

MAMLACHTIUT AS A TOOL OF OPPRESSION
On Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews in the Post-Zionist Era

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It is often argued, both in popular and academic literature, that there are two Israels: one religious, benighted and anti-democratic and the other secular, Western and liberal. The fact that this account dominates public discourse in Israel tells us a great deal, but the account itself tells us little about Israeli society. Actually, the most telling fault line in Israeli society lies between two competing cultures rooted in two disparate conceptions of Jewish empowerment. No analysis of the relationship between religion and state in Israel can be complete without a deeper understanding of these two cultures and the asymmetric relationship between them over the past fifty years.

1. ZIONISM

According to Jewish tradition, the Jews lost the political sovereignty that accompanied the first and second Temples when the demands and privileges of political power proved too great a challenge to their loyalty to religion and to each other. According to this tradition, life in the Diaspora serves at once as a consequence, a punishment, and a cure for this failure. Diaspora life offered Jews the opportunity to develop a self-definition divorced from territory and political sovereignty. Jews redefined power in terms of cultural autonomy, the power to live their lives according to their own traditions and to pass on their cultural and intellectual legacy to their children. The power to move armies was not among their aspirations. The locus of Jewish activity and power in the Diaspora was what is now called “civil society” – private schools, nurturing neighborhoods, *batei midrash* and *batei kneset*, small professional guilds, volunteer groups, etc. Networks of such relatively small voluntary associations tended to create a reservoir of social trust among participants and constituted a forum for the determination and expression of collective interests independent of any particular political entity. On the whole, Jews developed a profound wariness of political establishments.

Although the lack of political sovereignty offers opportunities for self-improvement, Jews have never regarded it as an end in itself. Rather, as the Yiddish proverb says of dying, it is more of a tradition than a mitzvah. Thus, when the possibility presented itself, Zionists sought to empower Jews by expanding the scope of their autonomy from the cultural to the political sphere. It was argued that this would not only solve the very real physical threats facing the Jews but would also revitalize their culture, which had become stultified in the Diaspora. Furthermore, it was said, Zionism would strengthen Jewish identity that had been compromised by economic and political dependence on non-Jews.

Many pious Jews rejected Zionism on the grounds that it would not empower Jews but rather usurp the power Jews already had. They argued that Zionism would simply replace the traditional Jewish notion of cultural power with a political-military one adopted from the very non-Jews they sought to resist. Furthermore, they said, Zionism would ultimately not revitalize Jewish culture but rather replace it. Consequently, Zionism would not strengthen Jewish identity but would simply redefine it from one based on religious and cultural fraternity to one based merely on political allegiance.

These two attitudes toward Zionism led to the evolution of a continuum of cultures that can roughly be divided into two groups. On one side were those who rejected the traditional “*galuti*” notion of power, favoring instead more secular and concrete forms of power. They saw their primary loyalty as being to the state and its citizens and the primary expression of that loyalty as participation in its economic and military development. On the other side were those who continued to embrace the *galuti* notion of power. Whatever their degree of fealty to the state, they saw their primary loyalty as being to Judaism and the Jewish people wherever they may be and the primary expression of that loyalty as the safeguarding of its traditions in one form or another. For lack of better terminology, I will refer to these two groups as Israeli Jews and Jewish Jews, respectively.

(To be sure, the vast majority of those I am concerned with in this paper consider themselves to be both Jews and Israelis, to one extent or another. This dichotomy – and terminology – corresponds roughly to that explored in S. Herman, *Israelis and Jews* [New York: Random House, 1970], and reflects often subtle distinctions in commitment rather than a clear-cut choice. Moreover, this dichotomy should be distinguished from that between halakhically observant and non-observant Jews. A considerable, though perhaps diminishing, number of non-observant Jews can be safely categorized as Jewish Jews and many others, especially Jews of Sefardic origin and Revisionists, might altogether resist neat pigeonholing with regard to these categories.)

