

Conceptions of 'State of Israel' in Israeli Society

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In an extremely thoughtful article, Baruch Kimmerling has argued that since 1977 Israeli leaders have utilized the concept of *Eretz Israel* rather than State of Israel to refer to the national collectivity.¹ The former term, whether used consciously or unconsciously refers to a civil community based on impersonal and universalist standards of conduct and governance. The latter term, *Eretz Israel*, evokes a collective identity rooted in a moral community based upon primordial symbols and ties. Terminological usage to the contrary notwithstanding, the orientation to which Kimmerling refers certainly predates 1977. This might suggest to some that Israelis have a weak image of, or orientation to, their state. This is not, however, the case. What we are inclined to argue is that many, and possibly even most Israelis, do not share a *Western* image of the state. We are tempted to call the alternative image a Jewish model of the state. But it is probably more helpful to think of it as a communal model.

Although social scientists – political scientists in particular – make frequent use of the term 'state' there is little agreement as to its definition. But the term does evoke a certain sense. As described by one political scientist, it is 'the sense of an organization of coercive power operating beyond our immediate control and

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¹ Baruch Kimmerling, 'Between the Primordial and the Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: *Eretz Israel* or the State of Israel?', in: Erik Cohen, Moshe Lissak and Uri Almagor (eds.), *Comparative Social Dynamics: Essays in Honor of S.N. Eisenstadt*, Boulder (Westview Press) 1985, pp. 262–283.

intruding into all aspects of our lives'.² The sense of state includes impersonal law and physical sanctions.³ But it is primarily the sense of an entity which is detached from the citizens who comprise it and yet is in some way responsible *for* – and in a democracy responsible *to* – them. Finally, and this is extremely important for our purposes, the state is conceived as having an interest of its own, independent of the interests of its citizens.

Community, on the other hand, while also an abstraction, is more readily comprehended. It refers to a group of people who share or believe they share some characteristic and/or value and/or need that defines the nature of their interrelationship. The basis of community is interrelationship and that which supports and strengthens such interrelationships is most highly valued. Hence, community – unlike state – has no interest independent of its members. Our argument is that the collectivity of Jewish Israelis has a weak sense of state in the Western sense, the meaning assigned to it here, and a strong sense of community. When they imagine Israel (whether they use the term State of Israel or *Eretz Israel*), they imagine a community and not a state.

This phenomenon has been observed by many others, although the terminology they use sometimes varies. It lies, we believe, at the heart of Ehud Sprinzak's impressive analysis of Israel's culture of illegalism.⁴ Sprinzak observes that 'rule of law' is a relatively weak concept or is of rather low priority in Israeli society. Not only do many Israelis violate the law, he argues, but they feel that it is legitimate to do so, particularly if it serves group interests or the interests of the community as they define it. He traces this aspect of Israeli political culture to a variety of factors, including the Jewish tradition itself, the experiences of the vast majority of Israelis who originate from Eastern Europe or Arab countries, the socialist traditions of Israel's founding fathers and the legitimization of extra-legal procedures during the period of the British mandate.⁵ In our terminology, Sprinzak is demonstrating the weak value Israelis attribute to state and the strong value they attribute to community. Indeed, this is reinforced by the observation that a number of the best known offenders who committed their 'crimes' not only for personal gain but to enrich the coffers of their party, committed suicide. According to the testimony of their families, and sometimes according to their own suicide notes, they did so not because they faced jail sentences but because they felt that their friends had abandoned them.

² Stephen Skoronek, *Building a New American State*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1982, p. 3.

³ Ted C. Lewellen, *Political Anthropology*, South Hadley, Mass. (Bergin and Garvey) 1983, p. 35.

⁴ Ehud Sprinzak, *Every Man Whatsoever is Right in his own Eyes: Illegalism in Israeli Society*, Tel Aviv (Sifriat Poalim) 1986 (Hebrew).

⁵ Yonathan Shapiro (*Democracy in Israel*, Tel Aviv [Massada] 1977 [Hebrew]) makes a similar point.

