

# LUISS



Cattedra

---

RELATORE

---

CORRELATORE

---

CANDIDATO

Anno Accademico

## **Index**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>p.3</b>
<b>Chapter I: Zionisms</b>	<b>p.5</b>
I.I Theodor Herzl's "The Jewish State"	p.5
I.II The Jewish State	p.8
I.III David Ben Gurion's Socialist Zionism	p.14
I.IV Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism	p.18
I.V The Zionist Ethos of the "New Jew"	p.22
I.VI Some Remarks on Zionism	p.24
<b>Chapter II: Religion and Zionism</b>	<b>p.27</b>
II.I A Premise on Jewish Religion	p.27
II.II Religious Anti-Zionism	p.28
II.III Religious Zionism	p.33
II.IV Religious Messianic Zionism	p.36
II.V Some Remarks on Religious Communities and Zionism	p.40
<b>Chapter III: A New Identity</b>	<b>p.42</b>
III.I The Six-Day War	p.42
III.II The Occupation	p.45
III.III The Settlers	p.48
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>p.55</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>p.60</b>

## Introduction

«It is no accident that Jews do not have a pope, nor could they ever have one. If one day someone would jump up and call himself ‘the pope of the Jews’, every one of us would come up, give him a good pat on the back and say, ‘Hey, pope, you don't know me, I don't know you, but my grandmother and your aunt used to do business together in Minsk or Casablanca, so now sit there for a good five minutes, five minutes no more, that I will explain to you once and for all what God really wants from us» (Oz 2017, p. 44).

Approaching even briefly the history of Jewish thought, one cannot but agree with this consideration of Amos Oz. In fact, the absence of a central religious or secular authority allowed for the development of a variety of schools of thought and interpretations of the sacred texts. This inevitably reflects on Jewish culture and also on Zionism, which, as will be examined, will express itself in different ways. The purpose of this dissertation will then be to provide an analysis of the most relevant currents of Zionism and to explore the evolution of the relationship it has had with the Jewish religion, before and after the establishment of the state of Israel. In order to do so, it will provide an overview of Theodor Herzl's “the Jewish State”, David Ben Gurion's Socialist Zionism and Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism, highlighting their main features, points in common and contrasting views. The following section will include an analysis of the evolving relationship between the more religious Jewish communities and Zionism, taking into considerations perspectives that go from complete refusal and hostility to a theological and messianic reinterpretation of it. Finally, the thesis will conclude with a chapter presenting how the Six-Day war and the consequent Occupation represented a turning point in the relation between religion and Zionism, giving the possibility to religious Zionist to put into practice their ideals, with important consequences for the broader Israeli identity and the potential development of initiatives of peace.

The term “Zionism” is a particularly complicated one. It is subject to infinite examinations and matched with countless adjectives. Because of this, this thesis will not attempt to develop a single definition of it. On the contrary, one of the goals of this text will be to highlight its varied and evolving nature. In its initial phase, before the establishment of the state of Israel, it can be argued that with Zionism one could define “an ideology advocating for the establishment of a Jewish state”, with no precise geographical indication, and this will be the starting point of this analysis. Another point that needs to be addressed concerns Zionism after the establishment of the state of Israel. In fact, one could argue that, since the state has been founded, Zionism has fulfilled its purpose. Nonetheless, discussions about Zionism have

continued and many have continued to label themselves as Zionist, interpreting this ideal in different ways and advocating for diverse policies the state should have implemented, depending on the values they associated with their vision of Zionism. This is enough to justify the existence of Zionist ideology also after the foundation of the state of Israel.

Finally, to navigate the vast array of sources available on this topic is not an easy task. Zionism, along with Israeli history, has been extensively studied under different perspectives and requires a multidisciplinary approach. In terms of broader history of Israel and the Israeli-Arab conflict, Morris's *"Vittime"* (2001) provides a comprehensive account of the facts and dynamics involved. For what concerns Zionism in particular, Marzano's *"Storia dei Sionismi"* (2017) presents a detailed overview of the development of the Zionist movement and of the main currents that shaped it, from its origin until contemporary times. Rubinstein's "From Herzl to Rabin: the changing image of Zionism" (2000), on the other hand, is an important tool to observe the evolution of Zionism and Israeli society from the perspective not only of an intellectual, but also of a directly involved lawmaker. Stern's and Taub's chapters in *"Studi sul pensiero politico israeliano"* explore Zionism and issues related to the relationship between religion and the state through the lens of Political Science. In analyzing religious Zionism and the settlers' history and ideology, Taub's "The Settlers" (2010) proved to be the most valuable text, while, to explore their impact on Israeli society, Bar-Tal's *"La trappola dei conflitti intrattabili"* (2024) provides an interdisciplinary perspective, analyzing also the evolving effect that the occupation and the conflict have had on public narratives, with all the related consequences. These texts constituted the base for the development of every argument advanced in this thesis. In conclusion, the perspective of writers and intellectuals such as Oz and Yehoshua, even if not always formulated in an academic tone, proved to be a fundamental tool to navigate the complexities that characterize these issues. A final note: since some of the sources used for the preparation of this thesis were originally in Italian, the author has provided their translations when they are directly quoted in the text.

## Chapter I

### Zionisms

#### I.I Theodor Herzl's "The Jewish State"

To begin an analysis of Zionism, it is inevitable to start from what is generally considered as its foundational text: Theodor Herzl's "The Jewish State" (1896 - "*Der Judenstaat*" in its original German and known also as "The State of the Jews" in other versions). The "Jewish State" is a pamphlet, first published in February 1896 by M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung in Leipzig and Vienna. It was initially titled "Address to the Rothschilds". The original title highlights Herzl's intent to present the pamphlet as a speech to the influential Rothschild family, renowned for their prominence in international banking at the time. However, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, a key figure in supporting Jewish settlements in Palestine, opposed Herzl's plan. In fact, he believed it posed risks to Jews living in the Diaspora and feared it might undermine the stability and success of the existing Jewish communities in Palestine, who he had strongly supported financially in their initial development (Bein 1989, p. 40).

It is subtitled "Proposal of a Modern Solution for the Jewish Question", highlighting Herzl's view that the Jews' presence in Europe was a problem (a "question") and therefore needed a solution. In his view, the degree of discrimination and antisemitism faced by Jewish communities was so relevant that it would have been impossible to pursue a process of integration into society or even of peaceful coexistence. Herzl's work laid the foundation for modern political Zionism, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland as a solution to widespread anti-Semitism and the challenges faced by Jewish communities globally.

Herzl was born in 1860 in Budapest from a middle-class family. He immediately showed an inclination for literature and humanistic subjects and a predilection for the German language and culture, reflecting his secular upbringing in a well-off, German-speaking Jewish family in Budapest. In 1878, he entered the law faculty of the University of Vienna, and his experience in the students' societies there will prove to be decisive in the development of his views. While Herzl pursued his studies and engaged with ideas of modernity and liberalism, he also faced the realities of rising anti-Semitism on campus and within Viennese society. Jewish students, despite their contributions, often encountered discrimination and social exclusion, experiences that Herzl likely witnessed firsthand. Although he completed his law degree in 1884, Herzl's growing disillusionment with societal prejudice led him to abandon legal practice in favor of

writing and journalism, where he sought to explore and address the deeper social and political issues of his time (Cohen 1959, pp 19-35).

Theodor Herzl initially embraced assimilation. He believed that adopting European cultural norms and distancing oneself from overt expressions of Jewish identity would lead to acceptance and integration into broader society. During these years, he even advocated for a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity (Rubenstein 200, p. 15), which highlights his strongly secular views on religion. This tendency came from afar, particularly from the so called Haskala movement, known also as the Jewish Enlightenment. It was an 18th and 19th-century movement that aimed to modernize Jewish life by promoting secular education, integration into European society, and the use of vernacular languages alongside Hebrew (and not Yiddish). Led by thinkers like Moses Mendelssohn (1729 – 1786), it sought to balance traditional Jewish identity with the ideals of the European Enlightenment, though it also sparked tensions between modernists and traditionalists. However, despite his liberal views and his secular lifestyle, Herzl encountered persistent anti-Semitism, which exposed the limitations of assimilation as a protective strategy and as the way forward for Jewish communities in Europe.

In this context, Herzl went on to become a journalist for the “Neue Freie Presse” and, eventually, their correspondent in Paris. There, he covered the Dreyfus Affair (1894 – 1906). He witnessed most of the open court hearings and the public ceremony of degradation, which took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1895 and where is reported that the crowd chanted “Death to Judas, death to the Jew!”. The Dreyfus Affair had huge global resonance and sparked a debate on antisemitism in Europe. It surely had a strong impact on Herzl: Cohen reports that he wrote in an article in 1899 that “It was the Dreyfus trial that made me a Zionist” (1959, p. 67). While it is undisputable that the Dreyfus Affair substantially contributed to the development of Herzl views, this statement seems hyperbolic. In fact, many historians agree that the rise in popularity of Karl Lueger in the Viennese political landscape contributed at least as much (Cohen 1959, pp 48-77; Kornberg 1993, pp. 87-113; Poliakov 2003, pp. 3-31). Poliakov describes his rise like this:

«It soon became apparent that especially in Vienna any political group that wanted to appeal to the artisans had no chance of success without an anti-Semitic platform. But Austrian workers, contrary to their German counterparts, were also receptive. It was at this time that a well-known phrase was coined in Vienna: ‘Anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools’. The situation was exploited by the Catholic politician Karl Lueger, the leader of the Austrian Christian-Social [...]. In 1887, Lueger raised the banner of anti-Semitism. He was opposed by the upper bourgeoisie and the higher clergy, but strongly encouraged by Pope Leo XIII and

Cardinal Rampolla, who were sympathetic to the aspirations of the urban proletariat. He led his party from victory to victory and was finally elected mayor of Vienna in a landslide. [...] 'It is up to me to decide who is Jewish', he was fond of saying, and he occasionally attended a synagogue service wearing the insignia of his office» (2003, p. 24).

He would remain mayor of Vienna until his death in 1910 and was so renowned for his antisemitism (even if he did not implement policies that would directly or explicitly discriminate the Jews) that he is cited and tributed by Hitler in his "*Mein Kampf*" (Poliakov 2003, p. 24).

During this period, Theodor Herzl wrote his play "The New Ghetto", which vividly portrays the struggles and insecurities faced by wealthy, assimilated Jews in Vienna despite their apparent success and represents a turning point in the evolution of his thought. The play's protagonist, a Jewish lawyer, strives to break free from the societal constraints and prejudices that confine him to a metaphorical "ghetto," only to realize that these barriers are insurmountable within the context of Western society. Through this work, Herzl reflected on the broader condition of European Jews and came to reject his earlier belief in the possibility of emancipation and assimilation as a solution to the "Jewish question".

Herzl's observations of pervasive anti-Semitism in Vienna and elsewhere in Europe deepened his conviction that Jewish integration could never provide true security or equality. Instead, he concluded that anti-Semitism was a societal problem that could not be eradicated or effectively resisted. He reasoned that the only viable path for Jewish survival and dignity was the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state where Jews could live free from discrimination. In June 1895, he recorded in his diary his evolving perspective: «In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude toward antisemitism ... Above all, I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' antisemitism» (Kornberg 1993, p. 115). This marked a turning point in Herzl's thinking, leading him to dedicate himself to the Zionist cause and advocate for the creation of a homeland where Jews could exercise self-determination and escape the oppressive conditions of Europe.

