d'une grave scission politique au sein du sionisme religieux. Cette scission reflète deux approches distinctes au sein du SR en ce qui concerne l'État, le modernisme et les relations souhaitables entre nationalisme et religion.

#### Nationalisme et religiosité

Pendant longtemps, la religiosité a été considérée comme secondaire au nationalisme dans son influence sur la nature du conflit israélo-arabe/palestinien. Cette thèse soutient le contraire. La religion et le nationalisme ne constituent pas deux médiums indépendants l'un de l'autre dans la sphère israélo-palestinienne en général, et le conflit entre les deux mouvements nationaux contribue à engendrer un sentiment particulièrement fort de nationalisme religieux.

Comprendre la centralité de l'élément religieux dans les conflits contemporains à travers le monde est crucial, mais cet aspect des choses ne reçoit en général qu'une attention insuffisante de la part des universitaires et des décideurs, qui ont tendance à se concentrer sur les aspects historiques, géographiques et politiques des conflits (Fox, 1999). Jusqu'à récemment, il était courant de traiter le nationalisme et la religion comme deux phénomènes distincts dans l'expérience humaine. Au début du millénaire, de plus en plus de chercheurs ont commencé à noter que ces deux manifestations de l'ordre symbolique et institutionnel, ces deux systèmes de croyances, sont en fait liés de plusieurs façons (Fischer & Maor, 2019). Lorsque la religion *per se* et le nationalisme *per se* s'entrelacent, nous sommes confrontés à un phénomène distinct que nous décrivons par un terme relié par un trait d'union – le nationalisme-religieux (NR).

Dans de nombreux cas, le NR n'est qu'un marqueur d'identité instrumental. Dans cette thèse, nous nous intéressons aux manifestations religieuses du sionisme et du mouvement national palestinien (MNP). Le courant dominant de chacun de ces deux mouvements nationaux est fondé sur l'interprétation d'un ethos religieux dans un langage national moderne - le caractère islamique sacré de la Palestine, et le retour

à Sion respectivement.<sup>355</sup> Cette religiosité qui est à la base de leurs éthiques nationales respectives, engendre un type particulier de ce que j'appelle un **nationalisme-religieux fort**.<sup>356</sup>

Le sentiment national-religieux dans notre étude de cas – le conflit israélo-palestinien – est enraciné dans et façonné par l'histoire et la théologie ; il semble donc sage d'accorder à ces éléments l'attention appropriée afin de jeter des bases solides pour les recherches futures.

#### L'approche comparative

Il est étonnant de réaliser à quel point les Juifs et les Arabes comprennent différemment les mêmes événements. Par conséquent, la meilleure approche pour étudier le conflit israélo-palestinien est de tenter d'étudier les deux parties avec des outils similaires et selon les mêmes critères (Cohen 2015, xiv). Je resterai toujours, inévitablement, un juif israélien, mais en tant que chercheur, je dois non seulement viser l'objectivité académique, mais aussi être capable de placer les deux côtés sous le même scalpel.

Une telle recherche nécessite une compréhension du discours théorique sur le nationalisme-religieux ainsi qu'une connaissance approfondie de la particularité des deux éléments de notre étude de cas : les sociétés judéo-israélienne et musulmane-palestinienne. Une approche interdisciplinaire est donc requise, joignant les sciences sociales et politiques, la politique comparée, les méthodes de recherche historique d'analyse textuelle, la religion comparée, la pensée juive et islamique et les études de conflit.

Le judaïsme et l'islam présentent des différences significatives ainsi des similitudes frappantes. Le judaïsme est une petite religion introvertie. L'Islam est une religion universelle et une civilisation mondiale. Toutes deux sont des religions

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<sup>355</sup> Alain Dieckhoff soutient que le sionisme est une manifestation nationale moderne de la religion juive (Dieckhoff 2003). En ce sens, le nationalisme peut parfois être considéré comme une autre expression de la religiosité.