In the early summer of 1986 the Israeli cabinet approved the appointment of a new Attorney General. The previous Attorney General had resigned. He had been under enormous political pressure in a number of instances, but the immediate circumstances surrounding his resignation were connected to his demand for an investigation of charges that the General Security Service had been involved in murder and in fraudulent testimony in court to cover this up. His demand for an investigation had subjected him to a barrage of criticism from leaders of the major political parties and probably led him to resign earlier than he had originally intended. On June 11th the new Attorney General, who had served as a District Court Judge prior to his appointment, had his first official meeting with the Prime Minister. It was assumed that their major topic of conversation would be how the new appointee would handle the General Security Service affair. Perhaps it was. But in a press interview immediately following the meeting the Attorney General stated that most of the meeting focused on the Avraham Gindi affair. Avraham Gindi, a prominent builder, had been charged with tax fraud and misallocation of funds, and had taken his life a few days earlier. The new Attorney General was quoted as follows:

I was shocked and sorrowful to hear of his tragic death, even though I did not know [him]. It crossed my mind, a few days before, that if Gindi had had a real friend, like myself – and this is my main quality, being a friend and assisting people in need – life as a whole would have appeared better, more hopeful to him...I had an urge to approach him, make contact with him, but, being a judge, of course, I couldn't do that. I told Shamir [the Prime Minister] that this type of tragedy should not have occurred. That there is something wrong with Israeli society, with our system, if a man can go to such a tragic death. Shamir felt as I did.⁶

The significance of community – in this case a very constricted community – in contrast to the state comes through very strongly in a column by the popular journalist Yonatan Gefen in *Ma'ariv*, one of Israel's most popular dailies.⁷ Gefen writes about his own and his friends' dislike of the country's leaders and government. Their loyalty, he explains, is to the *hevreh* (a slang term for one's circle of friends). Homeland, he claims, 'is primarily the love of the people who live there' and elsewhere:

I don't know the meaning of state. It's too big for me. But a platoon I understand, its easy for me to love.... Yes, we are a state [composed] of *hevreh*... I am here because of my *hevreh* ... And there is nothing to be done about it. This is the only

⁶ *The Jerusalem Post*, June 12, 1986, p. 5.

⁷ *Ma'ariv* ('Weekend Supplement'), October 3, 1986, pp. 10–11.

state in which there is a *hevreh* and hence it is your fate to continue to hate it but to remain here forever.

Why, he goes on to ask, given the magnitude of emigration (*yeridah*), can't Israelis find a *hevreh* abroad. Gefen's answer is that he also loves the land, 'despite the state that hinders...as much as it possibly can'.

Another writer explicitly contrasts state and community arguing that Israelis increasingly prefer the latter with its 'limited responsibility for the internal life of its members, generally [confined to] the area of social and religious services' and attributes *yeridah* to a flight from statehood and the substitution of community.⁸

There are many examples that point to the ascendancy of community over state or the weak sense of state in Israeli culture. A personal anecdote is illustrative of what we have in mind. A few years ago the Israel Political Science Association sponsored a series of public forums in which three political scientists addressed questions to leaders of various Knesset factions. On the evening in question the present writer was invited to join two other political scientists in interviewing four members of the Knesset, two of whom were government Ministers from the same party. One of the Ministers was a very senior member of the government. It was decided that the participants would gather an hour before the time for the public forum to discuss the ground rules for the interview. The senior Minister present would not let the group get down to work. He queried all of us about our backgrounds and related a series of stories, some more relevant and some less relevant, whose ostensible purpose was to create ties between himself or other people he knew and each of us. The hour was drawing to a close but efforts to redirect the Minister to the business at hand were of no avail. One of us turned to the second Minister, and whispered, 'I hope that meetings of your party executive are not conducted in this manner'. The second Minister responded, 'Not only are party meetings conducted like this, but so are Cabinet meetings'. Of course, the story may only illustrate the garrulousness of one Minister. After all, his junior partner was aware of the inappropriateness of his behavior. On the other hand, however exaggerated or ironic his own response may have been – surely some business is conducted at Cabinet meetings – he was suggesting that the senior Minister operated in a government environment supportive of such behavior; behavior that subordinated instrumental needs to expressive needs, manifest goals to interpersonal relationships.

