THE ZIONIST ARGUMENT AND THE ARGUMENT ABOUT ZIONISM

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IMPROVING THE CAMPUS CLIMATE INITIATIVE (ICCI)

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Academic Engagement NETWORK

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THE ZIONIST ARGUMENT AND THE ARGUMENT ABOUT ZIONISM

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Zionism is a more contested than understood phenomenon—a badge of honor for some, a portent of disorder for others. Those enthralled by the notion of Jews seizing control of their political and historical fate are matched by others inflamed by an image of Zionism decanted into a settler colonialism embezzling resources from the rightful owners of the land of Israel. While some see in Israel's founding proof of Zionism's unqualified success, others view the establishment of a Jewish state as the cataclysm depriving another people of its national rights. On the one side is a belief in what Zionism presumably achieved while on the other what it purportedly destroyed. For some, Zionism is shorthand for evil, for others, a sacred mission.

That Zionism is a source of controversy is nothing new. Zionism, as an ideology, may be forged around an heroic exodus story where people escape death and destruction to rebuild a promised land, but as a strategy, it is a mechanism for survival preoccupied as much with disagreements over the most effective way to achieve it as with disputes about its purpose. Emerging in an era of political upheaval, Zionism developed embedded in disagreements that now sound less like a dispatch from another century than like a mirror of the landscape inhabited today. Perhaps in our own Age of Corona, when reading itself, has come back into style, it is possible to consider how much can be learned from considering the historical circumstances that gave Zionism not only its traction but more importantly its momentum and ask whether such a review can pry loose the obsession with reducing its story to either a blessing or a curse.

THE BEGINNING IN EUROPE

Zionism was one of several responses to the massive changes engulfing nineteenth century Europe that widened opportunities but also posed special risks for Jews. An Enlightenment that beckoned Jews to become full citizens simultaneously raised fears about its potentially corrosive consequences for a civilization with an ancient lineage. Jews could not help but wonder whether their own traditions and organizations required adjustment if not radical revision to create compatibility with these newly emerging polities. Religious reformers revised doctrines, rituals, and liturgy introducing new styles of Jewish worship and identity.[1] Those opposed to innovations bulldozed their opponents by advocating a doubling down on religious beliefs and observance—the only means, the newly named Orthodox insisted, of halting collective Jewish decline, if not its disappearance.[2] All groups contended with proponents arguing for totally dissolving the Jewish lifestyle, erasing all differences as a prerequisite to eliminating any basis for discrimination and hatred. When high hopes for full acceptance remained beyond reach—Enlightenment thinkers were more often than not tone-deaf to their own anti-Semitic murmurs—some Jews embraced revolution promoting the promises of radical socialism or anarchism.

None of the several responses to modernity did much to stop the feeling of many Jews that their collective future was spinning out of control. The collapse of Eastern European Jewish society, when the norms generated by synagogue and study hall lost their force, imparted an aura of apocalypse. Emigration unsettled families while political and economic changes

[1] *The first Reform temple opened in Seesen, Germany on July 17, 1810.*

[2] *The earliest known mentioning of the term Orthodox Jews was made in the Berlinische Monatsschrift in 1795. The word Orthodox was borrowed from the general German Enlightenment discourse, and used not to denote a specific religious group, but rather those Jews who opposed Enlightenment.*

disrupted customs and relations once taken for granted as eternal, raising the possibility that a collective Jewish existence would disappear.[3] A tradition engaged through textual mastery and interpretation that guided behavior and shaped social and economic relations was on the verge of collapse.

Where many saw the crumbling of faith as a catastrophe, Zionists saw it as the beginning of liberation. The Zionist narrative supplied Jews with an answer in a familiar idiom replete with metaphors of a shared fate. But unlike the classic texts from which these words and ideas were drawn and reworked, Zionism's calls for a return to the land of Israel were not issued as religious imperatives. The national ideal, always implicit in the Jewish story, was not so much invented as re-focused away from the demands of Heaven on to the brokenness of the Jewish Earth. In proposing the building of a national homeland, Zionism provided Jews with a redemptive enterprise that would be authorized by their own work and by the civic framework they were called upon to create.