It seems that Herzl identified a sort of incompatibility between his typically western, or even German, liberal values with his Jewish identity, which was forcefully accompanied by rejection and exclusion. In the first phase of his life, he strongly prioritized this first aspect of his persona, the German liberal, and tried to work to remove the obstacle that his Jewish identity posed to its realization, both in society (fighting antisemitism) and in himself (being a non-observant Jew, even considering converting to Christianity). During the second phase of his life, he realized that the second aspect of his self, his Jewish identity, would not have been accepted by

the society of his time in any case. It could have not been cancelled nor conciliated with his first. In his view, the realization of a Jewish state would have been the only way to fulfill this duality.

Rubenstein recognizes this dualism also in the overall Jewish community and connects it to the overarching historic tension between East and West, in which the Jews would represent a sort of personification, living in the “western” society with their “eastern” religion and identity. About Herzl, he writes:

«Herzl himself personified this chasm between East and West. His attachment to Judaism was minimal, his knowledge of things Jewish nebulous, consisting mainly of childhood memories of a Budapest synagogue. As a European and as a civilized man, anti-Semitism aroused anger and disgust in him. When he gradually came to discover the unfathomable depth and intensity of the new-old sickness, he was driven to the idea of a Jewish state. Yet his very philosophy remained European, secular and liberal. He sought to heal the ugly wound that afflicted the Jews and marred the enlightened face of Christian Europe: hence, his stubborn insistence on the need for international recognition and cooperation with enlightened Gentiles in carrying out the Return to Zion. That recognition, Herzl argued, should be expressed through a charter enabling the Jews to return to their homeland. The granting of the charter by the enlightened nations of Europe would constitute the one event revolutionizing relations between Jews and Gentiles. The creation of a Jewish commonwealth, a progressive society based on the European model, would symbolize the end of anti-Semitism. Recognition was imperative not only because of obvious demands of political expediency but also because of the need to put an end to the tragic friction between Jews and Christians» (2000, p. 14).

In this way, the establishment of a Jewish state would not only mean providing a safe escape to Jews in Europe and, arguably, this would not even be its main function. The new nation would symbolize the beginning of a new phase also in the relationship between Christians and Jews, finally recognized as other, but equal. A synthesis of western values and Jewish identity.

## **I.II The Jewish State**

It is in this context, that Herzl writes “The Jewish State”. As mentioned above, it is generally considered a pamphlet. In fact, it is everything but a treaty of political philosophy like many of its time: it is much shorter (usually around 50 pages in most editions, without counting introductions, prefaces and notes), divided in many very short chapters and, above all, focused much more on the practice than on the philosophy. More than a treaty of political philosophy

than, it has the tone of a manifesto, almost like an instruction booklet, surely a declaration of intent.

The text begins with a rather long introduction. The first thing that strikes the reader, quite unexpectedly, is the importance and centrality given to the theme of modernity and technological advancement, which highlights an almost positivist perspective on history by the author, who is everything but a man of science. The references to modernity are many and the author seems to identify a sort of contradiction between antisemitism and technological and scientific advancements. For example:

«Hence the misery of the Jews is an anachronism—not because there was a period of enlightenment one hundred years ago, for that enlightenment reached in reality only the choicest spirits. Now, I am of opinion that electric light was not invented for the purpose of illuminating the drawing-rooms of a few snobs, but rather for the purpose of throwing light on some of the dark problems of humanity. One of these problems, and not the least of them, is the Jewish question» (Herzl 2021).

This passage illustrates Herzl's belief that the advancements of modernity, symbolized here by the electric light, should illuminate and address fundamental injustices, including the persistent issue of antisemitism. His almost ironic critique underscores the tension between the technological progress of the era and the continued prevalence of outdated prejudices. By framing the Jewish question as a “dark problem” that modern society has failed to resolve, Herzl not only highlights the moral failure of contemporary civilization but also sets the stage for his argument that the establishment of a Jewish state is both a rational and necessary response to these contradictions.

Aligned with this trust in modernity and progress, the introduction conveys also the view that the formation of the new state will represent a social realization and advancement for those who will participate in it, starting from those from the lower classes, who Herzl believes will be the first to be fascinated by this endeavor. He writes:

«For this, many old, outgrown, confused and limited notions must first be entirely erased from the minds of men. Dull brains might, for instance, imagine that this exodus would be from civilized regions into the desert. That is not the case. It will be carried out in the midst of civilization. We shall not revert to a lower stage; we shall rise to a higher one. We shall not dwell in mud huts; we shall build newer and more beautiful houses, and possess them in safety. We shall not lose our acquired possessions; we shall realize them. We shall surrender our well-earned rights only for greater privileges. We shall not sacrifice our beloved customs; we shall find them again. We shall not leave our old home before the new is prepared for us. Those only

will depart who are sure thereby to improve their position; those who are now desperate will go first, after them the poor; next the prosperous, and, last of all, the opulent. The precursors will raise themselves to a higher grade, equal to that class whose representatives will shortly follow. Thus the exodus will be at the same time an ascent of the classes» (Herzl 2021).

This passage encapsulates Herzl's vision of the formation of a Jewish state as not merely a political project but a transformative social endeavor. He envisions the migration as a step forward, both materially and morally, ensuring that participants rise to a higher standard of living and societal equality. Herzl portrays the exodus as a progressive and orderly movement, driven by hope and opportunity rather than desperation. By emphasizing the preservation and enhancement of cultural and material achievements, he reinforces his belief in the compatibility of modernity, progress, and the creation of a new society, where the aspirations of the marginalized will be realized alongside the collective advancement of the Jewish people.

After the introduction, Herzl immediately addresses “the Jewish Question”. In a series of chapters, he describes very negatively the situation of Jewish communities in Europe and, in a slightly Marxist way, predicts an even more negative future: «we are certain to suffer very severely in the struggle between classes, because we stand in the most exposed position in the camps of both Socialists and capitalists» (Herzl 2021). He goes on addressing the issue of antisemitism and the impossibility to assimilate in chapters covering previous attempts to solve this problem, the causes of antisemitism and the effects of antisemitism on the Jewish people. Curiously, he seems to identify in antisemitism also a forceful source of unity: «We are one people—our enemies have made us one in our despite, as repeatedly happens in history. Distress binds us together, and, thus united, we suddenly discover our strength» (Herzl 2021). This dual perspective on antisemitism, as both a source of suffering and a catalyst for unity, underscores Herzl's argument that the shared plight of Jews necessitates a collective and proactive solution.

Afterwards, the author starts to directly explain the practical plan and the steps needed for the formation of the Jewish state. The goal, he argues, would be to «Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the reasonable requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves» (Herzl 2021). Herzl argues for the establishment of two entities, namely the “Society of Jews” and the “Jewish Company”, who would have the function of “mediums” carrying out the plan: «The Society of Jews will do the preparatory work in the domains of science and politics, which the Jewish Company will afterwards practically apply» (Herzl 2021). He imagines a gradual departure of the Jews from Europe, again progressively starting from the poorest to richer classes. The Society should be

acknowledged by governments and mediate with the “Powers” of the world to reach its objective.

This chapter closes with one of the few references to the local population of the place where the Jewish state would be founded. The author argues against a gradual and unorganized, non-mediated migration of the Jews:

«Should the Powers declare themselves willing to admit our sovereignty over a neutral piece of land, then the Society will enter into negotiations for the possession of this land. [...] An infiltration is bound to end in disaster. It continues till the inevitable moment when the native population feels itself threatened, and forces the Government to stop the further influx of Jews. Immigration is consequently futile unless based on an assured supremacy» (Herzl 2021).

He goes on:

«The Society of Jews will treat with the present masters of the land, putting itself under the protectorate of the European Powers, if they prove friendly to the plan. We could offer the present possessors of the land enormous advantages; take upon ourselves part of the public debt, build new roads for traffic, which our presence in the country would render necessary, etc. The creation of our State would be beneficial to adjacent countries, because the cultivation of a strip of land increases the value of its surrounding districts in innumerable ways» (Herzl 2021).

Herzl's emphasis on organized migration and negotiation reflects his pragmatic approach, aiming to ensure the establishment of the Jewish state is both peaceful and mutually beneficial to all parties involved. At the same time, it is evident that the author does not consider the benevolence of the local population as a priority, like it is obtaining the approval of the main global powers.

The following chapter concerns exactly the issue of where to place this Jewish state. Interestingly, while this issue should be one of the most important when envisioning a project such as this one, Herzl gives it only a very limited space in the pamphlet. The chapter is titled “Palestine or Argentina?” and is one of the shortest. In it, the author briefly compares the perspective of creating the Jewish state in the two regions. About Argentina, he argues that with its fertile land, vast size, sparse population, and mild climate, presents an attractive option. He believes that granting part of its territory for the establishment of a Jewish state would bring significant benefits to the country. However, he acknowledges existing tensions caused by current Jewish migration and emphasizes the need to clarify how this new movement differs from past efforts. About Palestine, Herzl describes it as the historic homeland of the Jewish people, which would help to inspire people to migrate. He suggests that if the Sultan of the

Ottoman Empire was to grant Palestine, the Jewish people could assist in regulating Turkey's finances. He envisions the Jewish state as a bastion of European civilization against Asia and proposes safeguarding Christian holy sites through internationally recognized extraterritorial status, with the Jewish state pledging to protect them. This commitment, Herzl argues, would symbolize the resolution of the Jewish question after centuries of suffering. Even if not explicitly expressed, the tone seems to suggest a certain preference for Palestine rather than Argentina. Nonetheless, the author writes: «Shall we choose Palestine or Argentina? We shall take what is given us, and what is selected by Jewish public opinion» (Herzl 2021), highlighting how the geographical location of the Jewish state, in his view, is of secondary importance.

“Palestine or Argentina?” is followed by a sequence of chapters of a very practical nature, concerning issues related to trade, labor, commerce, property rights and even the urban planning of the future state. These chapters reflect Herzl's attention to detail and pragmatic attitude, addressing the economic structure, governance, and social organization necessary for building a self-sustaining and modern Jewish nation. Some of the most interesting ones are “Society of Jews and the Jewish state”, in which he defines the role of the Society more precisely; “The gestor of the Jews”, which contains the main out of the few biblical references in the text, comparing the Society to Moses, while at the same time reiterating that control over land will have to be granted by international law; “Constitution”, in which the author proposes an aristocratic-republic constitution, without going into too much detail with what is meant by that, but demonstrating nonetheless moderately democratic views; “Language”, in which Herzl believes that it would be unrealistic to imagine Hebrew as the national language and identifies in Switzerland an example of a multilingual country (he will change his mind on this issue); “The banner” in which he proposes as flag a white banner, bearing seven golden stars, symbolizing the seven golden hours of the proposed working-day.

It is interesting to focus on the chapter “Theocracy”. Herzl envisages the risk that the new state would become a theocracy and immediately addresses this danger:

«We shall therefore prevent any theocratic tendencies from coming to the fore on the part of our priesthood. We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples in the same way as we shall keep our volunteer forces within the confines of their barracks. Army and priesthood shall receive honors as high as their valuable functions deserve. But they must not interfere in the administration of the State which confers distinction upon them, else they will conjure up difficulties without and within» (Herzl 2021).

He also considers the occurrence of non-Jews coming to live in the newborn state:

«Every man will be as free and undisturbed in his faith or his disbelief as he is in his nationality. And if it should occur that men of different creeds and different nationalities came to live amongst us, we should accord them honorable protection, and equality before the law» (Herzl 2021).