This is behavior commonly associated with traditional rather than modern societies, with primordial rather than civil societies (to use dichotomies developed by Edward Shils and Clifford

⁸ Shlomo Tanai, 'State or Community', *Ma'ariv*, August 6, 1987, p. 11.

Geertz), with *Gemeinschaft* rather than *Gesellschaft* societies (to use terms first suggested by Ferdinand Tönnies), with mechanical rather than organic societies (terms first suggested by Emile Durkheim), with status based rather than contract based societies (in the terminology of Henry Maine). All of these terms, and others, have been used by social scientists to describe the phenomenon we are describing. We make no claim for the theoretical priority of our categories of state and community although they are, maybe, more helpful in describing Israeli society.

The foregoing example suggests that Israeli society places a low premium on efficiency, certainly when contrasted with values of care and concern for the welfare of individuals. Examples abound. The Cabinet ordered all government ministers to reduce their staff. The Ministry of Education scheduled 270 employees for dismissal. Education Minister Izhak Navon was criticized because, it was charged, many on his ministry's list were 'hardship' cases. In a radio interview (July 28, 1985), Navon claimed that he had ordered his department heads to retain all employees who were sick, handicapped, heads of families one of whose members was killed in a war, or heads of families who were the sole breadwinners. Efficiency, he announced, was not to be a criterion for dismissal. 'We will make the inefficient more efficient'.

Such instances are not unique to Israel. The expectation that government will serve as the employment agency for those who are otherwise unemployable is not unknown in Western society. What is less common is the explicit dismissal of efficiency as a criterion for employment – and by a government Minister at that. It might be argued that Navon is a poor example. By virtue of his Sephardi heritage he is, it might be said, especially rooted in the culture of community and insensitive to the impersonal value of efficiency associated with the model of a state. In a special supplement devoted to Sephardi culture, Israel's most prestigious daily *Ha'aretz* characterized it as warm, loving, caring and spontaneous, which, they indicated, also meant disorganized and unplanned.⁹ They cite an example of an employer refusing to transfer an inefficient worker because his feelings would be hurt.¹⁰ Perhaps this is more characteristic of Sephardic than Ashkenazic culture, although Kenneth Avrech's discussion of Israeli society¹¹ and studies of Israeli administration and bureaucracy cited by Sprinzak¹² find many such instances among Ashkenazim. Furthermore, as we shall see, Navon was the only member of the cabinet to favor a statist rather than a communitarian position on a different occasion. Whatever the case, as *Ha'aretz*

⁹ *Ha'aretz* ('Supplement'), September 13, 1985, pp. 4, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹ Kenneth Avrech, *American Immigrants in Israel*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 1981.

¹² Ehud Sprinzak, *op. cit.*

itself points out, the significance of Sephardi culture for all Israelis is the fact that its influence over Israeli society in general continues to grow stronger.

Another example of communal rather than statist orientation of the society is found in the importance the public attributes to personal tragedies. In June, 1985, a school bus carrying seventh-grade children was struck by a railroad train. Twenty people were killed including seventeen children. Without minimizing the tragic nature of the event one wonders about the amount of coverage it was accorded. Israel's most popular television program is the nightly *Mabat*, devoted to the major national and international events of the day. *Mabat* is Israel's window on the world. Opinion surveys show it is the public's major source of information about what takes place beyond their immediate surroundings. Hence, the fact that *Mabat* devoted twenty of its thirty minutes to the bus accident indicates how much importance the public attributes – or how much importance Israel's sole television channel believes the public should attribute – to personal tragedy. On the following day the first three pages of *Ma'ariv* were devoted, in their entirety, to the tragedy. The following day every story on the paper's first four pages was devoted to the accident.