> "IN WHAT APPEARED AS MUCH CRISIS AS JUNCTURE, ZIONISM EMERGED AS BOTH A CRITIQUE OF THE DEVASTATING CIRCUMSTANCES OF JEWISH LIFE AND OF THE PROPOSED REMEDIES THAT WOULD LEAVE A DEBILITATED PEOPLE OR CULTURE IN ITS WAKE. MOVING TO THEIR ANCIENT HOMELAND COULD, ZIONISTS ARGUED, LIFT JEWS UP TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW KIND OF SOLIDARITY, MORAL DEVELOPMENT, AND POWER TO SHAPE THEIR OWN DESTINY."

The Jew who once focused on dwelling in the land of Israel as a religious ideal was always striving on behalf of a deferred, distant, and immeasurable Messianic goal. Zionists gave Jews

[3] *An estimated 2.4 million Jews from Eastern Europe came to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.*

a challenge intended to be experienced with successes and failures that could be calculated. In what appeared as much crisis as juncture, Zionism emerged as both a critique of the devastating circumstances of Jewish life and of the proposed remedies that would leave a debilitated people or culture in its wake.[4] Moving to their ancient homeland could, Zionists argued, lift Jews up to the possibility of a new kind of solidarity, moral development, and power to shape their own destiny.

Aiming to transform the structure of Jewish life without totally detaching it from its history and from many of its traditions, Zionism looked simultaneously backward and forward. Preaching rebellion as much against the shackling of Jews by alien rulers as by the agents of Jewish religion, Zionists argued that independence would liberate Jews from the rule of rabbis no less than from that of the Czar, the police, and from that most timeless instrument of persecution—the mob.

For how Jews imagined their future had everything to do with how they understood their circumstances in the present even as they drew on core tenets of their heritage. Perhaps because Israel was imagined long before it was founded—visions conjured in the religious canon, in utopian fantasies, and in political treatises—Zionism could never be fully free from the initial debates over core principles and values. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of its goals and values, Zionism managed to establish the coordinates of a widely accepted and highly regarded relationship between land, people, and language. Reviving the Hebrew language became an instrument to transform a people once defined by their religious traditions and law into a nation

[4] *Misery and violence in Russia prompted open calls for Jewish emigration, the first issued by Leon Pinsker in Auto-Emancipation published in 1882. Pinsker noted that Russian Jews were a population already on the move but without a clear direction or purpose. His pamphlet inspired the creation of the first Zionist framework supporting small land purchases as the basis for Jewish agricultural settlement in Ottoman Palestine.*

bound together by a shared, albeit often newly invented, set of mores. The creation of a culture whose literature and ideas were expressed in Hebrew and whose ancient laws and rituals could be translated into national traditions was the groundwork for both a liberation Zionists sought from religious authority and for a state offering Jews something that Zionists believed could be found nowhere else—the opportunity to take advantage of the modern world.

Developing its understanding of the world at a time when European philosophy posited that humans, treated as commodities in the modern economy or as cogs in a powerful bureaucracy, possessed little freedom of action, Zionism insisted that these same impersonal forces could be harnessed to give Jews the capacity for both freedom and most importantly, for collective transformation. In proposing the building of a national homeland, Zionism provided Jews with a sacred enterprise that would be authorized by their own actions.

Zionism gave voice to the power of the imagination not simply to reinterpret history but more importantly, to change it for the sake of creating a radically different future for Jews. Substituting action for prayers gave Zionism its purpose. Work, rather than textual study, would be the vehicle for legitimizing possession, creating community and for transforming sites holy in scripture into a homeland. Zionists were builders empowered less as individuals than as members of a kind of collective construction team.