<sup>356</sup> Le terme « nationalism-religieux fort » s'inspire d'un livre sur le fondamentalisme intitulé « Strong Religion » (Almond, Appleby et Sivan 2003), qui fait partie du Fundamentalism Project - un projet de recherche complet en sept volumes sur le fondamentalisme dans le monde, édité par MARTIN E. MARTY ET R. SCOTT APPLEBY, EDITORS. Publié par University of Chicago Press.

d'orthopraxie, dans lesquelles les croyants et les membres de la communauté vivent selon une loi sacrée, Halacha (הלכה) en hébreu et Shari'a (شريعة) en arabe. Mais alors que la loi islamique a pris forme lorsque l'islam était en cours d'expansion territoriale et bénéficiait d'une hégémonie politique (Layish 2005, 14), la loi juive, quant à elle, a été façonnée dans des circonstances complètement opposées, pendant une période de passivité politique, en diaspora. En l'absence d'un État propre aux juifs, le judaïsme n'a pas développé de véritable tradition politique. Par contraste, il est largement admis qu'au début de l'Islam, religion et politique étaient inséparables et que toute activité politique devait avoir une base religieuse (Elad 1995, 149).

Nous voyons donc que bien que le judaïsme et l'islam soient toutes les deux des religions abrahamiques et monothéistes de révélation et de loi sacrée, elles diffèrent non seulement par leur portée mais aussi par leur approche fondamentale du pouvoir politique.

#### L'anomalie minorité-majorité

Le cas israélo-palestinien constitue une situation sans précédent historique, dans lequel une communauté musulmane autochtone vit sous domination juive, sur une terre qu'à la fois juifs et musulmans considèrent comme sacrée, et sur laquelle ils revendiquent tous deux des droits religieux, historiques et politiques. La religion juive, qui a évolué pendant la diaspora en tant que minorité permanente, doit s'adapter pour régner sur les minorités religieuses (Lavie 2015, 9-16). Par contraste, la question du statut de minorités musulmanes dirigées par des non-musulmans ne s'est pas posée pendant la majeure partie de l'histoire islamique (Layish 2005, 14). Les choses ont commencé à changer à l'époque coloniale, lorsque les puissances chrétiennes occidentales ont pris le contrôle de territoires islamiques. Dans les années 1990, lorsque de larges communautés musulmanes bien établies ont prospéré dans les pays occidentaux, une théorie juridique pour les minorités musulmanes (*Fiqh al-Aqalliyat*) a été mise en place par deux personnalités religieuses musulmanes de premier plan, le cheikh Dr Taha Jabir al-Alwani de Virginie et le cheikh Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi du Qatar (Fishman 2006, 1).

Bien que les musulmans soient minoritaires en Israël, et exclus de l'hégémonie dans son ensemble et du pouvoir politique en particulier, cette doctrine n'est pas pertinente pour les musulmans d'Israël et de Palestine - d'un point de vue islamique, les musulmans d'Israël/Palestine ne se considèrent pas comme une minorité à accommoder par la société majoritaire hégémonique, mais plutôt comme les propriétaires légitimes de la terre actuellement sous occupation et oppression, en attente de libération. Nous voyons ainsi que le conflit entre Israël, les Palestiniens et le monde arabe et musulman dans son ensemble a créé une situation politique et religieuse unique qui découle de circonstances historiques sans précédent.

Comparer le judaïsme et l'islam en tant que deux religions de droit qui englobent tous les aspects de la vie du pratiquant est courant dans la littérature, mais seuls quelques ouvrages traitent des similitudes et des différences systématiques entre la charia et la halacha concernant l'État moderne. En tant que phénomènes politiques modernes, le sionisme et le mouvement national palestinien sont tous deux considérés comme des anomalies, rarement évoquées dans les recherches générales sur le nationalisme ou dans les études comparatives.