These two groups have realized the respective prognoses of Zionists and anti-Zionists with parallel irony. Israeli Jews have indeed replaced Jewish culture and identity with a non-Jewish secular Israeli culture and identity. Jewish Jews have realized the predictions of the Zionists: though many opponents of Zionism would not admit it, the challenges and opportunities offered by the state have led to the revitalization of Jewish culture and identity.

Both Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews seem to have taken for granted that, for better or worse, the *galuti* conception of power was incompatible with the task of building a state. Thus it was understood that political power would be assumed by those who valued it most, namely, those Israeli Jews least inhibited by vestigial loyalty to traditional Jewish patterns of behavior and thought. This power was neither used sparingly nor yielded easily. Early Zionism incorporated two doctrines, *mamlachtiut* and socialism, which centralized power in the hands of the political leadership of that time, namely, the Israeli Labor party (Mapai). *Mamlachtiut*

subjugated the political interests of all groups and individuals to those of the political leadership and socialism did the same for economic interests.

In the name of *mamlachtiut*, Zionism effectively destroyed the elements of civil society by co-opting them to the state. Schools were nationalized, religious organizations regulated by a duly formed ministry, small guilds subsumed by the *histadrut*, charity organizations marginalized by the welfare state, and informal ethnicity-based societies forced to melt. The atrophy of those informal associations that had in the past been the source of Jewish communal vitality led slowly but inexorably to the depletion of those qualities required for self-government: social trust, public responsibility, and respect for legitimate authority. The gap left by the disappearance of civil society was filled at the national level by burgeoning bureaucracy and the concentration of power in the hands of that elite which sought its collective identity in the state alone.

This centralized power was used to attempt to “civilize” those groups, mostly religious immigrants, who had not yet internalized the secular Zionist orthodoxy. (Many of the unfortunate details of these attempts can be found in the unjustly forgotten report of the government-appointed Frumkin commission, eventually published as an appendix to Zvi Zameret, *Days of the Melting Pot* (in Hebrew), [Beersheva: Ben-Gurion Univ. Press, 1993].) Such people had to be re-educated in more concrete notions of power – power they were not to share.

2. THE ISRAELI RULING CLASS

The patterns of power that were established in the early days of the state have persisted until today. Jewish Jews are, in the best case, no more than tolerated guests in the corridors of power.

To substantiate this claim, let us define a “ruling class” as a relatively closed and narrow circle of like-minded people who satisfy the following three criteria: First, they hold self-perpetuating control of the standing establishments of the state. Second, their values are assumed in public discourse to be self-evident so that attempts to promote other values are interpreted as coercion. Third, their critique of the establishment is seen as constructive self-criticism, while the same critique by others is perceived as subversive and threatening.

By these criteria, there is an unmistakable ruling class in Israel consisting of the ideological progeny of the Mapai party. This ruling class is distinguished neither by a narrowly defined socio-economic profile nor by a sustained political philosophy (for example, both socialism and Jewish nationalism are now thought of as skeletons in the Mapai closet). Nevertheless, one feature of the ruling class remains constant: its exclusion of all those who are more Jewish than Israeli – Sefardim, new immigrants and, of course, religious Jews.

Despite several Likud-led governments since 1977, the same inner circle that assumed power in the early days of the state still controls all the major non-elected institutions of the state. The media, the security agencies, the prosecution apparatus and the courts are all self-perpetuating establishments closed to those who do not adopt the secular agenda. The supreme court to this day reserves a “religious seat” on the bench, a classic example of an ostensible lower bound quota serving in practice as an (approximate) upper bound. Virtually every role model on television, every newscaster, every talk show host is an unabashed representative of the secular point of view. (The exceptions, as they say, prove the rule. The studied “neutrality” of the few visibly religious broadcasters leaves little doubt about which identities may not be worn on one’s sleeve.) Although, the army suffers no shortage of kippa-wearing officers, those few who have approached policy-making levels have fallen victim to a somewhat muddy glass ceiling. Finally, the huge financial power concentrated in state-sanctioned cartels and tightly controlled professional guilds stands available for exploitation by the old boys network which controls it.