BRITISH MANDATE [1922-1948]

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and Great Britain's support for the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish National Home ironically provided Zionism with international legitimacy before it earned widespread backing from Jews. The dismantling of the Ottoman Empire allowed Great Britain to map Palestine and subsequently shape the structures of Zionism's governing institutions and policies. While bringing Palestine into Great Britain's strategic orbit may have been justified as extending aid to the downtrodden, beleaguered

Jewish people, the beneficence was actually aimed at rebuilding British imperial power and stimulating its economy: Jewish immigration was expected to generate revenue and investment and more than cover the costs of holding Palestine. In fact, the capital investment funds raised by the World Zionist Organization eased some of Great Britain's postwar financial burdens and repaid the Mandate's share of Ottoman war debts.

There were significant overlaps between British and Zionist interests particularly about immigration. Without Jewish immigration, no progress in developing a national home could be expected. But with it, Palestine's economy became highly volatile, subject to alternating periods of 'boom' and 'bust'. Five years, after the 1922 census, the Jewish population in Palestine had almost doubled. By 1945, it had grown by more than 412 percent comprising about one-third of the total population.

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The many young immigrants who trekked through the devastated battlegrounds of Europe to enter Palestine often found themselves challenged—sometimes undone—by grinding poverty even as Zionist rhetoric magnified and sanctified the process of nation building as the central task of their lives. The development of the Jewish National Home was, in fact, curated as the work of nationalists who generated ambitions not simply for a state and society like all other nations but rather for redemption: that is, the hope

that a Jewish state and society would provide a new kind of social order without hierarchy, without exploitation, and with justice and equality for all.

By tying a humanistic mission to a struggle for sovereignty, Zionist politics were frequently pulled in different directions. The tensions between the movement's utopian idealism and its capacity to set priorities meant having to come to terms with the fact that the promises of founding a Jewish state on the purest of Zionist ideals could not be kept. Nor were Zionists disposed to dreaming up the same utopian aspirations. Not surprisingly, the standards generated by the Zionist imperatives to build a nation and homeland intended to be both "normal" and "exceptional" encouraged expectations that could not ever be met but could never be totally dismissed. And while the differences could often be hidden in abstractions or ambiguous language, they could not be entirely avoided. Never reluctant to champion their ideals, Zionists displayed a remarkable linguistic flexibility, particularly about foundational terms like homeland and state in an effort to radiate a compensatory unity from a diversity of views and goals. The result: even political Zionists known for the brutal clarity with which they proclaimed their commitment to a Jewish state imagined it not possessing the sovereignty on offer from political philosophers like Thomas Hobbes. What Jews in Palestine knew was that they were participants in a story attracting intense global attention as well as in a risky political experiment marked by significant conflict and hardship.

In the transition from dispersion to ingathering and from powerlessness to power, Zionist leaders were convinced they were remaking a nation and culture. The images so indelibly inscribed in the conventional histories of Israel's founding tend to confirm the notion that a Jewish nation was remade, and a new collective identity formed in a land with no natural resources claimed by a movement possessing too little capital for the tasks it undertook. Zionist leaders pushed this notion to its extreme by presenting the agricultural collectives [Kibbutzim]—never encompassing more than a tiny percentage of Israel's population [under one percent in some years]—as emblematic of the Jewish National Home. These communities were

presumably bound together by a shared commitment to the principles of freedom, love of the land, physical labor, and of revitalizing the Hebrew language—all seemingly accomplished by sheer will.

Zionist leaders may have wanted to remake the Jewish people and produce a new kind of social and cultural order, but a disjunction always persisted between national claims and national realities. Jews who lived outside of Palestine could embrace Zionism and one or another of its visions of a national home as an abstract ideal. In Palestine, Jewish immigrants understood Zionism as an assortment of institutions shaping their lives. In Europe, Zionists could picture the future Jewish society; in Palestine, their daily activities formed it. While Zionists faced a constellation of perilous exposures in Europe, they could not help but be aware of the world they left behind when they landed in the promised land.

It was one thing to imagine physical labor as fulfilling and quite another to experience it. Disappointments that backbreaking physical labor did not produce a sense of fulfillment or feelings of intimacy with the land often triggered profound feelings of melancholy and a deep sense of personal self-doubt. Acknowledged individual failures—missing home, lapsing into Yiddish, longing for the music of Beethoven and Chopin rather than for the sound of jackals—were typically scaled up from the personal to the social as violations of Zionism's sacred norms.