### L'effet miroir

Sur la côte orientale de la Méditerranée, Juifs et Arabes musulmans, et plus tard Israéliens et Palestiniens, sont les acteurs inséparables d'un drame permanent qui évolue depuis la fin du XIXe siècle. Les nationalismes-religieux israélo-juif et palestinien-musulman sont deux idéologies concurrentes, agissant dans le même espace et se rapportant à celui-ci. Ils constituent deux expressions opposées de nationalismes-religieux, chacune d'entre elle à l'une des extrémités du conflit israélo-palestinien. Bien qu'enracinées dans leur contexte particulier, respectivement juif-israélien et arabo-musulman, les deux tendances évoluent constamment l'une en face de l'autre. Ainsi, alors qu'en surface ils s'opposent de manière absolue, un regard plus profond révèle qu'ils coexistent en réalité dans une grande proximité, parfois littéralement et physiquement dans la même rue. Il serait donc déraisonnable de supposer qu'ils ne s'influencent pas mutuellement ou ne mènent pas une sorte de dialogue (direct ou indirect) et, dans une certaine mesure, se reflètent l'un l'autre.



Le sionisme-religieux et le Hamas, en tant que principales manifestations du nationalisme-religieux israélo-juif et palestinien-musulman, ont combattu le processus de réconciliation israélo-palestinien dans les années 1990 avec un certain succès. Par la suite, tous deux ont évolué depuis les marges et vers le devant de la scène, et ont progressé vers l'hégémonie. Ainsi, le Hamas et l'élite kookiste du sionisme-religieux, dans toute leur diversité, méritent une comparaison.

Le passage du NR au centre de la scène en Israël et en Palestine remonte à 1967, voire avant. Cependant, ce n'est qu'après les événements, les effets et les résultats du processus de paix israélo-palestinien débuté dans les années 1990 que les NR israélien et palestinien ne sont devenus partie intégrante de la culture hégémonique. Les compromis territoriaux et idéologiques qui ont accompagné le processus de paix au cours des dernières décennies ont été particulièrement influents ici (Inbari 2012, al-Makadmeh 1994). Dans leur antagonisme vis-à-vis de ce processus, les nationalismes religieux israélo-juifs et palestiniens-musulmans peuvent être considérés comme se reflétant ou tout au moins liés l'un à l'autre.

### Résumé des différents chapitres

Ce mémoire comprend cinq chapitres repartis entre trois parties principales. La première partie, composée des chapitres 1 et 2, construit le cadre théorique et donne les définitions conceptuelles, elle constitue l'infrastructure sur laquelle repose le reste du travail.

Le premier chapitre présente une théorie du nationalisme religieux fort (RNF). Il passe en revue le discours académique général sur la religion, le nationalisme et le nationalisme-religieux (NR), affirmant que certains NR sont plus forts que d'autres dans leur religiosité. Le NR qui est à l'œuvre dans le cas israélo-palestinien est défini comme NRF. Le premier chapitre s'appuie principalement sur des sources secondaires et des études universitaires.

Dans le deuxième chapitre, la théorie du NRF est appliquée au cas israélo-palestinien en réexaminant les racines historiques du conflit. Tout d'abord, les bases

religieuses des récits fondateurs des deux mouvements nationaux, qui les rend plus susceptibles d'évoluer en NRF, sont mises en évidence et juxtaposées. À ce stade, le chapitre passe en revue les racines historiques du violent conflit entre Juifs et Arabes en Terre Sainte, révélant à nouveau l'élément NRF qui se trouve à sa base. La méthodologie appliquée comprend une interprétation innovante des sources secondaires, dans un cadre nouveau et comparatif, ainsi que des travaux d'archives et des sources primaires en ligne et écrites de perspectives rétro-historiques arabes et hébraïques contemporaines.