Furthermore, the set of values implicit in the prevailing understanding of coercion coincides far more precisely with the interests of the secular establishment than with civil liberties. For example, it is widely assumed in Israel that true democracy requires that shopkeepers must not be forced to close their stores on days that are not sacred to them. Yet this principle is not seen to be applicable to Yom Ha’atzmaut. Likewise, it is generally accepted that people ought not to be condemned for not observing rituals to which they are opposed. Unless the ritual is a siren on Yom Hazikaron. Other examples abound. Pressure must not be brought to bear to alter public performances which some may find offensive except when, for instance, the Rabin assassination is deemed to be insufficiently emphasized (as was reportedly the case with the Jubilee Bells performance). Jerusalemites may not demand closure of public streets to prevent disruptiveness on Shabbat but in Kfar Shemaryahu, for example, residents can have police break up disorderly parties in private homes. Cultural taboos may not serve as a basis for denying people the right to eat what they wish unless those people are, say, among the tens of thousands of Thai workers who wish to violate Western, not Jewish, taboos by consuming dog meat. The flagrant display of women’s bodies to promote products is not deemed coercive, but protesting against it is – unless the protest is on feminist, not religious, grounds. The guiding principle at work here, it would appear, is not a concern for civil liberties.

Finally, only members of the secular ruling class may question the canonical values and institutions of Israeli society for they do so from the inside. Flag burning, protest art, criticism of court decisions, and prophecies of doom precipitated by political rivals, are permitted only to the privileged. Highly inflammatory remarks directed by prominent members of the secular establishment against Jewish Jews or against straying government institutions are regarded as legitimate exercise of free speech. Far less incendiary criticism emanating from “uppity” Jewish Jews is said to constitute “incitement” and “the undermining of the foundations of Israeli democracy”.

3. GALUTI RESPONSES TO EXCLUSION

There are several avenues open to groups systematically excluded from power. The avenues most traveled by Jewish Jews in Israel mirror those of Jews in the Diaspora: accommodation and disengagement.

Accommodation is a form of self-colonization in which partially acculturated groups take for granted the right of the ruling class to govern. Such groups either willfully overlook their own lack of power or justify it as a consequence of their own presumed unworthiness. Such was the response to secular Zionism by many religious Zionists in the early years of the state. Religious Zionists saw in Zionism an opportunity for authentic Jewish empowerment which would lead to a revival of Jewish spiritual life. But they could not escape the belief that state-building required a new conception of power, a kind of Gentile macho, that is unnatural for Jewish Jews. They thus developed an almost self-negating ideology that immortalized their own inferiority vis-a-vis the Zionist ruling class. As a result many religious Zionists have evolved into what seem to be earnest caricatures: more Zionist than the Zionists or more loyal to the ruling class than the ruling class itself.

Obviously, it is in the interest of the ruling class that the accommodationist ideology be encouraged. In order to do so, they must give accommodationists a sense of inclusion while reinforcing their feelings of inferiority. Thus, for example, in the early days of the state, Ben-Gurion took pains to include religious Zionists in his coalition (the so-called "*brit historit*") even though he could have dispensed with them. But for the most part they were given the right to preside over ceremonial matters, while important decisions which presumably required the skills of more worldly men than they, were often made elsewhere.

The other common response to exclusion has been disengagement, which is a form of self-marginalization in which powerless but cohesive groups view the power of the ruling class as a terminal social illness from which one can be spared only by keeping one's distance. For example, many Haredim regard the state and its institutions as inherently inimical to authentic Judaism. They point to the nascent state's many crimes as proof of this claim: the over-emphasis on the symbolic importance of military conquest, the forced re-education of Sefardic immigrants, the alleged neglect of Holocaust victims both during and after the war. As a result, Haredim have generally sought not to change the state or challenge the secular establishment's hegemony but rather to ignore the state or, at most, to exploit it as outsiders.

Here too, the ruling class has an interest in perpetuating the ideology of disengagement so long as the marginalized group does not present a credible alternative to the ruling class. Thus it has been in the mutual interest of the secular establishment and the Haredim to minimize interaction, and hence the possibility of cross-influence, between them. To take the most conspicuous example, until recently both sides have found it convenient to permit the non-participation of Haredim in the armed forces.