The fact that news of this nature, personal and emotional, overshadows news of a more cosmopolitan impersonal nature is also true in Western societies. It is all a matter of degree and it seems to us that the degree to which this is true in Israeli society, especially considering the extent to which Israel must be sensitive to developments outside its boundaries, is remarkable. Furthermore, the acute concern with the welfare of other members of the community rather than 'interests of state', a term virtually unknown in the Israelis' lexicon, can have important policy consequences. The most dramatic example was the exchange of prisoners between Israel and an Arab terrorist organization in the summer of 1985.

In that incident, after lengthy negotiations, Israel agreed to release 1,150 terrorists in its prisons in return for the release of three soldiers captured during the 1982 war in Lebanon and held by a terrorist organization identified with the rejectionist front (more extreme than Arafat). The released terrorists were chosen by the terrorist organization and included those serving life sentences for the murder of Israeli citizens. Most Israeli leaders today recognize that the exchange was a major mistake. It undercut Israel's claim that governments ought not make deals with terrorist organizations. It freed over one thousand hardened, trained terrorists with no guarantee that they would not conduct terrorist activity in the future. It greatly increased the terrorist leaders' prestige. It strengthened the morale and resolve of terrorists by conveying the message that no matter how heinous their crime, if captured by Israel, there was a good possibility of their

being released. It discouraged captured terrorists from cooperating with Israeli authorities. It indicated how high a price Israel was willing to pay for the release of its own prisoners, thereby setting a standard for future exchanges that Israel will find hard to meet. Nevertheless, the exchange was approved by the National Unity government in 1985 in a unanimous vote of its Cabinet. Only one Minister, Navon, abstained. In a private communication, pollster Mina Zemach revealed that her survey of public opinion taken the day after the exchange was announced, showed that it enjoyed overwhelming public support.

The exchange came under public attack as soon as it was announced. It is interesting to examine the justifications offered by Israeli spokesmen. Enormous importance was attributed to the pressure exerted by the parents of the three imprisoned soldiers on the Minister of Defense. 'How could he look these parents in the eyes?' is the way one army spokesman phrased it. Others commented that public criticism of those responsible for the exchange was illegitimate, for 'how would the critics feel if their sons were held prisoners?' What came through very dramatically in defense of the exchange was the notion that no sacrifice was too great for the state to make for its prisoners. Calculations of prestige, future cost, responsibility, were all secondary to the communal quasi-familial sentiment that one does whatever possible for one's child without adding up costs. It was precisely what one expects of a family, not from a state.

Other examples of the relative devaluation of state come to mind. Government buildings in Israel have none of the grandeur or awe-inspiring effect of such structures throughout the world. It is only through the contributions of the Rothschild Foundation that one of Israel's most imposing edifices, the Knesset building which houses its legislature, was constructed, and it is only through the generosity of that same foundation that forty years after Israel's creation, a Supreme Court building is in the final stages of planning. Nowhere is the general lack of respect for the state and the institutions of the state more dramatically expressed than in the language and manner of address that members of the Israeli government and legislature permit themselves. This, we suggest, is due to the political culture which personalizes relationships and harbors very weak images of a remote state somewhat alien to the members of the society in whose forums ritualized behavior is demanded. The ritual forms of speech and stylized behavior that characterizes governments of the Western world are foreign to the Israeli mentality. That is not, after all, how a quasi-familial community projects itself.

Of all the instrumentalities of the state the one most remote and alien from the general public would seem to be the courts. At best, they may be trusted to dispense justice and relied upon to treat all equally, but they are not institutions with which the public feels

intimate. It is not surprising that of all the institutions of government their procedures are the most stylized. They would appear to personify statist rather than communitarian values and, indeed, it is among the statist proponents in particular that Israeli courts are very popular. Yet note how the attorney for one of the arrested Jewish terrorists addressed the court in appealing for leniency in the sentencing of his client:

Your honor; you are a Jewish judge in the District Court of Jerusalem. You are not the judge in the International Court in the Hague.¹³

Is it surprising, therefore, that the most popular form of celebrating Israel Independence Day is by family picnic? The state is truly, in the eyes of so many Israelis, another expression of community, i.e., the family writ large. Recall Yosef Burg's answer to the question 'What is an Israeli?'. 'My wife and my children; an Israeli is a Jew at home' was his reply.¹⁴

The very impersonality of the Western state suggests the applicability of universal law. Its independence from its citizens implies their equality in the eyes of the state. All are equally distant. Community, on the other hand, is personal. Built on status, on past performance and future expectations, on degrees of kinship ties, on loyalty and commitment, it suggests that not all are equal. Since membership in the community of Israelis is defined by Jewish identity, the non-Jewish minorities, almost by definition become second-class citizens.