It turned out to be much easier to believe in equality than to live a totally communal life with no separation between the public and the private. And it was much more appealing in theory to do away with religion than to live, in practice, without the warmth of family and the comfort of rituals and holidays. In fact, religiously observant Jews could not help but feel discomfort with the radical transformative vision projected in classical Zionist discourse even as they carried their religious and communal associations with them in settling in Palestine. Not surprisingly, they often created the same kinds of neighborhoods they left behind in the towns and villages of their birth. Although Zionists frequently asserted that the new Jewish society in the land

of Israel was being fashioned in accordance with their beliefs and not molded by the customs and habits acquired in the countries of their birth, actual lived culture cannot be trundled from slogans or spun from visions no matter how lofty the ideals.

Zionism's utopianism may have been distant from the way most Palestine's Jews lived, but it was critical to shaping conventional histories supposedly explaining how the Jewish National Home was developed. Zionist ideals held a particular resonance for teens who affirmed them not by joining communes but rather by becoming familiar with the land of Israel by hiking and by singing the songs and reciting the poetry stirred by the reveries of the Zionist narrative. Illuminating this point is "Lo Sharti Lach Artzi"[5] written by Rachel, a young poet who described her homeland as gloried not by heroic deeds on a battlefield but rather by a tree planted on Jordan's calm shores and by walking through its fields. To believe that Palestine could be conquered with the plow and simultaneously raised to glory through poetry was to believe that souls could be remade, and a country redeemed. The aesthetic quality of this culture, it might be argued, would be history's compensation for the social changes that had been lost. Transforming the actual social structure of the Jewish people was, you might call, 'Mishnah Impossible,' while the act of the imagination that drew the image of the ideal Sabra [native born Israeli] became a sacred imperative. The more the preconditions for transformation seemed beyond Zionist control, the more activities in the Jewish community fixed on language as a substitute for political action. But even the revival of Hebrew that gave access to the beauty of ancient texts could inflict wounds. By mobilizing the impulses for revolutionary change, the vocabulary also disciplined them, ordering the experience of immigrants, shaping their outlook, and rationalizing their place and identity in the developing community.

[5] *I do not sing to thee, my homeland, tales of heroic deeds that brought you glory and fame; I rather planted a tree where Jordan's shore rests peacefully; my feet only conquered a path winding through the fields.*

This is why the settler colonial rubric makes so little sense in explaining Zionism's impact on Palestine's Arabs and why branding Zionism a settler colonial project is as much a misuse of language as it is of history. The approach turns what is a complicated set of developments into a presumed moral inquiry that dismisses rather than engages with the evidence. Intending to widen the understanding of Zionism, settler colonialism instead entraps it.

Zionists aimed not at bringing a new civilization to the Arabs they encountered in Palestine but rather to the Diaspora Jew. Hebrew literature in the early years of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine is saturated with romantic notions of the Arab as overflowing with life in contrast to the Diaspora Jew who is typically represented as withered and dying. In short, because Zionism focused on transforming the Jewish people, this was a cultural program that at least, initially, was more than willing to make room for the Arab, non-Jewish 'other'. By the time circumstances—fierce Arab resistance combined with sustained outbursts of violence and an impending global conflict—convinced British policymakers to alter the principles of their Mandate policies in 1939, Zionism's momentum was too strong to be stopped by proclamations, and Palestinian society too fragmented to see the burgeoning possibilities for their own independence in sharing the land.