In short, until now Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews have shared the assumption that political power sits more naturally on the shoulders of the latter. Nevertheless, as we shall see, two natural processes have conspired to undermine the arrangements through which the ruling class's control of the state has gone unchallenged by religious Zionists and Haredim. One is the natural tendency of excluded groups towards normalization and the other is the ebbing of ideology, in this case, the Zionist ethos. Both Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews have begun to rethink – each in their own ways – the role of the state in defining societal values.

4. THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

The arrangement by which religious Zionists were led to believe that they held real power began to unravel the moment they sought to exercise this power, that is, when they began to pursue policies that were independent of those of their presumed partners. In executing aggressive settlement activities, religious Zionists were eagerly – perhaps too eagerly – attempting to establish their credentials as full-fledged Zionists precisely at the time that the secular establishment was beginning to abandon old-fashioned Zionist values. Although their youthful enthusiasm proved infectious for a time, religious Zionists soon became burdensome to the ruling class. They quickly came to realize how conditional and tenuous was their membership in the inner circle of power.

The decline of the Zionist ethos laid bare the fact that the myth of a shared dream of Jewish empowerment had been dead for a long time. Even the most naive religious Zionists could not fail to wake up to the reality that for many Israeli Jews a thin veneer of Zionist rhetoric had masked almost total erosion of Jewish identity. Nowadays, all that remains of the Zionist ethos, it might appear, is a variation of the old doctrine of *mamlachtiut*: any threat to the exclusive right of the secular establishment to rule is a threat to the state itself.

Religious Zionists could once comfort themselves with the idea that it was only Haredi rejecters of the Zionist ethos who were the objects of secular derision. Lately they have found themselves on the wrong end of the gun. Where once *mamlachtiut* was invoked to marginalize those out of step with the Zionist agenda, “democracy” is now invoked to delegitimize those whose particularistic values are not identical with the “neutrality” of the ruling elite. Israeli political life is rife with rhetoric ranging from the merely exclusionary and patronizing “after all we’ve done for them” variety, to the downright threatening. Jewish Jews are often portrayed as an undifferentiated powerful mob plotting to rob the ruling class of its rightful power and resources. The very damned-if-they-do-damned-if-they-don’t character of these portrayals is eerily familiar: The Jews are pacifists who refuse to serve in the Army; they are warmongers attempting to take over the Army. The Jews are anti-Zionists alienated from the soil; they are hyper-Zionists who sanctify the soil. The Jews practice primitive tribal rites that are rightfully despised; the Jews are paranoid crybabies who accuse their opponents of anti-Semitism. The Jews exercise undue influence over Israeli society; the Jews exhibit clannish

disinterest in the larger society. And finally: The Jews are restless Messianists; the Jews murdered our Messiah.

One significant turning point in the relationship between religious Zionists and the secular establishment was the signing of the Oslo accords. Whatever their diplomatic merits (and these have no bearing on my argument), the Oslo accords were, above all else, a flexing of ruling class muscles. These accords, seemingly ceaselessly accompanied by the gentle tinkling of cocktail glasses, were based on the typically patronizing ruling-class assumption that the Palestinians' nationalist aspirations were just so much lower-class bravado and that a little prosperity would mollify them. Moreover, the political elite openly belittled the interests and opinions of the significant segment of the population that would pay the price of the accords. In fact, rather than attempting to persuade opponents of the benefits of the accords, the establishment focussed its efforts on stifling opposition to them, often doing so with blatant disregard for elementary civil liberties. The full weight of government institutions was brought to bear to intimidate opponents and to suppress damaging information. It should not be surprising, then, that the intensity of opposition to the accords among different segments of the population increased not as a function of nationalism but rather as a function of alienation from the secular ruling class. Meimad supported the accords; the secular right was quiescent; Haredim opposed them. Gush Emunim, burdened by an ideology of *mamlachtiut*, was confused and paralyzed. When a serious protest movement did eventually emerge, it was led not by Moetzet Yesha, as some had expected it would be, but mostly by ad hoc associations of American immigrants unencumbered by an ideology that sanctified the Zionist establishment.