And concludes the chapter with a statement that could have sounded, by his own admission, fairly sarcastic, but that he takes very seriously: «We learnt toleration in Europe» (Herzl 2021). This chapter is crucial then in understanding Herzl's views on the relationship between religion and the state. Particularly this last quote highlights the link between European liberalism and Herzl's Zionism: these values are the center of his views on the world and therefore on how an ideal state should be organized, whether it would be Jewish or not. Related to this, it is also particularly emblematic that he would not have included any religious nor identarian symbol even in the flag.

Finally, the pamphlet closes with a similar tone to the introduction. Herzl insists with the theme of modernity and of how the Jewish state will be an expression of it. Then, he reiterates the main points he expressed in the previous chapters and concludes:

«Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews wish to have a State, and they shall have one. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own home. The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare will react with beneficent force for the good of humanity» (Herzl 2021).

Once more, Herzl's closing words encapsulate his vision of the Jewish state as not only a solution to the Jewish Question but also a beacon of progress and a source of benefit for all humanity.

In 1897, one year after the publication on the Jewish State, Herzl organized the first Zionist Congress (which would then take place once a year) in Basel, Switzerland, which marked the formal beginning of the political Zionist movement. During the congress, the Basel Program was adopted, emphasizing the need to establish a Jewish homeland secured under international law. Herzl was elected president of the newly formed World Zionist Organization. Immediately after the congress he wrote his famous, almost prophetic statement: «Were I to sum up the Basel Congress in a word - which I shall guard against pronouncing publicly - it would be this: At Basel, I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will see it» (Cohen 1959, p. 162). He missed it only by a couple of years.

Herzl tirelessly advocated for the Zionist cause, meeting with prominent political leaders and monarchs. He sought support from the Ottoman Empire as well as European powers such as Britain, Germany, and Russia. While his immediate diplomatic efforts were largely unsuccessful, his work established Zionism as a global political movement. Herzl died on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1904 at the age of 44 in Edlach, Austria, likely due to heart failure. He was initially buried in Vienna but was reinterred in 1949 on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, a site named in his honor and now a central location for Israeli national remembrances.

To conclude then, it is worth to reassume the key features of Herzl's Zionism. The Jewish State reveals a completely secular view of the Zionist project: the biblical references are minimal, if not non-existent, and the envisioned organization of the new state does not include any religious feature. Herzl has a particularly liberal and above all modern conception of the state. The Jews are then treated much more as an ethnic group rather than a religious community. Furthermore, Herzl does not see the Palestine as the only place where the state should be founded and does not even explicitly state his preference for it (later in his life, his approval for the hypothesis of settling in a region of Uganda will be source of harsh disagreements with fellow Zionists). He does not even use the term "Israel" to refer to the future state (he employs this word only once in the text to refer to the Jewish religious community as a whole). Finally, there is no doubt that the problem of the coexistence with the local population of the place where the Jewish state will be founded is considered as a problem of secondary importance. What matters is obtaining the blessing of the Powers of the time.

### **I.III David Ben Gurion's Socialist Zionism**

David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973) was arguably the central figure in the establishment of the State of Israel and served as its first Prime Minister. Born as David Grün in Płońsk, in what was then part of the Russian Empire (now Poland), he grew up in an already Zionist household. Inspired by Theodor Herzl and the ideals of Zionism, Ben-Gurion migrated to Ottoman Palestine in 1906, joining the so-called second *aliyah* (the second wave of Jewish migrants to Palestine). He then moved to Istanbul to study law but, when the first world war erupted, he has expelled because he was a subject of the Russian Empire. He then spent some years in the United States and then, back in Palestine, he enlisted in one of the few Jewish battalions who supported the British Empire against the Ottomans. After this experience, he finally settled in Palestine, getting involved in the political life of the Zionist community. In 1921, one year after its foundation, he became the general secretary of the *Histradut*, the Jewish workers' trade

union. In 1930, he founded, with other socialists, the *Mapai*, the workers' party, which dominated Israeli politics in the following decades. In 1935, he was elected as president of the Jewish Agency and, until 1963, when he decided to retire in a kibbutz in the Negev desert, he was the leader of the Jewish population in Palestine first and of the state of Israel since its foundation in 1948 (Marzano 2017, pp. 89-94).

In the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the small Jewish community in Palestine was living in a climate of political turmoil. Immigrants from different regions of Europe were starting their new life and bringing with them their vision of how the new community (it was too soon to truly envision the success of establishing a proper state) should have been organized. The vast majority of the political movements of the time were of a socialist persuasion, but with some key differences among them in conciliating a Marxist, socialist perspective with the development of an organized community which had the ultimate goal of establishing a nation-state. Views varied about which of the two had to be privileged.

Marzano identifies two authors as the main theorists who inspired the socialist Zionism of the second *aliyah*: Ber Borochov (1881 - 1917) and Aaron David Gordon (1856 - 1922) (Marzano 2017, pp. 53-59). Borochov was a Marxist thinker, and he argued that "the liberation of the Jewish people could only have been achieved through its territorial concentration in Palestine and the transformation of its social structure. Socialism and Zionism could not in fact be separated" (Marzano 2017, pp. 55-56.). To summarize his thought, he believed that Zionism needed the Jewish proletariat to accomplish its goal, and that the Jewish proletariat could accomplish Zionism with its means, that is class struggle. Meaning that Zionism had to be realized through class struggle. In a way, it could be argued that Borochov has a similar approach to Herzl's, but adopting Marxism instead of Liberalism. Gordon, on the other hand, was not a Marxist, but he believed that:

«Work was the ideal principle to which one's life should be consecrated; and all the more so for the Jews because, in his view, only through agricultural work would it be possible to contribute to the national rebirth of the Jewish people and only this work could 'conquer' the Palestinian land and make it Jewish. Indeed, for Gordon, work had a value that could be described as curative, especially for Jews in the diaspora, who needed a process of 'regeneration'» (Marzano 2017, p. 57.).

Gordon then passed on to the socialist Zionist movement two key concepts that would become cornerstones of its ideology: the conquest of work and the conquest of land. Consequently, Zionists started to believe that «only land work carried out directly by Jews and no longer employing Arab labor would guarantee them the right to live on Palestinian land»

(Marzano 2017, p. 58.). Overall, it can be argued that socialist Zionism directly originated from Russian socialism, and then distanced itself from it because it advocated the need for Jewish autonomy, which the latter did not consider (Marzano 2017, pp. 53-59).

The two parties who were competing for the leadership of the Zionist movement when Ben Gurion migrated to Palestine were directly influenced by Borochof and Gordon. *Poale Zion* (“Workers of Zion”) was inspired by Borochof’s thought and aspired to combine Marxism with Zionism through class struggle, while *Hapoel Hatzair* (“The Young Worker”), inspired by Gordon, aspired to the establishment of the Jewish nation through work. To synthesize, *Poale Zion* had more universalistic views, *Hapoel Hatzair* a more nationalistic approach (Marzano 2017, pp. 90-91). In this context, Ben Gurion sided with *Poale Zion*. A key turning point happened in 1919, under the British Mandate, when *Poale Zion* split in two and the more right-wing side, including Ben Gurion, founded *Ahdut HaAvoda* (“Labour Unity”), which the following year established the *Histradut* and the *Haganah* (“Defense”), the main Zionist paramilitary organization which later formed the nucleus of Israeli Defense Forces once the state was founded in 1948.

Finally, in 1930 *Ahdut HaAvoda* and *Hapoel Hatzair* merged and founded the *Mapai*, determining more clearly the socialist Zionist ideology:

«During the 1920s, the decisive clash, which would shape the history of Israeli Labour Zionism, between two different approaches came to an end: the universalist democratic socialism of Borochof, on the one hand, and the organic nationalism of Gordon, on the other. The victory of the latter's theoretical position, concretely represented by the prevalence within *Mapai* of *Hapoel Hatzair* 's approach over *Poale Zion* 's, can be summarised with the well-known slogan ‘from class to nation’» (Marzano 2017, p. 92.)

Socialist Zionism was then based on three pillars: migration to Palestine, establishment of the state and socio-economic transformation.

David Ben Gurion emerged as the undisputed leader of this movement and the central figure of Jewish political life in Palestine. He famously synthesized his political vision:

«The Jewish revolution requires not only an undivided and organic partnership of all the workers in Israel but also the mutual cooperation of labor and the nation. This cooperation is based on a two-way historical tie, the bond of the Jewish people to its pioneer-workers and the bond of the worker-pioneer to the people. Whoever harms the cause of the working class, in the supposed name of the general interests of the people, is false to the historical will of the people and to its needs. And anyone who questions the ultimate authority of the nation as a

whole, in the supposed name of the class-independence of labor, negates the historic mission of Jewish labor and undermines its dynamic potential» (Ben Gurion 1944, p. 615).

First of all, in typical Socialist fashion, he considers the goal of his political project as a revolution and advocates for the unity of all the workers. He also identifies the two pillars of this project: labor and nation. The author then refers to the bond between the pioneer-workers and the people, arguably implying that the pioneer-workers have done it for the (future) people of Israel, and that the people of Israel should elect them as their ideal model. This tie should represent the cement of society. He then establishes two historical necessities: the historical will of the people with their historical needs and the historical mission of Jewish labor. In my view, it can be argued that the first represents socialism and the second Zionism. Whoever does not act for the interests of the workers and whoever does not see the establishment of the nation of Israel as an historic mission is an enemy. The pillar of labor sustains socialism, the pillar of nation sustains Zionism. «For Ben Gurion, then, Socialism and Zionism were one» (Marzano 2017, p. 93).

Ben Gurion was convinced of this and the idea that Israel was built on socialist foundations constituted for many years one of the founding myths of Israeli society (Sternhell 1999 pp. xv-47). Nonetheless, there are some difficulties, if not contradictions, in trying to conciliate Socialism and Zionism. In fact, many historians now agree that between the two, Zionism distinctly prevailed (Greilsammer 2007; Marzano 2017; Sternhell 1999). Sternhell argues that the ideology of Labor Zionism was primarily driven by nationalism rather than socialism and he introduces the definition of “nationalist socialism” to describe it. In his view, initially, Labor Zionism was more deeply rooted in socialism, but Marxist influence waned over time. The followers of Marxist Zionist Borochof started losing influence even before the British Mandate began. Zionism, which defined Jews as a nation, conflicted with ideologies like Marxism and socialism that categorized people by class or liberalism that emphasized individual autonomy. Unlike Marxism, Labor Zionism avoided class struggle and instead pursued cooperation between workers and capitalists to strengthen the nation. This approach focused on uniting all sectors of society to enhance the nation’s ability to compete on the global stage (Sternhell 1999, pp. 3-47). It is also fundamental to emphasize that this Zionist vision of socialism excluded the Arabs, going against some of the foundational socialist principles and producing very relevant consequences in terms of effective separation between the two communities in Palestine (Marzano 2017, p. 93).