A propos des sources dans ce chapitre et les suivants, il est important de souligner la frontière parfois fluide entre sources primaires et secondaires. Les oeuvres des intellectuels NR sont pour certaines lues comme des sources primaires, pour d'autres comme sources secondaires. Cette ambiguïté nous accompagnera tout au long de cette thèse.

La deuxième partie du travail traite de l'évolution depuis les marges vers le devant de la scène via un processus de politisation et d'institutionnalisation. Il comprend une courte introduction et deux chapitres, examinant l'un le Hamas et l'autre le sionisme religieux avec une référence comparative au chapitre précédent.

Dans la brève introduction de cette partie de l'ouvrage, la logique de comparaison entre le Hamas et le SR est expliquée, tout en soulignant les différences et les similitudes manifestes entre les deux mouvements. Par ailleurs, la logique institutionnelle du NR est développée, comme introduction à l'examen de l'évolution du Hamas et du SR vers l'hégémonie.

Dans les deux chapitres suivants, l'histoire de l'institutionnalisation du Hamas et du SR est racontée, en partie à travers les principaux protagonistes qui ont construit ces mouvements et leurs institutions, tels que Cheikh Ahmed Yassin et RZYH Kook. L'essentiel de ces chapitres allie une analyse de l'histoire politique, des textes théologico-idéologiques et des structures institutionnelles. L'histoire politique du Hamas est examinée, depuis sa Charte fondatrice de 1988 jusqu'au Document de principes et politiques généraux de 2017. Une histoire politique parallèle du SR et de

ses descendants est étudiée, en mettant l'accent sur les structures sociales et les institutions.

Le Hamas et le sionisme religieux représentent le mieux les approches nationales et religieuses palestiniennes et israéliennes. Cependant, alors que le Hamas est d'abord une organisation, le SR est d'abord une force sociale et idéologique. Pour cette raison, leurs montées respectives s'expriment différemment, par des manifestations institutionnelles, politiques, idéologiques et sociales respectivement.

Cette différence structurelle entre les deux mouvements nécessite une méthodologie différenciée. C'est pourquoi notre approche dans les deux chapitres n'est pas identique. Alors que le chapitre sur le Hamas est principalement (mais pas seulement) traité à travers des documents officiels (charte, programme du parti, document de principes, etc.) et l'histoire politique, le chapitre sur le SR est de nature plus sociologique, car il examine l'université de Bar-Ilan, le système éducatif et le leadership politique et spirituel.

Néanmoins, malgré ce décalage structurel, qui dicte la différence entre les méthodologies retenues dans chaque chapitre, la comparaison entre RZ et Hamas reste valable et même nécessaire.

L'approche institutionnelle, dont l'importance est expliquée au début de la deuxième partie, n'est que limitée si elle ne repose pas sur des fondements idéologiques solides. Dans la troisième partie, le chapitre cinq passe en revue les thèmes idéologiques centraux au sein du NRF israélien et palestinien. Tout au long du chapitre, une revue thématique est menée, sur les perceptions de soi et des autres, l'authenticité nationale et la sainteté religieuse. Chaque thème est examiné relativement brièvement, et nous nous concentrons sur la comparaison entre le discours judéo-israélien et le discours musulman-palestinien. Ce dernier chapitre illustre comment le NRF devient hégémonique à travers une dialectique du discours idéologique. Le SR et le Hamas ont depuis les années 1990 peu à peu occupé le devant de la scène dans leurs sociétés respectives en posant une vision du monde idéologique globale. Ces visions du monde NR interagissent dans une sorte de discours dialectique.

## Conclusions

Le SR en Israël et le Hamas palestinien sont tous deux passés du statut d'opposition marginale dans les années 1990 à celui d'élite hégémonique au pouvoir dans la deuxième décennie du siècle actuel. Comme le montre cette thèse, ce glissement n'est pas apparu soudainement, et s'explique par les racines religieuses profondes à partir desquelles les mouvements nationaux sioniste et palestinien ont grandi. Cette base religieuse, c'est-à-dire le fait que les récits sionistes et palestiniens constituent des interprétations nationales - parfois laïques - d'un ethos religieux, rend ces mouvements nationaux plus susceptibles de devenir fortement religieux en réaction à une menace sur les thèmes fondamentaux de leur récit.