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1948: THE BEGINNING IN ISRAEL

When Jews founded their state in 1948, they had a narrative that presumed to explain not only their Zionist past but also the direction of their national future. But when a narrative, taken for granted as an accounting of the past and a projection of the future, cannot explain what is happening in the present, it is bound for a reckoning. While Israel's foundational socialist Zionist creed could take credit for establishing a state, it increasingly lost its vigor in trying to sustain it. Its idioms seemed both unpopular and a non-response to the country's serious problems. No one suffered more than the multitudes of people brought together in a newly established Jewish state: immigrants who initially viewed one another as foreign and alien, but who encountered one another in ways that changed everyone and reshaped the nation's society and culture. Officials typically tried to dismiss the complaints of immigrants accusing them of draining Israeli political culture of its communal energies and humanistic ideals. In fact, politically engaged immigrants set off chain reactions that eventually multiplied the possibilities for social acceptance and cleared space for new cultural sounds and sights that a hegemonic socialist Zionism devalued. Immigrants thrust the idea of individual rights more fully into the political discourse by pushing back against the idea of social engineering and insisting on a public life free from the straitjacket of principles its early leaders celebrated. This was no watering down of their passion for Zionism. Rather, it became a populist thrust by immigrants against the lords of culture who scolded them for embracing their own traditions and lifestyles.

It is less a revelation than a reminder to say that no democracy emerged fully formed in 1948. Although coalitions of political parties established governments—elections held and laws passed—the process of creating democratic procedures and norms was reworked many times particularly during the state's first years. Israelis could take some of their bearings from past practices, but the challenges confronting the Jewish state strained the resources and capacities of the venerable institutions developed during British rule. There was a framework of order,

but it lacked the capacity to meet the needs of the country's growing population: an economy broken by war and overwhelmed by masses arriving without even the language to explain their problems; epidemics killing young and old and running through the tents or huts hastily constructed to provide some protection from the weather that could be as brutal in the summer as in the winter. How the government met the needs of its people—when widespread despair mingled with a strong belief in the future—would set the course not only for Israel's distribution of power, but also and more importantly, for whether new immigrants would feel bound to the country's common national enterprise.

Israelis would not be able to put their titanic struggle for safety and security behind them for many years. The stirring tales of heroic war that were so important for the imagination could not hide from view the discontent that absorbed the daily tasks of dealing with economic and financial shortages and restrictions. The norms of citizenship emerged during years when widespread poverty and suffering could easily have overwhelmed if not buried discussions of norms and values that came to define both the obligations and rights of Israelis. The complexities and difficulties of these days were compounded because many of these immigrants came from societies without traditions of freedom or of rights that offered protection from political abuse.

There may never have been such a vast variety of Jews brought together in one place before. All of this frightened politicians and officials haunted as much by the prospect of social dislocation as by the abuse of women and children they witnessed among so many immigrant families. Female children often married off by fathers before they were sexually mature, girls not sent to school—customs that were as much a betrayal of Zionism's ambition for Jewish liberation as an assault on what were then widely accepted notions of modernity. Tempted to move swiftly against what appeared archaic and uncivilized, Israeli officials were halted sometimes by fears that weakening the patriarchal family might deepen the ruptures in a

society with so many fault lines already under assault.

Initially disoriented by the loss of dignity and control, the multitudes brought to Israel were totally dependent on officials who frequently ramped up prejudice against newcomers unprepared for the hardships they encountered. Immigrants often pressed for accommodations that seemed corrosive of traditional standard Zionist visions and of established political and cultural values. But despite concerns, the political system opened a path for immigrants to speak for themselves leading to a more diverse and dynamic culture than classical Zionism ever imagined. Political engagement expanded public discourse—pitted a discourse of human and individual rights against the claims of communal needs and produced enough of a correspondence between the two to give collective action agency.

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Thrown into the cauldron they helped brew from within by joining those who arrived without the resources necessary to sustain themselves and their households, Israel's immigrants deepened the cleavages between class, religion and ethnicity, but they also defined the basic principles of citizenship. That there was no rigorous and precise description of citizenship in the new Jewish state is not surprising although there seemed to be widespread agreement on certain general concepts. First, the political culture entailed a strong but largely implicit commitment to respect such important individual rights pertaining to speech and press judging by the lively uncensored debates that characterized Zionist and Israeli politics. Second and perhaps most distinctively, sovereignty generated a

series of obligations rather than a 'bill' of individual rights. The language of obligations rather than of rights dominated discourse at the state's founding and was set largely by the dominant labor movement. The list of obligations began with security needs, understandable given the circumstances, and then moved to focus on developing the labor economy that included educating the next generation and providing services to help absorb the newly arriving immigrants