There is no question, in our opinion, that the primary threat to the rights and status of the Israeli Arabs stems from the Jews' fear for their security and the threats their Arab neighbors pose. But, we suggest, this threat by itself, is not the immediate cause for the reluctance of so many Israelis to view the Arabs as equal members of the society. This reluctance, we believe, stems from the political culture that encourages conceptions of community at the expense of conceptions of state. Perhaps, however, this is putting the cart before the horse. One reason why Israelis emphasize community so strongly and deemphasize state may be that the threats to their security stem from the fact of their Jewishness and from their communal commitments. It may be only natural, therefore, for such threats to have produced the counterreaction we have been examining.

Ben-Gurion was aware of or feared the consequences of the rather low value his compatriots put on the state. How could it be otherwise, when the whole phenomenon of Jewish statehood was at variance with two thousand years of Jewish tradition? Ben-Gurion sought to counter the parochialism of community,

¹³ *Ma'ariv*, June 15, 1984, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ma'ariv* ('Weekend Supplement'), September 12, 1986, p. 29.

although his concern was to undermine the sub-communities formed around political party and ethnic origin rather than the Jewish particularism of the state. Ben-Gurion was the father of the conception that has been called *mamlakhtiut* ('statism'), a term he himself frequently invoked. We are not concerned with tracing Ben-Gurion's specific conception of statism nor responding to the charge that in his own activity, particularly his attitudes towards the Arab population, his compromises with religious demands for a virtually independent school system, or his tolerance of some degree of corruption within his own party, he was not always faithful to a blueprint of a statist society. Our point, instead, is to indicate that, at least in broad outline, the concept of a strong state in the Western meaning of the term, is not totally foreign to Israeli political history. In Ben-Gurion's conception of the state, Judaism played an important role, but it was a particular form of Judaism, one which was defined and interpreted quite selectively.¹⁵ Those elements within the Jewish tradition that supported statism were emphasized, while other elements were ignored. How influential are statist orientations in Israeli political culture? The question is difficult to answer and much of what we say here is speculative. But it seems to us that statism, in the Western sense of the term, is an important component in the conception of a minority of the population. For such people, predominantly secular rather than religious, Ashkenazi rather than Sephardi, of high rather than low educational status, in the legal and military professions and the foreign service, statism is an important value. Many within these population groups, however, have gone beyond Ben-Gurion by denuding statism of its Jewish significance. In this respect, they are faithful to the more Western model. Indeed, those concerned about the future of Israeli democracy – and there are many such Israelis today – tend to be those who feel most sympathetic to this statist tradition. What they may not appreciate, what they may be reluctant to acknowledge, is that their problem is not overcoming totalitarian or authoritarian tendencies in Israeli culture (these hardly exist), but rather overcoming deeply rooted images about the nature of the society which has been formed and the vision of how that society ought to be conducted. As far as many who feel they are heirs to Ben-Gurion's statist conceptions are concerned, Judaism, at most, retains important symbolic significance for the State of Israel but should be virtually bereft of influence on public policy. The question of how important a role the State of Israel plays in their conceptions of Judaism is somewhat misleading. Judaism itself is a dimension of their lives which is of secondary or peripheral importance.

¹⁵ On statism and Judaism see Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, Berkeley (University of California Press) 1983.