In conclusion, it is possible to observe some similarities and differences between Socialist Zionism and Herzl’s. First, and most importantly, there has been the key step from theory to

practice: while Herzl produced a plan and started to advocate for its cause in Europe, the second *aliyah*'s immigrants acted pragmatically to establish the state of Israel and ultimately succeeded. In terms of similarities, it can be argued that both Herzl and Ben Gurion shared a secular perspective on Zionism, not seen as a divine or biblical mission, and even on the Jewish people, recognized much more as an ethnic group than a religious community. Ben Gurion's Zionism is founded on the concepts of the centrality of work, community and collectivism, which are socialist values, but they are complementary, if not subjected, to the final "historic" goal of establishing the state of Israel. Similarly to how Herzl predicted that the lower social classes would have been the first to migrate, the socialist Zionist identified in the working class the engine to generate the new nation. They had less trust in the benevolence of the great powers of the time and maintained the belief that their project was a revolutionary one. If for Herzl the first step would have been to obtain control over a territory under international law, for Ben Gurion that would have been the last and final. Finally, it was by then considered non-negotiable the fact that the Jewish state should have been established in Palestine, any other option was not taken into consideration anymore.

#### **I.IV Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism**

Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940) was a key figure in the Zionist movement and the founder of Revisionist Zionism, which significantly shaped the ideological foundations of the State of Israel. Born Vladimir Yevgenyevich Jabotinsky in Odessa, in the Russian Empire (now Ukraine), he grew up in a multicultural and secular environment. He studied law in Switzerland and Italy before turning to journalism and Zionist activism. Deeply affected by the pogroms that plagued Jewish communities in the Russian Empire, he became convinced of the necessity of a homeland for the survival and security of the Jewish people. Sent to Alexandria by a Russian newspaper during World War I, Jabotinsky co-founded the Jewish Legion, a military unit that served in the British Army in the Middle East, furthering his belief in the importance of Jewish self-defense. In 1925, dissatisfied with the Labor Zionists' political gradualist and socialist approaches, he established Revisionist Zionism, advocating for the immediate creation of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River (including then both Palestine and Transjordan, contemporary Jordan) and emphasizing the need for strong self-defense capabilities and political sovereignty. While his ideas often clashed with those of leaders like David Ben-Gurion, his vision left a lasting impact, particularly through paramilitary organizations such as the Irgun and the Betar youth movement, and later the Likud Party.

Jabotinsky died of heart attack while visiting a self-defense camp in 1940 in the United States, leaving behind a legacy that shaped Zionism and Israeli politics in the decades to come (Marzano 2017, pp. 155-160).

In terms of political views and philosophy, Jabotinsky is surely the most eclectic among the most prominent Zionist figures. Initially fascinated not only by Herzl's Zionism but also by his charisma and persona, he always advocated for the development of a new model of Jew (a transversal theme of secular Zionisms, as will be addressed later on in the text, but to which Jabotinsky attributed even more importance) and for the centrality of force and defense in the establishment of the new state and society. Because of this, he has often been labeled as Fascist. Marzano argues:

«Certainly Jabotinsky was in favor of fascist corporatism. He was also a nationalist and believed that the primary goal of Zionism was to create a 'new Jew' without whom a Jewish state would not be possible. In doing so, Jabotinsky was inspired by what fascism was doing to 'fascistise' Italy and create a new man. However, in the leader of revisionist Zionism, the similarities with fascism were more apparent than real. The basic element of fascism was the negation of liberalism, whereas Jabotinsky remained a convinced liberal until the end of his life» (2017, p. 156).

In my opinion, the main "Fascist" feature of Jabotinsky's thought (which he never explicated in a programmatic text), is in its attitude towards political activism and violence. He privileged action over theory, in a typical fascist way, and strongly advocated for the development of paramilitary Jewish organizations who would defend Jewish interests with the use of force, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora communities. Also because of this perspective, Jabotinsky always put the issue of the coexistence with the Arabs in Palestine at the center of his political activism.

In 1923, just a few years after the 1920-1921 clashes which demonstrated the importance of the 'Arab question' to the first Zionists, Jabotinsky published his most renowned article: "The Iron Wall". The author begins by arguing that, even if he is often considered as an enemy of the Arabs who would want them out of Palestine, this is not true and that he believes in the principle of equal rights (provided that the Jews are the majority). In the following sections, Jabotinsky argues against the possibility of a voluntary agreement between the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine, comparing them to other colonizers and colonized of the past. In his view, the Arabs will resist Zionism like all natives resist colonizers. Every attempt to coexist then would not only be naïve, but also disrespectful towards the Arab themselves:

«To imagine, as our Arabophiles do, that they will voluntarily consent to the realisation of Zionism in return for the moral and material conveniences which the Jewish colonist brings with him, is a childish notion, which has at bottom a kind of contempt for the Arab people; it means that they despise the Arab race, which they regard as a corrupt mob that can be bought and sold, and are willing to give up their fatherland for a good railway system» (Jabotinsky 1923, p. 3).

The goal of the Zionists can never be supported, nor accepted then by the Arabs: «The Zionists want only one thing, Jewish immigration; and this Jewish immigration is what the Arabs do not want. [...] Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed» (Jabotinsky 1923, p. 5).

After painting this scenario then, he famously proposes the only viable solution:

«We cannot offer any adequate compensation to the Palestinian Arabs in return for Palestine. And therefore, there is no likelihood of any voluntary agreement being reached. So that all those who regard such an agreement as a condition *sine qua non* for Zionism may as well say 'non' and withdraw from Zionism. Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach» (Jabotinsky 1923, p. 5).

The following paragraphs are dedicated to justifying the morality of this view and, more interestingly, to presenting the possibility of a future agreement, but only when the Arabs will have given up their hope and become more moderate. Then, there will be mutual concessions and the two people will be able to live together in peace like good neighbors. «In other words, the only way to reach an agreement in the future is to abandon all idea of seeking an agreement at present» (Jabotinsky 1923, p. 7).

The tone of the article is very cynical and assumes to be much more realists than other, non-mentioned, Zionists. More than once in the text Jabotinsky states that this is the only reality of things and that those who do not share this view are deluded or dreamers. He warns against the danger of the empty rhetoric of those who prefer discussions and discredits them.

Only this “iron wall” would have granted success to the Zionists in Palestine. Jabotinsky did not necessarily draw a future of war. On the contrary, he believed that the sooner the Arab opposition broke against that wall, the sooner an agreement would be reached. A Jewish defense force was therefore necessary if an agreement was to be reached in the future (Marzano 2017, p. 158). Arguably, this view proved to be terribly prophetic, except for the future of peace.

The great influence of this passage can be traced until our days. Indeed, as I am writing these words, the Israeli Defense Forces are conducting an operation in the occupied West Bank called “Iron Wall” (Al Jazeera 2025).

Immediately after the publication of this article, Jabotinsky participated in the foundation of the association *Betar*, a youth movement with almost paramilitary features, in Riga, Latvia and, in 1924, in the foundation of the *Zionim Revisionistim* (Revisionist Zionists) party in Paris. During the conference in which the party was formally established, the delegates stated their methods and their objectives:

«The goal of Zionism is a Jewish state. The territory: both sides of the Jordan. The method: mass colonisation. The solution to the financial problem: a national loan. These four principles cannot be realised without international approval. Therefore, the agenda consists of a new political campaign and the militarisation of Jewish youth in *Eretz Israel* [Palestine] and the diaspora» (Goldberg 1999, p. 235).

They share with Herzl the idea that obtaining international approval represents a priority for the Zionist movement to reach its objective, but they go further both in terms of geographical location of the new state, looking at Transjordan in addition to Palestine, and in the strongly militarist methods.

In the following years Revisionist Zionism grew in popularity and in 1931 managed to oust Weizmann as head of the Zionist Organization but its extremist tones and the homicide of the Socialist Chaim Arlozorov scared the majority of the delegates, who ended up marginalizing the movement. Furthermore, during the 1930s numerous Revisionist activists broke out from the party and founded proper paramilitary and even terrorist organizations, such as *Irgun* and *Lehi*, which used indiscriminate violence on the Arabs and British in several instances, and from which Jabotinsky distanced himself. In this context, when Jabotinsky died in New York in 1940, the record of revisionist Zionism was rather poor. Outside of the Zionist organization and marginalized within the Jewish community in Palestine, with its leadership increasingly convinced that the only way to create a Jewish state was through the indiscriminate use of violence, no one would have placed his bet, in the early 1940s, on its political future (Marzano 2017, p. 160).

Again, it can be argued that Revisionist Zionism is characterized by strong secular views, like its Socialist and Political counterparts. In a rather simplistic way, like the other two are associated with two of the main political ideologies of the time, socialism and liberalism, the temptation to associate Revisionist Zionism with fascism is there. The similarities are many, particularly in its militarist approach. Nonetheless, there are some key differences that makes

it difficult to accept this thesis, as previously emphasized. In my view, if one had to choose an adjective to describe Revisionist Zionism, it would be Nietzschean: turning to action rather than philosophical reflection or political planning, it focuses its efforts on creating the “new Jew,” in this vision Jewish declension of the German philosopher’s *Übermensch*, and on an inevitable opposition to the Arabs. There is much more will to power than plans to build a new society. Introducing a maybe provocative view, this may be the reason of its unsucess in the first decades of its existence, when there were social, national and physical infrastructures that needed to be designed and built, and of its success from the 1970s onwards, when Israel had already become a solid state and a regional military power. Revisionist Zionism shared with the socialists a revolutionary approach, but did not advance a practical vision of society and nation.

#### **I.V The Zionist Ethos of the “New Jew”**

There is one element that connects, to a greater or lesser extent, the main currents of Zionism taken here under consideration: the ethos of the “new Jew.” Both Herzl, Ben Gurion and Jabotinsky envisioned with Zionism not only the development of a state for the Jewish people, but also a process of transformation of those who would participate in it. This transformation would have been not only socio-economical, but also cultural, if not even existential. During the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the Zionist movement a dichotomy developed between the Jew of the Diaspora, the *yehudi* (from the same root as “Jewish” in English) and the “new Jew” of Palestine, the *‘ivri* (from the same root as “Hebrew” in English). The dichotomy between the two is well exposed by Jabotinsky in this famous passage:

«Our starting point is to take the typical Yid of today and to imagine his diametrical opposite... because the Yid [same as *Yehudi*, Jew of the Diaspora] is ugly, sickly, and lacks decorum, we shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty. The Yid is trodden upon and easily frightened and, therefore, the Hebrew [‘ivri] ought to be proud and independent. The Yid is despised by all and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to charm all. The Yid has accepted submission and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to learn how to command. The Yid wants to conceal his identity from strangers and, therefore, the Hebrew should look the world straight in the eye and declare: ‘I am a Hebrew!’» (1949, p. 99).

For Jabotinsky, this new Jew was already personified in Herzl and was the source of his admiration for him (Rubinstein 2000, pp.9-10). Also Ben Gurion, who had a very different conception of Zionism, shared this ideological trait and was, for example, often reported

referring to the diaspora Jews as the “miserable step-brother” (Rubinstein 2000, p. 11). On this regard, Rubinstein argues:

«But at the beginning, Zionist literature abounded with this very posture: The old-time Jew contrasted with the newly born Hebrew; the Diaspora Jew with the native Sabra; the Yid of yesteryear with the resurrected Maccabee, the inferior Jew with the super-Jew. [...] The Return to Zion is coupled with a metamorphosis of the Jew into a new man. The Jew would become a “goy” [Non-Jewish] in the double meaning that this word has in Hebrew, signifying both “Gentile” and “nation.” Once this rebirth takes place, the traumas of the past will be forgotten. To be a goy means to be healthy; healthy nations, healthy people are not obsessed with issues of existence and survival» (2000, pp. 10-11).