The obligations of citizenship were not placed upon the entire population nor were they expected to devolve upon residents equitably. Acknowledging that the ultra-orthodox Jewish community challenged the legitimacy of a Jewish state and that those Arabs who remained in situ during the 1948 War would presumably be hostile to its existence, both groups were exempted from many of the most onerous nation-building burdens. Instead, both populations were granted a great deal of cultural and religious autonomy and were not subjected to the enormous pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture nor to accept its warrant for public service—pressures common to civic democracies. Obeying laws and paying taxes would suffice in Israel's ethnic democracy. That Israel's citizens were not all enmeshed in identical obligations could be read as a sign of respect for the country's diversity; that such differences imposed on the Arab and

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ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities a certain dependence on the state could be interpreted as a portent of problems later encountered and the reason the country's discourse on citizenship continues to provoke dissent.

ZIONISM AND THE ARABS IN ISRAEL

While Israel's founding in the midst of war produced severe dislocations for Jews, it generated almost total chaos for the Arabs who remained within the 1949 Armistice lines. Once part of what had been the British Mandate Palestine's majority population, Arabs found themselves a distinct minority when the guns were silenced. Almost strangers in a strange land—war had reduced their numbers to one tenth of the Jewish population—the Arabs were understandably unsure of how they would be treated by the new Israeli state or its majority Jewish society nor what would happen to their lands and communities after this monumental defeat for them and for the Arab States that had deployed their armies to stop the establishment of a Jewish state.

Arabs could see loss in every direction they turned. Their villages were emptied of inhabitants, many becoming the sites of newly established Jewish communities. The mixed cities of Haifa, Tiberius, and Safed were transformed into Jewish centers, while some that were divided by ethnicity, like Tel Aviv/Jaffa, became largely homogenous urban entities. And the country's most contested site—Jerusalem—was bisected by the war into a partitioned city with an enemy state [Jordan] claiming the lands and towns of what is now known as the West Bank as their own and preparing for what was commonly expected to be a 'second round'. With their most prominent leaders having fled and residing in other Arab countries, the Arabs in the new state of Israel had to feel completely abandoned, forced to acknowledge that their cause, itself, was on life support.

Israel's response to these kinds of inequities drew as thick a verbal veil across national differences as possible with an emphasis on individual as opposed to collective rights consistent

with citizenship. Indeed, Israeli Arabs have enjoyed ever expanding freedoms of speech, press, assembly; they could vote and form political parties to run for parliament on platforms that even deny legitimacy to the very electoral mechanisms that brought them to power. And while these rights coexisted with severe inequities, they also proved to be a powerful political resource for progress.

So central has the Jewish state become to the collective consciousness of Arabs that this is now a very different community than the one conquered in 1948. Demographic changes, prompted by Israeli policies, have emboldened Arab Israeli leaders to demand more resources to meet the expectations and needs of the residents who voted them into power. Mayors of Arab towns have engaged in strikes that caught the attention of national ministers some of whom had their own electoral interests in mind when they provided more funds for schools and for upgrading the local infrastructure. Even Israeli politicians who subscribed to the most hard line parties and whose platforms gave little consideration to the plight of the Israeli Arabs have forged alliances with Arab local leaders when they came into office and controlled ministries that might dispense services. A consciousness of the critical importance of Israel's administrative hierarchy meant that increasing numbers of Arab mayors sought to redefine their village into town status in order to widen the ambit of their access to

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national resources and tighten their relationship with the national government.

Adjusting to life in the Jewish state may have been unsettling for Arabs but it, nevertheless, had profound implications for how Arabs came to understand citizenship as comprising a calculation and pursuit of their interests, a definition of their identity, and an assessment of their political rights. Particularly for those born and raised in Israel and able to acquire university degrees and professional status, engaging in political activity has come naturally. A number of Arab professional associations have undertaken aggressive action and engaged in protests against inequities in the delivery of goods and services to their communities by invoking the country's proclaimed ideals. These professional organizations are helping to solidify a broadened view of Israeli citizenship when they call attention to policies that vitiate Arab political rights. Human rights organizations also fund direct challenges to some of the cherished practices that have historically bestowed privileges on Israel's Jewish citizens. Arabs find solidarity, resistance, and assimilation in Israel with their rights protected by the country's judicial system and their opportunities expanded by its politics.