A new schism has developed within the religious Zionist camp. This schism does not divide right from left. Rather it divides *mamlachti'im* (both Kooknik statistes and Meimad accommodationists), who take for granted the right of the secular ruling class to exploit the power of the state, from the dissidents who reject that right.

5. THE TRANSFORMATION OF HAREDI ANTI-ZIONISM

The arrangement by which Haredim agree to be marginalized has also begun to unravel. First, it has proved to be impractical for most Haredim. As their numbers and economic needs have increased, Haredim have found life as pariahs to be economically unviable. Furthermore, they have been forced to acknowledge that they cannot afford the luxury of pretending that the secular establishment and its state are no concern of theirs. The theological implications and emotional grip of a state founded and run by Jews cannot be ignored. Perhaps against their better judgment, Haredim have simply begun to care about the state.

The gradual transition in Haredi attitudes has resulted in a somewhat ambivalent relationship with state institutions that leaves many Haredim vulnerable to charges of sanctimonious exploitation. Haredim have for a long time cited their exclusion from Israeli society as justification for arrogating themselves certain legal, military and financial dispensations.

More recently, though, some Haredim have begun from converse premises and conveniently reached the same conclusion: precisely because of its – at least, nominal – Jewishness, they argue, the state ought to willingly grant them these very same dispensations. This kind of posturing is understandably vexatious for some, and it seems perfectly reasonable that the state reevaluate the nature and scope of the dispensations that it grants Haredim. Still, the increasingly visceral reaction of many Israelis to the mere fact of Haredi existence – precisely as enforcement of religious legislation is waning, the institution of universal conscription is eroding, and the lavishing of public funds on grandiose cultural projects and failed socialist institutions is increasing – bespeaks deeper forces at work. Israelis feel threatened by Haredim as never before.

The source of Israeli insecurity appears to be rooted in the decline of the Zionist ethos. As long as Israeli Jews identified fully with their redefinition of Jewish empowerment, they could relate to Haredi subversiveness with contemptuous disregard. But this very subversiveness now threatens to exert a certain perverse charm. It is, after all, undeniable that many of the central arguments of the currently fashionable post-Zionist historians roughly mirror a Haredi critique of Zionist militarism and cultural imperialism that has literally been written on the walls for over half a century. Moreover, the Haredi lifestyle is in many ways resolutely anti-establishment, almost downright Bohemian: they are organized into tight-knit communities, collectively engage in ritualized efforts to induce spiritual highs, attach little symbolic value to work and professional achievement, do not glorify the military, and demonstratively parade their rejection of the dominant culture through distinctive modes of dress and hairstyling. (That Haredi society is also patriarchal, hierarchical, intolerant, and often petty, narrow-minded, and self-righteous, is undeniable, but hardly harms the analogy.) Even if this analogy is a bit fanciful, the blurring line between Haredi *chazarah beshuvah* and some versions of post-Zionist rebellion (as personified, for example, by Uri Zohar and his friends) does seem to pose an unsettling threat to certain axioms of Israeli self-definition.

At the same time, most post-Zionists safely ensconced in the secular establishment fail to sympathize with, or even acknowledge, Haredi claims which foreshadowed their own. Instead, wishing to simultaneously enjoy both the luxuries of power and the exhilaration of rebellion, they portray Haredim as oppressors and themselves as defiant subversives resisting a powerful religious establishment. But like Whites accusing Black nationalists of racism, they miss the point: it should be plain to all who are the colonizers and who are the colonized.

6. THE NEW AGENDA

As a result of the breakdown of the arrangements between the secular establishment and the Jewish Jews, a new, still largely inchoate, dissident Jewish ideology is emerging. Many religious Zionists and Haredim have begun tilting towards the conscious rejection of the right of the secular elite to use the state to impose their values. Distinguishing between the state

and those who control it frees each group: religious Zionists need no longer sanctify the secular establishment and Haredim need no longer demonize the state.