This dichotomy declined itself also in two other oppositions: Yiddish/Hebrew and religious/secular. The choice to adopt Hebrew as a national language comes very early in the history of Zionism. The Hebrew Language Committee was founded in 1890 with the goal of modernize Hebrew and introduce the new words required for everyday life activities and, as it was progressively more and more adopted, before World War I the majority of those born in the Jewish community in Palestine were already native Hebrew speakers (Marzano 2017, p. 64). This process was explicitly pursued by the first Zionists because Hebrew was considered the basis for the cultural revival of the Jewish people and to mark the difference between the *yehudi* and the *‘ivri* Jews (Marzano 2017, p. 64). For what concerns religion, in the secular view of Zionism, the ritual and religious Jewish tradition is linked to the legacies of the Diaspora and is regarded as one of the key characteristics that the new Jew must strip himself of. The new Jew is, if anything, a direct heir to the ancient biblical warrior heroism or the historic Kingdom of Israel, not to the tradition of scholars, precepts and customs who came later (Stern 2018, pp. 5-11).

To conclude, the concept of the “new Jew” served as a unifying ethos for Zionism, driving a vision of personal and collective transformation that aimed to break from the perceived weaknesses of the Diaspora and reclaim a proud, independent and modern identity. This ideal, rooted in cultural revival, linguistic renewal, and a secular reinterpretation of Jewish history, underpinned the Zionist effort to create not only a state but also a society capable of forging a bold, self-determined future.

## I.VI Some Remarks on Zionism

Considering what has been introduced in the previous sections, it is possible to identify some common features that help attempting to provide a definition of Zionism, or at least to identify some common structural elements. The first element lays in its modernity: all three ideological perspectives described in this chapter base their views on a modern vision of history, politics and society. In fact, even if Jewish religion contains references to the return to Jerusalem and to Palestine as the homeland of the Jewish people, it is undeniable that liberalism, socialism and Jabotinsky's Nietzschean militarism provided the fundamental instruments for the development of modern Zionism. In fact, Taub argues that: «Zionism is a modern phenomenon and its novelty is part of modernity itself: namely, the promise that all human beings, including Jews, would be free and arbiters of their own destiny» (2018, p. 33). This explains why the first step required by the Zionists to their followers was an almost existential change of their self, which pushed many of them to change even their name. Becoming arbiter of their destiny would not have been something that could happen overnight:

«Zionism demanded the renunciation of a passive, fatalistic, otherworldly and totally dependent orientation; instead, it demanded the adoption of a modern conception of man as the master of his own destiny. The two are not identical, because breaking the bonds of dependence does not in itself guarantee true independence. [...] The Jews would have to tear off the whole web of their lives and weave a new one» (Taub 2018, p. 48).

It can be argued then that one of the key features of Zionism is believing in the modern principle of self-determination, applied to the Jewish people, who, in order to achieve it, need to change their perspective on their role in society. In this context, any religious obligation is considered a legacy of the past and a potential hinderance to this process.

It is worth to remind that this sentiment was not a peculiarity of the Jewish people at the time (Marzano 2017, pp. 11-16. Sterhnell 1999, pp. XV-1). All the fathers of Zionism died in a world in which the nations or empires in which they were born did not exist anymore. During those decades, the world undergone a transformation which destroyed the world order and created a new one. Even Herzl, who on the contrary was born and died in the Austro-Hungarian empire, envisaged a future of great turmoil, but since he was a man of his generation he imagined and foresaw a much more relevant role of the great European powers in the establishment of the Jewish state. Anyway, there is no doubt that Zionism fed on the revolutionary energy that characterized its time.

Interestingly, all the Zionist movements taken into consideration here envisioned a democratic state, but with the condition that Jews would be the vast majority. Even Jabotinsky, who could be imagined to be more fascinated by dictatorial tendencies, remained a liberal in this sense. Democracy and a Jewish national identity are then fundamentally linked in the Zionist perspective. The state should be democratic because it would be the only form of government that could grant true self-determination and provide stable political hegemony to the Jewish people. A Jewish majority of the population would create that sense of community and national sentiment which makes a democracy more than a formal social contract (Taub 2018, pp. 34-36). To describe this association, Taub argues:

«According to Zionism, ‘democratic’ and ‘Jewish’ were far from being a contradiction in terms. [...]. According to Zionism the Jewish character of the state and its democratic form of government were two sides of the same coin: a democratic state in which the vast majority of citizens were Jewish would be Jewish because the citizens, being free, would shape the public sphere according to their own culture and tradition. Hebrew would constitute the (first) official language of the state, Jewish holidays would be indicated in the official calendar, the Sabbath would be the day of rest, and the national culture would be based on Jewish tradition. According to Zionism, Judaism would become Israel's national identity, but not the state church. Israel was thus to be Jewish in the same sense that Poland is Polish, but not in the sense that Poland is Catholic» (2018, p. 36).

In this perspective, as long as Israel maintains a Jewish majority, the only way to make it non-Jewish, in the Zionist sense, would be to deprive its citizens of freedom, while abolishing the Jewish nature of the state would therefore be equivalent to abolishing democracy. In short, the Zionist vision tightly intertwines democracy and Jewish identity, asserting that a truly democratic state with a Jewish majority would naturally express its national character through its culture, language, and traditions, while still preserving individual and collective freedoms. It can be argued then that the development of a democratic system coupled with a strong Jewish identity represents a key feature of Zionism.

Finally, while Herzl in “The Jewish State” keeps the question of the geographical location of this state open, later forms of Zionism seem to consider Palestine as the only option. This is because of two reasons, one consequential to the other. The practical reason is that no other territory would have attracted a mass immigration of Jews, and this is because Jewish identity is too associated with the Palestinian territory. On this point, Taub argues that:

«The land of Israel is so fundamental to Jewish identity that without it a Jewish state would not make sense to Jews, for the same reasons that a British nation state would not make sense

outside Britain. When British men and women sought political independence elsewhere, they ended up no longer considering themselves as British and became Americans, Australians or Canadians. Jewish national identity (as opposed to religious identity) is tied to a territory, in the same way as it is for most other nations» (2018, p. 35).

This would also explain the failure of the initial attempts to identify an alternative location for the Jewish state. It can be argued then that the establishment of Jewish state in Palestine particularly represents another key feature of Zionism.

It is worth to mention that these considerations can be highly problematic, and have proven to be so for the Arab Palestinians. Arguably, they are the source of the tragedy that befell them. Mine is in no way meant to be a justification of what happened, but only an attempt to understand what ideological drives provoked the actions of the Zionists.

Zionism emerges as a modern revolutionary nationalist movement deeply rooted in the ideals of self-determination, cultural revival and democratic governance, while being tied to the historical and symbolic significance of Palestine. It sought to transform Jewish identity from one of perceived passivity and dependence to one of autonomy and nationhood, and aligned with some of the broader political currents of its time. All these elements, combined, formed the ideological driving force that made millions of people migrate, fight a war of independence, create a functional society and economy and gain international legitimacy.

## Chapter II

### Religion and Zionism

#### II.I A Premise on Jewish Religion

After having analyzed the main ideological features that characterized Zionism, it is now interesting to observe how and whether the more religious Jewish communities related, reacted or contributed to the initial attempts to settle in Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel. In fact, as demonstrated in the first chapter, secularism can be considered as one of the key features of the most influential trends of Zionism. Because of this, religious communities have had a peculiar and, above all, evolving relationship with it.

Before directly addressing this theme, it is necessary to make a premise about Jewish religious communities and Judaism in general. In every religion, followers vary widely in how strictly they adhere to its precepts and principles, as well as in the authorities they choose to respect. The degrees of religiosity are therefore virtually infinite, and it is not obvious who should be labeled as “religious” or “secular”. The case of Judaism is kind of paradoxical in this sense. In fact, since it has a very limited set of undisputable dogmas and does not have a single dominant religious authority, theological interpretations of the divine can vary extensively and the debate on some issues is not only always open, but also strongly encouraged. Nonetheless, it is generally considered self-evident who is religious and who is not, thanks to a series of distinctive garments and practices adopted by who is more devoted. Despite a theological approach which encourages study and debate, Judaism imposes to its most devoted followers a very strict and demanding adherence to a large set of rules.

Usually, communities who adopt the strictest Jewish lifestyle are referred to as orthodox, ultra-orthodox or *haredi*, in Hebrew. These terms are interchangeable in the common everyday language, and describe numerous communities, which vary based on their national origin, language spoken, costumes or rabbis whose authority they respect, who share this rigid lifestyle, completely dedicated to God. Beneath them, there is, as mentioned above, an infinite scale of possible adherence to religious rules, from those who celebrate only the most important festivities, to those who respect the precepts on food consumption but do not wear the *kippa* on their head and every other possible combination. Most of the times, they do not base their belonging to a community on their godliness, as the orthodox do. Anyway, this is not the context to conduct a long analysis of who is a religious Jew and who is not. This thesis will consider as religious someone who follows, at least in part, some religious precepts, considers

himself as a member of a specific religious community or group or association (for example by attending a rabbinical school) and, above all, adopts religious categories and arguments in addressing Zionism and the state of Israel.

## II.II Religious Anti-Zionism

When the Zionist movement originated, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vast majority of European Jews did not join its efforts and either decided to migrate elsewhere, mainly in north America, or remained in their homeland. Among them, there were also some who did not limit themselves to ignore Zionist efforts, but also actively opposed them. The two main sources of opposition to Zionism were the Bund and orthodox communities (Marzano 2017, pp. 71-74; Rubinstein 2000, pp. 183-195; Taub 2010, pp. 37-40). The Bund, formally the “General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia”, was a secular Jewish socialist organization founded in 1897 in Vilnius, in the Russian Empire. It emerged as a response to the economic hardship and antisemitism faced by Jewish workers, advocating for socialism, Jewish cultural autonomy and the adoption of Yiddish as the language of the Jewish proletariat. The Bund believed that Jews should fight for equal rights and social justice in the countries where they already lived. It was particularly strong in Poland and played a major role in labor organizing, political activism, and resistance against both antisemitic persecution and capitalist exploitation. The movement followed a different trajectory in every region of the Russian empire, but generally started to weaken during the 1920s, with many of its members joining communist parties. On its view on Zionism, Marzano writes: «Although Bundism and Zionism were similar in their criticism of East European Jewry and proposed to end what they saw as an anomaly, the Bund considered Zionism to be a petit-bourgeois, nationalist and colonialist ideology that broke the common front of Jewish workers' struggle alongside other proletarians» (2017, p. 72). Despite its decline, the Bund left a lasting impact on Jewish political thought and labor movements in Eastern Europe.

As can be anticipated, a very different opposition to Zionism came from the Orthodox communities. Apart from a very small minority of Rabbis who will adhere to Zionist ideals and whose position will be analyzed later in the chapter, the vast majority of religious Jews strongly rejected Zionism when it originated. At the base of this opposition there were religious reasons. In fact, the *Torah*, the sacred book, explicitly includes the “*mitzvat Yishuv Eretz Israel*”, meaning either the duty to go back to the “land of Israel” or the fact that going back to the land of Israel would be a good action. Nonetheless, decades before Zionism emerged, many

prominent Rabbis, most notably Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch who was the spiritual leader of the German Jewish orthodoxy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, interpreted this arguing that Jews should pray for the return to Palestine, but should not accelerate it (Marzano 2017, p. 73). In this perspective, the diaspora was interpreted as a punishment from God on the Jewish people, and only God could rectify it and decide when the punishment was over. According to the religious scriptures:

«When the people of Israel went into exile, they made three vows: not to hasten the end of days (i.e., not to do anything to expedite the coming of the Messiah), not to ascend the wall (i.e., not to immigrate to the Land of Israel and reestablish the House of David), and not to rebel against the nations of the world. Zionism violated, or so it seemed, all three» (Taub 2010, p. 38).