Ce processus se déroule simultanément des deux côtés du conflit israélo-palestinien. Alors que les différences entre Israéliens et Palestiniens sont claires, les mouvements NR des deux côtés ont parcouru un chemin similaire vers l'hégémonie, poussés par leur réaction à la « menace existentielle » du processus de paix et des compromis idéologiques et territoriaux. Bien que chaque camp –musulman-Palestinien tout comme juif-Israélien – soit enraciné dans son propre contexte, examiner ce processus comme celui de deux glissements indépendants, et non comme un dialogue dialectique complexe, ne risque d'offrir qu'une compréhension au mieux partielle et au pire erronée.

Ces dernières années, de nombreux penseurs ont souligné la centralité de la religion dans le conflit israélo-palestinien et son absence dans le processus de paix. Beaucoup ont conclu que pour surmonter les obstacles à la paix, il est crucial de s'adapter aux éléments nationaux-religieux et de les impliquer dans le processus. Cependant, la diplomatie occidentale est dans une confusion constante face au religieux. Cette tendance est en train de changer lentement : en novembre 2014, les fonctionnaires de l'équipe de soutien à la médiation de l'UE visaient à fournir des outils aux fonctionnaires de l'UE pour mieux s'engager avec les acteurs religieux et confessionnels dans les contextes de médiation et de dialogue.<sup>357</sup> À peu près au même

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<sup>357</sup> À l'époque j'ai été amené à titre professionnel à relire ce document de 11 pages intitulé : Prise en compte de la composante religieuse dans la médiation et le dialogue. Les 4 et 5 mai 2015, l'Institut universitaire européen (IUE) de Florence a lancé une conférence sur le thème de la politique

moment, pendant la deuxième administration d'Obama, le secrétaire d'État John Kerry a fondé le Bureau de la religion et des affaires mondiales au Département d'État (RGA) dirigé par le diplomate américain Shaun Casey.<sup>358</sup> Cependant, comme indiqué dans cette thèse, les conflits impliquant la religion ont tendance à être plus longs, plus violents et plus difficiles à résoudre. Empruntant à Walker Connor, les mouvements nationaux et les États religieux sont plus exposés à la radicalisation, au fascisme et au totalitarisme et sont plus susceptibles de commettre des atrocités en temps de guerre. En raison de la centralité de la religion dans le conflit et de l'auto-perception de chacune des parties au conflit, il est imprudent d'ignorer le facteur religieux. Il faut cependant noter que l'engager n'est pas une garantie de succès, et que les éléments religieux au cœur de la rencontre conflictuelle judéo-musulmane en Terre Sainte ne constituent pas forcément la clé unique pour sa résolution. Il est possible que les nationalistes religieux ne puissent tout simplement pas parcourir la distance requise pour la paix, en raison de la forte religiosité de leur éthique nationale, basée sur la négation de l'autre, et que leur engagement dans le processus ne fera que renforcer les obstacles à la paix.

Une note optimiste réside peut-être dans le fait que ce glissement ne concerne que le cadre hégémonique des deux mouvements, qui est patriarcal et enraciné dans une classe socio-économique particulière. De nouveaux mouvements pourraient éclore aux marges du NRF, au cœur des classes et des genres exclus, qui auraient avoir le potentiel d'orienter le conflit vers un avenir meilleur.

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internationale, de la diplomatie et de la religion visant à "clarifier le rôle du facteur religieux dans la politique internationale tant du point de vue de la diplomatie professionnelle que que du point de vue des praticiens religieux et laïcs des relations internationales".

<sup>358</sup> Casey est actuellement directeur du Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs de Georgetown.