The new Jewish dissidents, as we might call them, do not seek to replace the secular establishment. In an unredeemed world, most Jewish Jews aspire to modest political power but not to political supremacy; nor do they have a clear idea of what they would attempt to do if they were to achieve such supremacy. For them, the traditional Jewish aversion to political establishments remains largely intact. Moreover, dissident Jews are aware of the self-restraint required of politically dominant cultures and, if for this reason alone, are satisfied to defer the realization of their Messianic dreams until Messianic times. In the meantime, the objective of the new agenda is to redirect some of the powers of the state and thus indirectly to diminish the power of the secular establishment. More specifically, the goals of the new agenda include the termination of state interference in religious matters, of discrimination (slander and under-representation) against Jewish Jews, and of the state near-monopoly on broadcasting and education. In addition, the new agenda calls for a public square that more closely reflects the values of Jewish Jews.

The main points in the agenda of the dissident Jewish Jews may be summarized as follows:

Most Jews live outside the state, one quarter of Israel's citizens are non-Jews, and a small, but influential, proportion of the secular ruling class regards its Jewishness as little more than a birth defect. The state therefore lacks the authority to speak in the name of the Jewish people or to interfere in matters of Jewish law. In principle, the state has no more business deciding who is a Jew, who is a rabbi, who is a convert, who is married, than it does deciding who is a Hindu. Of course, the state can and must decide on criteria for admitting immigrants or conferring tax privileges as it sees fit. On the face of it, Jewish Jews ought to rejoice that the state chooses to use approximations of traditional religious concepts for these purposes. Unfortunately, however, this choice often has the unintended effect of entangling the state in what appear to be attempts at redefining inherently religious categories. Such attempts are an affront both to religion and to common sense.

The partial disentanglement of religion and state that is required to remedy this situation should do little to harm the ability of Jewish Jews to press their claims. Rather than presenting their legitimate demands as a form of special pleading, as some politicians in Israel have an unfortunate and ineffective habit of doing, Jewish Jews in Israel could simply demand the elementary consideration due to them as to any significant sub-culture. As in the struggle of Blacks and women in the United States, highest priority should be given to changing the face of public discourse. Both Israeli Jews and Jewish Jews themselves should be made aware of the extent to which anti-Jewish bias underlies much of Israeli discourse. Exclusion of Jewish Jews and derogation of their values should be utterly delegitimized in the same way that exclusion of any other group should be delegitimized. Similarly, the new agenda calls for fair representation of Jewish Jews in public bodies. All forms of tokenism are insulting and

patronizing gestures that must be eliminated. Jewish Jews must be fairly represented in the mainstream and not forcibly ghettoized.

Most importantly, the cultural autonomy of Jewish Jews must be respected and encouraged. In particular, the secular monopoly on state-controlled public broadcasting must be broken through decentralization. All those who satisfy certain elementary conditions should be allowed unfettered broadcasting rights. Similarly, education should be decentralized. All those – from Trotskyites to neo-Buddhists – who wish to open schools that satisfy certain basic requirements must be given the means to do so. Dissident Jews frankly acknowledge that the struggle against cultural hegemony is common to all excluded groups, including some whose views are anathema to them (and, obviously, including non-Jews, discussion of which must be regretfully deferred to some other occasion).

Nevertheless, each group has its own battles to fight. In particular, when it comes to defining the character of the public square, various communities that share that square must contend for a share of its control. In the public square, one person's right is another's obligation; there is no neutral position. Whether society permits or forbids the sale of dog meat, or the opening of theaters on Yom Hazikaron, or the placement of lewd images on billboards, it violates somebody's idea of the ideal public square. Conflicting value systems must compete for their place in the public square using persuasion, negotiation, and pressure tactics. That's democracy.