According to this interpretation then, it is not surprising that Zionism was considered as a major sin. In fact, while the single personal ambition to move to Palestine to study the sacred texts and be buried there was accepted, the objective of promoting mass-migration and establish a Jewish state was intolerable.

In this context, many orthodox Jews decided to also structure themselves in a political-religious movement and founded *Agudat Yisrael* (“Union of Israel”) in 1912. *Agudat Yisrael* was present in all European and American Jewish communities, with the aim of conducting a firm fight against Zionism. Its activities included expulsions from synagogues, ostracism and even denunciations to the authorities (Marzano 2017, p. 73). After this initial open hostility towards Zionists, their approach slightly softened:

«Only in the 1930s, in the face of increasing clashes between Jews and Arabs in Palestine - which also saw anti-Zionist Orthodox among the victims of violence - and the advance of Nazism in Europe, did relations between *Agudat Yisrael* and Zionism improve, and the foundations were even laid for some collaboration» (Marzano 2017, p. 73).

After the foundation of the state of Israel, *Agudat Yisrael* evolved into a full-fledged political party, who participated in the elections and represented the orthodox communities in parliament, highlighting an evolution of their relationship with the Zionists.

Despite this apparently conciliatory evolution of the relationship between the orthodox and the Zionists, even after the foundation of the state of Israel many orthodox maintained an adverse, if not hateful, view on Zionism. Among the arguments they adopted, there is one that provoked harsh criticism, but is nevertheless exemplificatory of the view that several religious leaders maintained of Zionism: the fact that the Zionists would have provoked the holocaust. It is not difficult to imagine the reactions that such an opinion could provoke in a country in

which a significant portion of the population was constituted by holocaust survivors. On this regard, Rubinstein writes:

«At its core, ultra-Orthodox objection to Zionism revolves around one basic theme: The Jews should wait for the Messiah's arrival before reestablishing their national center. Any mortal initiative of 'forcing the Messiah's arrival' is liable to invoke God's wrath. Even an event as cataclysmic as the annihilation of Europe's Jews, many of whom heeded their rabbis' advice and chose not to emigrate to Israel when it was still possible - did nothing to moderate the ultra-Orthodox, anti-Zionist polemic. On the contrary, the Holocaust provided a new, insidious argument against the Zionists: Forcing the Messiah's arrival, extremist elements claim, was what incurred God's anger [...]. The Shoah was the punishment meted out by heaven upon the Jewish people in retribution for transgressions committed by the Zionists. They had profaned the Holy Name with their rebellious disregard for God's will, seeking to usher in the redemption without his help» (Rubinstein 2000, pp. 183-184).

This goes beyond the simple opposition to Zionism, seeing it as the source of the most tragic catastrophe that hit the Jews in their history. This view fits also into a narrative that saw the secular Zionists as accomplices of the Nazis, basing this allegation on a series of episodes, much more suspected than verified, which would have seen the Zionist leadership either discriminating the religious Jews by not facilitating their immigration in Palestine or perceiving their extermination as a necessary evil in the process of creating a new Jewish society (Rubinstein, pp. 183 – 195). This view is now less and less shared and relevant, but nonetheless still present among members of these communities.

Another, less extreme, anti-Zionist perspective shared among orthodox Jews is that Zionism only worsened the situation for them and is to be considered as the cause of the violence they face from the Arabs. This view is well represented by a famous article that was published on one of the most popular orthodox newspapers in Israel after a terrorist attack during the 1990s, which was followed by the usual response of the government committing to fight terrorism. It is quite long, but it is worth to read it in its entirety:

«Therefore, the call issued while we are still suffering the fresh pain of terrorism, that 'we have to declare war on terrorism' is just stupid. What war? War with whom? Haven't there been enough wars in the State of Israel since Zionism intruded its way into our lives here? Tens of thousands of Jews have been killed in these wars, and not a single one has solved the existential problems of the people of Israel. On the contrary, war has simply led to more war. Anyone who believes that terrorism stems from the Oslo Agreement must recall that these agreements themselves are rooted in the Intifada which led to the Madrid Conference, which is rooted in

the Camp David Accords, which is rooted in the Yom Kippur War, which is rooted in the Six Day War, which is rooted in the Sinai Campaign, which is rooted in the fedayeen terrorism that began after the Arab refugees were expelled in the 1948 war and the 1948 war itself was a result of the pogroms and riots that began with the Zionist immigration, which declared a war to conquer the country and employ only Jewish laborers» (*Hamachane Hacharedi* 1997).

This argument exposes some evident contradictions. In fact, many of the orthodox Jews to which this article is directed benefited from the Law of Return, which allowed them as Jews to move to Israel and obtain the citizenship, and from several subsidies which the state grants to these communities. But, above all, the article presents a broadside against Zionism, attributing to it the cause of all of Israel's troubles, without mentioning the fervent support that ultra-Orthodox parties granted to the most fanatical brands of Israeli nationalism over the years (Rubinstein 2000, p. 193). Setting aside the contradictions, from this view emerges a complete rejection of Zionism. The only priority is to study the sacred texts and dedicate life to God, regardless of the nation in which you happen to live. Zionism is seen as a troublesome and ungodly intruder who destabilizes their lives.

Among those who shared these views, including the fact that Zionism held some responsibilities for the holocaust (Rubinstein 2000, p. 184), was the main leader of the orthodox community in the British Mandate first and in Israel later, Rav Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (1878–1953), known also by the name of his first publication: the “Chazon Ish”. The Chazon Ish, was a leading haredi Jewish scholar and theological authority. Born in Kosava, then part of the Russian Empire (now Belarus), he lived a secluded life dedicated to *Torah* study and writing. His magnum opus is a multi-volume work on Jewish law and Talmudic commentary, which gained him widespread recognition among religious scholars. In 1933, he migrated to Palestine, where he became a central figure in shaping the Haredi community and its approach to the modern Jewish state. Despite holding no official position, his rulings and guidance had a profound impact on Jewish religious law, education and broader society.

It has become famous, and particularly illustrative of the contrast between secular Zionism and religious anti-Zionism, a meeting that took place between the Chazon Ish and Ben Gurion in 1952. The tension between them was so great that, according to Orthodox tradition, the elderly rabbi deliberately kept his glasses off throughout the meeting, ensuring he would not have to look the secular leader in the eye (Stern 2018, p. 5). The meeting, as highlighted by Stern, had a great symbolic importance:

«The encounter between these two minute and weak-looking Jews was in effect a dispute between the two founding cultures of the nascent Jewish society in Israel: on the one hand, an

organization of Jews with a secularized perspective and a modern, future-oriented outlook; on the other, an association of community-driven Jews whose worldview was religious and whose orientation was turned to the past» (Stern 2018, p. 5).

The meeting, which could have represented a chance to create a pathway for the development of a unite perspective, was instead tense and strengthened the separation between the two communities. Ben Gurion, as illustrated in the first chapter, advocated for the advancement of a new Jewish identity and the overcoming of diasporic Judaism. On the other hand, the Chazon Ish:

«Opposed the ‘new Jew’ and wanted rather to transform the ‘old Jew’ into a sacred ideal. His life's commitment was not political but spiritual. He wanted to rebuild the glorious world of European Jewish scholarship destroyed with the Holocaust. He did not want to reconcile himself with King David of Jerusalem, but rather with the leaders of the *yeshivot* [religious schools] of the shtetls and Eastern European cities that had been active in the first part of the 20th century [...]. The Chazon Ish did not believe in the cultural revolution, but only in spiritual evolution. For him, the State of Israel was not a goal, but only a tool intended to enable the renewal of the religious-scholastic civilization that the war had destroyed. The state, in and of itself, had no value» (Stern 2018, p. 6).

In this context, the two leaders found an agreement which included a series of traditionally Jewish features in the everyday life of the state and granted a series of subsidies to the orthodox communities, who in return put an end to their active opposition to Zionism and passively accepted the state of Israel. Interestingly, both believed that their concessions to the counterpart would have been only temporary. Ben Gurion believed that the most religious communities would have either been progressively integrated into broader society or they would have left over time. The Chazon Ish, instead, assumed that the seculars would be defeated and that every Jew would eventually go back to his traditional religious way of life. In a way, they both succeed in their projects: Israel became a strong, modern, technological and, some would argue, secular and liberal state; while the world of *Torah* study was successfully rebuilt and expanded like never before in Israel. Nonetheless:

«Yet, both Ben-Gurion and the Chazon Ish also had to suffer bitter failures. Each operated outside their own ‘truth’ because they were convinced that history was on their side. Therefore, they made no effort to connect the two truths through the creation of a common national identity. Instead of mediation they opted for estranged coexistence. The ultra-Orthodox truth feared modernity, secularization and nationality; the secular truth rejected the past of the

diaspora, religion and classical Jewish culture. And so each retreated into its own camp and developed an independent and contradictory ethos» (Stern 2018, p. 8).

Stern defines these two perspectives as “two parallel monologues”: neither of the two interlocutors was truly interested in modifying their worldview to integrate the other’s community. They found a way to coexist in the same country, without aspiring to create a common platform to include the other (Stern 2018, p. 8). Arguably, a “parallel monologue” is a perfect way to define this religious response to Zionism. The vast majority of orthodox communities rejected the fundamental starting point of Zionism, which was the need to build a Jewish state, because their conception of society and of the world in general was too distant. The political dimension of the human being, for them, is of secondary importance, if not completely irrelevant. And this, coupled with the above-mentioned theological interpretations for which the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine would have constituted a sin, produced an inevitable hostility towards the secular Zionists. The parallel monologues continue to be recited today and constitute one the peculiar aspects of Israeli society.

### **II.III Religious Zionism**

The vast majority of religious and orthodox Jews rejected Zionism. Nonetheless, a small minority of them embraced it and reinterpreted it in a religious way, giving rise to a movement that will prove to be immensely relevant in contemporary Israel, even if its contribution to the foundation of the state was almost negligible. As mentioned above, the Jewish religion contains numerous references to the return to the land of Israel, the most famous being, at the end of the prayers for the festivities of *Yom Kippur* and *Pesach*, when the worshippers exclaim: “next year in Jerusalem!”. Because of this, several religious Jews, including some of the most renowned thinkers of the history of Judaism, moved to the “holy land” during the course of the centuries and joined the already existing communities, based principally in Jerusalem and Safed, where the most prestigious Talmudic schools were located. The centrality of Palestine in Jewish history is also attested by the existence of various “false messiahs” urging for a return to Zion, the most famous being David Alroy (12<sup>th</sup> century) and especially Sabbatai Zevi (1626 – 1676) (Marzano 2017, p. 20). Throughout history then, Jews preserved an attachment to the land of Palestine and in some rare cases migrated there, but always either as single individuals or very small communities, and never with the intention to conquer territory or moved by political reasons. Nothing that can be compared with later Zionism.