If Israeli rule has not been heralded as the dawn of a new age for the Arab population, it has admittedly cast Arabs into the throes of modernization. Israel granted Arab women both the vote and the possibility of securing jobs outside the home. The percentage of Arab students in higher education is rising steadily for all advanced degrees; with women making up more than half of this group. There have been investments in transportation and housing accompanied by advertising campaigns to combat racism in hiring increasing the numbers of Arabs working in government and in the public service sector. Although the standards for measuring social and economic gains point to considerable progress for Israeli Arabs, there are still indications—such as crime rates and violence—that suggest the presence of darker trends. One might sum up these developments by noting that the Arab community in Israel is struggling to keep up with the rapid changes in the 'start-up nation' to which it is attached but to which it is not yet fully hooked up.

CONCLUSION

THE JEWISH PEOPLE, ITSELF, A CONFOUNDING COLLECTION OF DIVERSITY ALWAYS SHAPED AND RESHAPED ZIONISM BLENDING IT WITH RELIGIOUS VALUES AND IMPERATIVES INTO A CULTURAL TOUCHSTONE FOR ISRAEL.

The Zionism that once determined to transform the Jewish people now seems naïve in its aims. Israeli society could never be simply one thing. The Jewish people, itself, a confounding collection of diversity always shaped and reshaped Zionism blending it with religious values and imperatives into a cultural touchstone for Israel. Once Judaism shadowed the very definition of Zionist culture; now it invigorates it and helps produce a more coherent set of shared values for Israeli society. Once called on to shed the customs they carried or inherited from the lands of their dispersion, Israelis are now encouraged to preserve them making this ever-changing Israeli culture, with its Zionist imprint, an ever more potent political force.

No longer is the old, romanticized image of Israel being shaped more by EXODUS, the film than by EXODUS, the Biblical Book. Instead the burdens and blessings of statehood are today often interrogated through the religious canon. Consider Ishay Ribo's brilliant SEDER HA-AVODAH, a reworked text of a part of the Yom Kippur service in a language that brought—secular and religious—into an interesting and important dialogue about leadership and the difficulties of discharging the duties mandated by an office and of meeting the expectations of the people whose needs must be met. Or think about how when Joint Arab List Ayman Odeh recommended that Beny Gantz become Israel's next prime minister, he referenced words coiled around Psalm 118 echoing the text central to the Hallel prayer. The newly installed Knesset Speaker—hard-liner Yuval Levin—opened his first address with words in fluent Arabic to greet

Muslims marking the end of the Ramadan fast. A Zionism, reformatted to fit the times and circumstances, makes a difference in the distribution of power and resources in Israel, but it also provides Israelis with the best version of themselves as tribunes of the oppressed and endangered.

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Donna Robinson Divine is the Morningstar Family Professor of Jewish Studies and Professor of Government emerita at Smith College, where she taught a variety of courses on Middle East politics. Able to draw on material in Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish, her books include Women Living Change: Cross-Cultural Perspectives; Essays from the Smith College Research Project on Women and Social Change; Politics and Society in Ottoman Palestine: The Arab Struggle for Survival and Power; Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israeli Conflict; Exiled in the Homeland: Zionism and the Return to Mandate Palestine and Word Crimes: Reclaiming the Language of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. She has served as a visiting professor at Harvard's Middle East Center, Yale University, the University of Sydney, the University of Hamburg, and the University of Geneva. Named the Katharine Asher Engel lecturer at Smith College for the 2012–13 academic year in recognition of her scholarly achievements, she was also designated as Smith's Honored Professor for the excellence of her teaching. She served as president of the Association for Israel Studies from 2017-2019 and is an affiliate professor at Israel's University of Haifa.

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