The alternate image of the State of Israel, which can also claim ties, however tenuous, to Ben-Gurion's conception of the state, is not necessarily a weak one. But it is a conception of state as the extension of community – not as some abstract or somewhat alien entity with interests of its own, independent of the body of its citizen-members, but rather as the arm of the community. This is very noticeable in attitudes towards the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the Israeli army, which commands universal respect, on the one hand, but a mixture of familiarity and contempt on the other. The army commands an element of fear but it is also something of a home. It is not alien. It is not an arm of the state, reflecting the power of some abstract entity with an interest of its own. The IDF is the army of the people, the power of the community. Hence the resistance to the rituals and mannerisms of traditional armies, the insistence on informality, the involvement of families in army rituals, as audience if not as participants.¹⁶

The State of Israel, in this conception, represents the authority of the Jewish community and exercises power on its behalf. To those who hold this conception of state, the State of Israel plays a very important role in the meaning they attribute to Judaism and in this respect they are also heirs of Ben-Gurion's legacy. After all, the statement, 'what counts is not what the *goyim* say but what the Jews do' is attributed to Israel's founding father. As one historian of the State of Israel points out:

Israel's leaders might have interpreted Jewish statehood as the expression of a national liberation movement, something every former colonial people would have understood. The term was scarcely mentioned, however, in the addresses and writing of Ben-Gurion, Sharett, or Eban. Rather, the Israeli statesmen chose to discern a profounder explanation for the 'miracle' of rebirth in the historical and theological roots of the Jewish people.¹⁷

The alternative conceptions of the State of Israel are contrasted in the debate over the extradition of William Nakash, a debate that engaged the interest of Israelis from 1986 through 1987, although, as we shall see, circumstances stacked the case somewhat in favor of the statist position. William Nakash was convicted in a French court of murdering an Algerian resident of France. He fled to Israel and maintained that the murder had been provoked by terrorist threats. Furthermore, he argued, if he were returned to a French prison, his life was in jeopardy from other Arab prisoners. These facts were challenged by many newspaper reports. In addition, Israel is bound by an extradition

¹⁶ For a description of such a ceremony see Ruth Wisse, 'Israel: A House Divided', *Commentary* 84 (September, 1987), pp. 33–38.

¹⁷ Howard Sachar, *A History of Israel*, New York (Knopf) 1976, p. 471.

treaty with France. After a long hesitation the Minister of Justice, under pressure from statist elements in society at large and in the Attorney General's office in particular agreed to extradite Nakash. The Supreme Court sustained this decision. The issue eventually played itself out in the question of the authority of the secular courts versus the authority of a rabbinical court which granted Nakash's wife's request for a writ forbidding his leaving the country on the grounds that this would render it difficult for her to force Nakash into granting her a divorce. There was no question but that there was collusion between Nakash and his wife and the argument over divorce was merely an excuse to avoid extradition. But the original issue was whether the State of Israel ought to act in compliance with its international obligations to extradite a convicted murderer to France, or was the primary obligation of the State of Israel to defend a Jew who claimed that because he was a Jew his rights would not be safeguarded in a foreign country? Each side was convinced of the justice of its position. By the end of 1986 virtually all of the establishment politicians, leaders of the Likud and of Labor, favored extradition, and the media were extremely one-sided in favoring this statist position. There is no question in our mind, that part of the explanation for their attitude stemmed from their antipathy to the rabbinical courts and their sense that these courts had overstepped their bounds in seeking to impose their judgement on the secular courts. Public opinion was not as one-sided as the media. The Dahaf Research Institute informed us that they sampled Israeli public opinion twice on attitudes towards extradition. In December, 1986 they found that 53 per cent of the Jewish population of Israel favored extradition and 43 per cent opposed it. Among Sephardi Jews, natives or the children of natives of Asian or African countries, 45 per cent favored extradition and 51 per cent opposed it. Among Ashkenazim, those of European or Western extraction, 62 per cent favored extradition and 35 per cent opposed it. In March of 1987 the effect of the establishment's support for extradition did not appear to have had marked effects on those favoring this alternative. The change came in a drop of ten per cent (from 43 per cent to 33 per cent) for those opposing extradition, and the rise in the group who said they had no opinion. In December, 1987, the issue was resolved in a manner not relevant to our concerns and Nakash was extradited with the agreement of the rabbinical courts.