In this context, Marzano identifies two rabbis that lived during the 19<sup>th</sup> century who can be considered as precursors of Zionism: Rav Yehudah Alkalai (1798 – 1878) and Rav Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795 – 1874). They both advocated for the self-redemption of the Jews through their migration to Palestine, arguing that Jews should not wait passively for their liberation by the messiah, which has to be imagined as a gradual process which can be facilitated. In this way, they proposed a sort of compromise between secular thinking, which privileged the role of the individual, and traditional messianic aspirations, as they overcame the idea that the return of the Jews to the land of Israel would be subordinate to the coming of the Messiah. By migrating to Palestine, men would accelerate that redemption that would come from the Messiah anyway (Marzano 2017, p. 26). In practical terms, they advanced some propositions which would anticipate by a few decades Herzl's plans, such as looking for the support of the Sultan and the creation of an organization coordinating and encouraging settlements and the acquisition of farming land in Palestine. Even if they did not have a lasting impact during their time, it is worth to mention them to illustrate the variety of ideas and initiatives which arose around Zionism. Furthermore, they represented the first attempt, even if unsuccessful, to combine religious messianism with an arguably political project.

During the following decades, while political Zionism structured itself as a political movement and started gaining popularity among European Jews, only a few members of the more religious communities decided to join its efforts. The most prominent one was the Lithuanian Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Reines (1839–1915). He was born in Karolin, in the Russian Empire (now Belarus). He showed great intellectual promise from a young age and became a distinguished Talmudic scholar. He served as a rabbi in several communities, particularly in Lida, where he established a famous yeshiva which combined traditional Torah study with secular education, a very innovative approach for its time. Rav Reines became a passionate advocate for Jewish nationalism and, in 1902, he founded the *Mizrachi* movement, the religious wing of the Zionist movement. He played an active role in the early Zionist Congresses and worked alongside Theodor Herzl to promote Jewish settlements in Palestine. Despite facing opposition from the more conservative religious authorities, he remained committed to his vision of a Zionist movement that embraced Jewish tradition. He continued his rabbinic and educational work until his passing in 1915. Despite never physically settling in Palestine, Rav Reines left behind a legacy that helped shape Religious Zionism for the future generations.

Rav Reines had similar views to Rav Alkalai and Rav Kalisher, the above-mentioned anticipators of Zionism, but found himself in the perfect time and place to have a much more lasting impact. Like them, he believed that it was possible to conciliate the ideals of Zionism

with the Jewish religion. In his view, the political and the religious had to be separated: religious orthodoxy did not prohibit migration to Palestine with the goal of establishing a Jewish state, while he did not attribute to Zionism any messianic or religiously deterministic values. It would have been an opportunity to create a platform for the flourishing of Jewish culture and religion, during a period marked by widespread antisemitism in Europe. About Rav Reines' Zionism, Taub writes:

«Rabbi Reines saw Zionism as a primarily political rather than a theological movement. It was also, in his view, a spiritual revival, in the sense that if Jews gathered together and built their own society they would be able to revitalize their culture and tradition. This spiritual revival was relegated, however, to the earthly and human realm. If there were messianic elements in Rabbi Reines's view of Zionism, they were not pronounced, nor did they become his dominant political legacy» (Taub 2010, p. 38).

Rav Reines' approach to Zionism demonstrated a pragmatic fusion of political activism and religious tradition, emphasizing cultural and spiritual revival without attributing messianic significance to the movement, coupled with the acceptance to cooperate with the seculars in achieving Zionists' objectives. His perspective allowed for a path for reconciliation between Zionism and Orthodoxy, leaving a lasting legacy in religious Zionist thought. It is worth noting also that, initially, the movement, aligning with Herzl's views, did not identify Palestine as the only option to establish the Jewish state. In fact, it was the only party of which all members voted in favor of the proposal to settle in Uganda during the sixth Zionist congress (Taub 2010, p. 192). This highlights even more how they gave a much more instrumental rather than religious value to the state.

This perspective was at the time the most popular among the religious Jews who adhered to Zionism and gave birth to the *Mizrachi* movement, abbreviation of *Merkaz Ruchani* ("Spiritual Center") (Taub 2010, p. 38). Founded in 1902, the *Mizrachi* participated in the Zionist Congresses, representing the minority of religious Zionists. In 1922, it moved its headquarter in Jerusalem and, during their congress in 1926, it published a declaration stating their position: "The *Mizrachi* is a Zionist, national and religious federation that strives to build the national home of the Jewish people in Palestine in accordance with traditional and written laws" (Marzano 2017, p. 136). Similarly to other Zionist currents, it was now clear that Palestine was the only option and they aspired to achieve this goal without renouncing to "traditional and written laws": as for every orthodox, adherence to religious norms is non-negotiable.

Rav Reines and the *Mizrachi* laid the foundation for a form of Zionism that integrated national aspirations with religious commitment. Even if this component remained a minority

during the key years of the establishment of the state of Israel, by insisting on the compatibility of Zionism with religious tradition, *Mizrachi* provided a framework for religious Jews to engage in Zionist efforts without compromising their adherence to Jewish law, shaping the future of Religious Zionism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **II.IV Religious Messianic Zionism**

Another Lithuanian Rabbi played a decisive role in paving a way to combine Zionism with the Jewish religion and, arguably, even if he had a smaller influence on his contemporaries compared to Rav Reines, his thought proved to be incredibly influential for future generations, with consequences that still impact Israeli politics and society. His name is Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865 – 1935). He was born in Griva, in the Russian Empire (now Latvia) and, like Rav Reines he demonstrated exceptional intellectual abilities from a young age, which led him to studying at the renowned Volozhin *Yeshiva*. He served as a rabbi in various communities before migrating to Palestine in 1904, where he became the chief rabbi of Jaffa. His leadership and vision led to his appointment as the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine in 1921. Three years later, in 1924, he founded the *Merkaz ha-Rav Kook yeshiva*, known mainly as *Merkaz ha-Rav* (“The Rabbi's center”), which became, and remains, the most prominent religious-Zionist yeshiva in the world. He died in Jerusalem in 1935 (Marzano 2017, pp. 136-137).

Rav Kook embraced Rav Reines’ view of combining religion and Zionism but took it one decisive step forward. In his view, Zionism not only could be combined with religion, but it could also be reinterpreted in a religious way and included in a messianic and deterministic vision of history. Even if they were unaware of it, secular and often anti-religious, Rav Kook believed that the Zionists were acting following a divine plan, and because of this they should have been supported. In this way, he also theologically overcame the religious prohibition of doing something to expedite the coming of the messiah and reestablishing a Jewish nation, because these were seen not as human endeavors, but as acts of God. This allowed him to reject any religious critic of Zionism. Taub writes:

«Rabbi Kook, a kind of Jewish Hegelian, saw secular Zionists and their Orthodox opponents as two complementary parts of a higher synthesis of which none of them was yet aware. Hegel’s cunning of history was replaced here by the cunning of God. When these two counterparts of the higher truth merged, they would bring about a merging of sovereignty and *halacha* [religious law]» (Taub 2010, p. 39).

Redemption was then seen as a process, rather than an event, and Jews could participate in it and have an active role, aware or unaware of the fact that they were acting according to God's broader plan. Rav Kook saw the state to which Zionism aspired not as the conclusion of the process, but only its beginning, an earthly tool that would serve as a vessel, a stepping-stone on the path to the ideal state, which, according to Rabbi Kook, would be the «foundation of the throne of God in the world» (Taub 2010, p. 39). Stern argues:

«Rabbi Kook and others offered a key reading that assigned mythical dimensions to Zionism and attributed hidden theological significance to its secularized programs. According to this view, Jewish history would be guided not by the hand of man but by the hand of God. The state would be destined to fulfill the purposes - messianic or otherwise - of Divine Providence, and within this framework secular Zionism plays an important role. Ben-Gurion and his cohort are a pawn on the divine chessboard and their actions serve the course of history as if interpreted from a religious perspective. Their consciousness is secular, even heretical, but it is a false consciousness. The entire course of political Zionism - which prides itself on acting within the confines of real history - is interpreted as part of a redemptive, meta-historical plan to hasten the coming of the Messiah» (2018, p. 10).

Rav Kook's vision thus transformed Zionism from a secular nationalist movement into a divine instrument of redemption, integrating it into a grand theological framework in which even its secular leaders unknowingly played a role in fulfilling a messianic destiny. It was still unclear to him what this destiny would have been and he remained vague and abstract about the future. It is worth noting, in fact, that he died in 1935, and therefore did not witness the great successes of Zionism during the following decades and the foundation of the state of Israel.

Nonetheless, two key elements of his theological view are particularly important, also considering the later evolution of religious Zionism:

«First, Rabbi Kook still made room for the anticipation of redemption; the path was not entirely in view, and the coming of the Messiah was still shrouded in the clouds of an unknown future. Redemption was one step closer but still mainly in divine, not human, hands. Second, the sacred dimensions that the state acquired paved the way to making sovereignty a value in its own right. Sovereignty, not necessarily settlement of land, gained religious sanction» (Taub 2010, p. 40).

While the first point relates to what has been mentioned above, namely the fact that Rav Kook did not make explicit prophecies about the future and it is impossible to know how he would have reacted to the foundation of a secular state of Israel by the socialist Zionists, the

second point is fundamental: this shift in focus meant that political authority and statehood were no longer viewed merely as practical necessities but as intrinsically sacred components of the redemptive process.

This view on Zionism was inherited and importantly elaborated by Rav Kook's only son: Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891 – 1982). He was born in a small town in what is now Lithuania where his father was serving as Rabbi. From an early age, he was deeply immersed in Torah study, guided primarily by his father, who shaped his worldview. When he was 13, he moved to Palestine with his family, where he became involved in the growing Religious Zionist movement. Following the passing of his father in 1935, Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook dedicated himself to preserving and expanding his father's teachings. He eventually became the head of *Mercaz HaRav*, the *yeshiva* his father had founded in Jerusalem, in 1952 after having been its administrative director since its foundation. Under his leadership, the institution became a major center for Religious Zionist thought, producing many students who played key roles in Israel's religious and political spheres. He died in Jerusalem in 1982 (Marzano 2017, pp. 135-138; Taub 2010, pp. 41-46).

In the decades after his father's death, Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook dedicated himself to studying and reinterpreting his thought. In his view, the ideas introduced by Rav Kook had to be grounded into reality and, therefore, into politics:

«He brought redemption and politics much closer. By editing his father's writings, he derived a far more detailed political plan from theology. The difference was crucial. The messianic belief and the anticipation of redemption [...] were replaced by a messianic confidence and positive knowledge of the future. To put it more crudely, redemption was lowered from the sphere of the state to the level of a political party. It was stripped of theological ambiguity and turned into a political platform» (Taub 2010, p. 41).

At the base of this interpretation there was the firm belief that they were already living in messianic times. Consequently, everyone should have dedicated himself to contribute to the messianic design, which was the creation of the Jewish state, synthesis of Judaism and political power, like Rav Kook imagined. In this way, he put forward a transformation of messianism from passive waiting for redemption, to active contribution to its concretization (Marzano 2017, p. 137). Even if implicit, is evident here the view, inherited from his father, that the secular Zionists were unknowingly acting according to a divine design and that religious sanction was attributed to Israeli sovereignty, but Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook goes even further, advocating for active contribution and, above all, introducing the key theme of land. In fact, he believed that the Jewish state, often in this rhetoric compared to the biblical Kingdom of Israel,

should have extended its territories on the entirety of *Eretz Israel* (the biblical locution to identify the land of Israel), which was sacred in every grain of its soil as it had been promised to Abraham 4000 years ago (Marzano 2017, p. 137). To summarize, the messianic design of redemption in progress provides that the holy sovereignty of Israel should overlay on the saint land that belongs to the Jews for biblical reasons, and everyone should strive to make this happen. Little does it matter if the state was built by socialist atheists, that too was part of the divine project. An explosive mix of religion, nationalism and fetichism of the land.