The new Jewish agenda differs from the classical *galuti* agenda in that it includes the aggressive pursuit of a more Jewish public square. To be sure, Jewish dissidents do not expect to always get their way. What they do not tolerate, though, is the high-minded idea that, all else being equal, it is the "enlightened" secular vision of the public square which must always prevail. They reject the patronizing notion that what is at issue is the extent to which secular Israelis must "respect the feelings of the religious", as if "the religious" were a tribe of tender and petulant innocents shrinking in horror at the sight of secular brazenness. The public square is as much – no more – that of Jewish Jews as it is anybody else's and it is as much their prerogative to respect or not respect others feelings as it is others' to respect or not respect theirs. While religious considerations need not be privileged over other desiderata in determining the character of the public square, neither may they be precluded as a matter of principle.

Of course, any Judaism that is relevant to the struggle for the public square must be defined in broad cultural terms that are meaningful to informed and sensitive Jews. At the same time, the attempt to garner broad support should not render the movement vulnerable to seduction by the secular establishment. Various attempts to redefine the relationship between Israeli Jews and Jewish Jews via social contracts purporting to define a common agenda are useful for short-term amelioration of acute conflicts. But in the long run, such common agendas tend to serve the interests of the secular establishment by perpetuating its privileges. This is particularly true of certain pacts currently in circulation, which are flawed in two respects.

First, they commit the category error of contrasting Judaism with democracy; implicit in this contrast is the erroneous conflation of democracy with secular values. Second, they seek to deepen state involvement in the formation of a common Israeli culture rather than to remove the state from such involvement. This idea is rooted in too generous a view of the possibility and desirability of the state using its power to reconcile the disparate cultures in its midst. Apart from all else, shame about perceived pre-Zionist Jewish feebleness is still so entrenched in conventional Israeli self-definition, that any state-sanctioned culture must inevitably lack the essential *galuti* elements of authentic Jewish culture: irony, historical awareness, and civility.

7. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS THE REHABILITATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Viewed in a broader context, the agenda described above might serve as a foundation for a more modest and realistic form of conciliation between some Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews. Precisely because of its militancy, the agenda taps into certain genuine post-modern trends in contemporary Israeli thought. Both the demise of the Zionist ethos and the emerging response of Jewish Jews to this change, indicate a budding awareness of the extent to which both *mamlachtiut* and certain versions of liberalism can be, and have been, used as tools of oppression.

In particular, dissident Jewish Jews tap into a growing consensus when they lament the destruction of Jewish civil society in the name of *mamlachtiut*. It is true that Israel's slow partial transition to liberal democracy and a decentralized economy has alleviated some of the state's most egregious inequities. But as multi-culturalists have pointed out – and as Jewish Jews know from bitter experience – the particular version of liberalism currently in vogue in Israel defers by default to the values of the elite who make the rules and determine which values are “neutral”. Specifically, by recognizing the rights of individuals but not of the communities with which they identify, Israeli liberals hamper the development of the elements of civil society which could threaten the hegemony of the secular ruling class.

The rehabilitation of civil society in Israel would serve the cause of egalitarian democracy as well as that of Jewish culture. A strong independent civil society serves as a counter-weight to the state and disperses power. Its constituent organizations serve as intermediaries between individuals and the state and catalyze a subtle dynamic of cooperation and resistance that facilitates both participation in democratic discourse and preservation of distinct cultural identities.

Moreover, it is civil society and not the state that can provide Israeli society with Jewish character. Returning to the language of Jewish empowerment with which we began, both Jewish Jews and Israeli Jews are beginning to acknowledge that political power embodied by the state and cultural power embedded in the components of civil society are two complementary forms of power, each of which makes its own demands and offers its own

rewards. The state can facilitate authentic Jewish culture, by allowing voluntary associations to flourish and by being responsive to them without suffocating them, but it can neither create Jewish culture nor substitute for it.

Perhaps, then, there is hope for a state that is more democratic and hence, inevitably, more Jewish; a less intrusive, more open state that makes room for, *inter alia*, a vast reservoir of Jewish creativity to be given full public expression; a state in which Jews might live as Jews authentically and unself-consciously. In short, a place every Jew can call "home". No more, no less.

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