For the communitionaries, the State of Israel certainly plays an important role in their conception of Judaism, although, like the ultra-nationalist religious Zionists they may be disappointed that Israel does not behave in accordance with their image of a Jewish state. Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook attributed sanctity to the State of Israel as well as the land of Israel. Indeed, in the article referred to above he argued that this sanctity extended to all the instrumen-

talities of the state including the IDF and its arms.¹⁸ But this, in turn, stemmed from the fact that the State of Israel was endowed with purpose. Hence, according to the resolution adopted by the Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, if Israel should surrender sovereignty over Judea or Samaria it would

represent a *prima facie* annulment of the State of Israel as a Zionist Jewish state whose purpose is to bring Jews to the sovereign Land of Israel, and not, perish the thought, to remove them from the Land of Israel and replace them with a foreign sovereignty.¹⁹

This is not the statement of a group to whom the State of Israel is unimportant but of a group with a particular image of what the State of Israel represents. Indeed, among religious Zionists the state assumes particularly important significance. Some, like the ultra-nationalists, have a particularly vivid image of its role and, therefore, may argue that the present leadership or the government is subverting its purpose. They, like those arrested for committing terrorist acts against the Arab population, will argue that they are serving the true interests of the state. More moderate elements in the religious Zionist camp are far more accommodating to the state as it exists. One spokesman argues on the pages of a leading religious Zionist journal:

...education for military service, study of science, and respecting the rule of law must serve, in a principled manner, as the basis for all religious values.... That is the purpose of religious Zionism which finds its expression in expanding the concept of religion until it includes service to the needs of the national state.²⁰

The associations between groups of Israelis and each of the conceptions of the state offered here are not static. Conceptions may certainly change. For example, the ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) community in 1948 perceived Israel in statist terms. (The fact that many of them were hostile to the state is not the important issue.) The *haredim* were concerned solely with protection of their own interests in the context of the alien state. This has changed. Forty years of living in Israeli society, along with the growing confidence of the *haredim* about their prospects has transformed their conception of Israel from a statist to a communal one. There is no

¹⁸ Zvi Yehuda Kook, 'The Sanctity of the Holy People in the Holy Land', in: Yosef Tirosh (ed.), *Religious Zionism and the State*, Jerusalem (The World Zionist Organization) 1978, pp. 140–146 (Hebrew).

¹⁹ The statement was issued November 4, 1985, reprinted in *Davar*, November 22, 1985, and translated into English in the International Center for Peace in the Middle East, *Israel Press Briefs*, 40 (December 1985), p. 17.

²⁰ Michael Nehorai, 'Education Outside the Boundaries', *Emdah*, 18 (August, 1987), p. 6.

better explanation for their readiness to assault the state for its activity in areas which do not impinge on the narrow concerns of the *haredi* community's welfare.

Nevertheless, at the risk of oversimplification, one can divide the Israeli population in accordance with conceptions of the state and argue that these conceptions, rooted in basic images of Judaism and the nature of society, have remained fairly constant. In the eyes of one set of Israelis – comprised primarily of secularists, Ashkenazim, professionals, those in the legal profession in particular and the well educated – the state is an entity distanced from, one might even say alienated from its citizens. Ultimately, in their eyes, the state must justify itself in terms of the services it provides the individual. These citizens may easily despair of its ability to do so. But, by virtue of their distancing themselves from the state, they also acknowledge that the state may legitimately pursue interests of its own. If one searches for historical antecedents for this group they can be found in political Zionism, in the programs of Herzl, Jabotinsky and even Weizmann. It is certainly a partial heritage of Ben-Gurion. The second group – comprised primarily of the religious, Sephardim, the less educated – views the state as an extension of the Jewish community (*kehilla*). The state represents the power and authority of the Jewish people, or at least the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. This conception also has antecedents within the Zionist movement. It, too, is at least a partial heir to Ben-Gurion's notions of state. In fact, in many respects, this conception of the state is closer to those of Israel's founders than are those of the statist. And this may provide the greatest paradox of all, in understanding Israel's contemporary political culture.