At this point then, Taub argues that:

«The road map of redemption was finally in human hands, and Rabbi Zvi Yehuda [Kook] left no room for doubt as to what it said: settlement, the redemption of land, was the holy path, and the state too must be committed to it. Earthly sovereignty became subordinate to a higher politico-theological plan for which it was but an instrument. ‘The Almighty has his own political agenda, according to which politics down here are conducted’, the rabbi said. ‘It is dictated by divine politics and no earthly politics can counter it’» (2010, p. 43).

Furthermore, this approach exceeded the traditional objectives of Zionism, which in its socialist and revisionist form did not include any religious reference in justifying its attachment to the land of Israel and accepted the borders of 1948, which cut out many of the biblically more relevant locations in Palestine:

«The turn was dramatic. Rabbi Kook the father created a possibility of cooperation between religious and secular Zionism, based on the centrality of sovereignty, but his son, by shifting the center of gravity decisively to settlement, created the possibility of collision between the two creeds. Any diversion from divine politics would delegitimize the state and potentially release believers from any commitment to it. “We are commanded by the *Torah*, not the government”, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda [Kook] said» (Taub 2010, p. 46).

This approach inevitably distanced Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook and his students also from the more traditional orthodox communities, who either maintained an hostile view on Zionism or identified themselves with the positions of the *Mizrachi*, but was also a chance to create a new entirely religious-Zionist community, which combined religiousness and observance with political nationalism: «They would be free of their sense of inferiority to the ultra-Orthodox for their learning and to the secular Zionists for their pioneering work» (Taub 2010, p. 42). This process gave birth to an entire new sector of Israeli society, which gained more and more influence year after year.

The theories presented in this section were taught for decades in the *Merkaz Ha-Rav yeshiva* and the many students who attended it, who had become rabbis and could in turn influence

many other worshippers, contributed to its diffusion in Israeli society (Marzano 2017, p. 138). While they remained almost marginalized during the first two decades after the foundation of the state of Israel, they found great resonance after the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six-Day War and the consequent Occupation, as will be analyzed in the following chapter. Arguably, Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook planted a seed, and the occupation gave it the possibility to sprout.

## **II.V Some Remarks on Religious Communities and Zionism**

In conclusion, it can be observed how Jewish religious communities developed varied responses to Zionism. Most of the orthodox communities, even if they were based in Palestine or in Israel after its foundation, ignored it or directly opposed it. Arguably, their rejection is based on two elements. First, an interpretation of the sacred texts which considers Zionism as a sin, as it would break the three vows that Jewish people made when they went into exile and only God would be the one who could put an end to the punishment of the Diaspora. This perception fueled hostility towards Zionism and provoked a series of attacks against it, including the accusation that it would have provoked the holocaust. Second, a fully religious and traditional view on society, which gives a secondary importance to the political dimension. The state itself does not have a significant value. They developed and constituted a “parallel monologue” to Zionism, progressively and passively accepting it, but without sharing its objectives.

On the other hand, religious communities who embraced Zionism can be divided into two segments: one that does not see Zionism as a messianic endeavor and one that does. The *Mizrachi* movement, influenced by Rav Yitzchak Yaacov Reines, approached Zionism in a very pragmatic way. They believed in a strong separation between the sacred and the political and, in a time characterized by great antisemitism in Europe, they saw in the establishment of a Jewish state the chance for a new flourishing of Jewish tradition and culture. No other religious value was attached to the achievement of the Zionists, whose secular lifestyle was not acceptable but with whom the political objectives were shared.

The messianic religious Zionists developed a different perspective. Based on the teachings of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook reinterpreted by his son Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook, they interpret Zionism in a messianic way, believing that redemption will arrive through the establishment of a Jewish state on the perceived sacred land where there was the Kingdom of Israel in biblical times. While the father opened the door for a providential interpretation of Zionism, granting a sacred value to Israeli sovereignty, the son, who witnessed the unexpected victories of 1948

and 1967, argued for an active form of redemption and anticipation of the imminent arrival of the messiah and added the key element of the sacrality of the land of Israel, producing a fanatic religious nationalist ideology which sees the justification of its political project (fundamentally the settlement of Jews on the entirety of Palestine) in the will of God. This represents an absolute novelty in Jewish thought and presents a paradox: those who claim to invoke the oldest roots, are actually the most recent.

Thus, the relationship between religious communities and Zionism has been shaped by deeply rooted theological interpretations, historical circumstances, and evolving political realities. While traditional Orthodox communities largely rejected or remained indifferent to Zionism, pragmatic religious Zionists viewed it as a practical solution for Jewish reawakening and messianic religious Zionists elevated it to a divine process of redemption. These ideological perspectives continue to influence Israeli society and politics, shaping debates on the role of religion in the state and the significance of the land of Israel, often with tragic consequences.

## **Chapter III**

### **A New Identity**

#### **III.I The Six-Day War**

The previous two chapters have highlighted how the dominant currents of Zionism adopted a secular perspective and the orthodox and more religious Jewish communities reacted to it in different ways, with the majority of them either considering it as a blasphemy, or accepting it in a pragmatic, but not theological sense. Another faction conciliated religion and Zionism, interpreting it in messianic terms. While their contribution to the establishment of the state was not significant, their influence on Israeli politics and society grew exponentially over time. It is interesting then to analyze this process, which, many agree (Bar-Tal 2023; Marzano 2017; Rubinstein 2000; Taub 2010), find its key-turning point in the Six-Days War (5th to 10th of June 1967) and the consequent Occupation.

From its independence in 1948 until the mid-1960s, Israel's political landscape was shaped by both internal state-building efforts and external security challenges. Domestically, the country was dominated by the Labor Zionist movement, with the Mapai party, led by David Ben-Gurion, playing a central role in government. The state prioritized the absorption of large waves of Jewish immigrants, arriving mostly as refugees from war-torn Europe and Middle Eastern countries, modifying Israel's social and economic fabric. The early years were marked by efforts to establish stable institutions, develop infrastructure, and integrate diverse Jewish communities into a unified national identity. Politically, Israel had a highly fragmented parliamentary system with numerous parties representing different ideological, religious, and ethnic groups, though Mapai consistently led ruling coalitions, with Ben Gurion as prime minister until 1963, apart from a brief interruption in 1954. After him, who decided to retire in a kibbutz in the desert for the last ten years of his life, Levi Eshkol, a fellow socialist Zionist, was appointed as prime minister until his death, in office, in 1969.

On the external front, after the resolution n.181 of the United Nations on the 29th of November 1947 established the creation of a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine, and the Zionist leadership signed the Declaration of Independence on the 14th of May 1948, Israel faced ongoing hostilities with its Arab neighbors, who refused to recognize its existence. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War (known as "War of Independence" in Israel) secured Israel's independence but left unresolved territorial and refugee issues, leading to frequent border tensions. In fact, the Armistice Agreement of 1949 settled Israeli borders on what is now

commonly referred to as “the Green Line”, which are still the country’s officially recognized borders under international law, but this agreement did not provide stability to the region and was accepted reluctantly by the Arab countries. In 1956, Israel joined Britain and France in the Suez Crisis, briefly occupying the Sinai Peninsula in response to Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal, before withdrawing under international pressure. By the mid-1960s, rising tensions with Arab states, especially Egypt, Syria and Jordan, as well as increasing Palestinian guerrilla activity, set the stage for further conflict, shaping Israel’s political and military strategies.

In this context of growing tensions erupted the Six-Day war, which proved to be a key turning point in the history of Israel and of the whole Middle East. In May 1967, the Soviet Union allegedly provided the Egyptian president Nasser with incorrect intelligence claiming that Israel was mobilizing forces along the Syrian border (Morris 2001, p. 386). In response, on May 16th, Nasser began deploying Egyptian troops in two defensive lines within the Sinai Peninsula near Israel’s border. Shortly after, on May 19th, he ordered the expulsion of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), which had been stationed in the region after the Suez Crisis, from Gaza and Sinai, subsequently taking control of UNEF positions in Sharm el-Sheikh, which overlooked the strategic Straits of Tiran. Israel warned that any blockade of the Straits would be considered an act of war, yet on May 22nd-23rd, Nasser proceeded to close them to Israeli shipping. On May 30th, Egypt and Jordan signed a defense pact, and the next day, at Jordan’s request, Iraq began deploying troops and armored units into Jordan, later reinforced by Egyptian forces. Meanwhile, on June 1st, Israel expanded its cabinet to form a National Unity Government. During those days, these military movements were often accompanied by very crude statements broadcasted via radio by the Egyptian leader, one of the most famous was: «We will hang the last imperialist soldier with the entrails of the last Zionist!» (Marzano 2017, p. 139).

Rubinstein argues that, in order to understand the climate that followed the war, it is necessary to also look at the anxiety that pervaded Israeli society in the weeks before:

«To understand the nature of this turnabout, a reconstruction of its background is necessary. The June war was preceded by a period of national anxiety such as Israel had not known since the days of the War of Independence. The Arab forces seemed, on the eve of the war, to menace the very existence of the state and the lives of its inhabitants. Moreover, this threat descended upon Israel unexpectedly, after years of believing that the status quo with the Arabs would be long-lasting. This anxiety was compounded by shock at the impotent apathy of the international community in the face of Nasser's aggression. Within hours, international guarantees of Israeli

free navigation sank into the waters of the blocked Tiran Straits and the United Nations observers' force vanished into thin Sinai air. [...] Remembering a time in which Europe's Jews encountered a similarly divided world, Israelis would not soon forget these days of 'clenching fists and pounding hearts'. Today, [...] these words sound highly exaggerated; nevertheless, they testify both to the prewar anxiety and to the bursting emotions following the victory» (2000, pp. 93-94).

He also quotes Abba Eban, Israel foreign minister at the time: «Abba Eban described the sensations of Israelis on those fateful days: "As we looked around us we saw the world divided between those who were seeking our destruction and those who would do nothing to prevent it» (Rubinstein 2000, p. 94).

Israel then decided to attack and, de facto, won the war the same morning the conflict started (Marzano 2017, p. 138). In just a few hours, the Israeli air force succeeded in destroying almost the entire Egyptian air force, the entire Jordanian one and half of the Syrian one. At that point, the ground offensive began. The Egyptian army was forced to retreat within 36 hours. By June 8th, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai were in Israeli hands. The offensive against Jordan started on June 7th: Israel aimed at gaining what had come under Hashemite control in the 1948 war, East Jerusalem and the entire West Bank. In the case of the offensive against Syria, Israel changed strategy in the course of the war, after the Egyptian and Jordanian defeats. Between June 9th and 10th, the conquest of the entire Golan, from which numerous attacks had been conducted against Israeli settlements close to the border in the years before, seemed unfeasible. By the time the UN Security Council imposed a ceasefire on June 10th, the Golan was also under Israeli control.

While the dominant narrative for many years has been that Israel was forced to conduct a preventive attack, contemporary historians tend to agree on the fact that the Israeli leadership was aware of the non-intention of Nasser to conduct an offensive (Marzano 2017, pp.139-140; Morris 2001, pp. 391-430). Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the movements of troops, the expulsion of the UN mission in the Sinai, the closure of the Tiran Strait and the pacts signed among the Arab countries created the premises for the war to start. To a certain extent, it can be argued that the Egyptian leadership created the perfect chance for Israel to conduct an operation that it was looking forward to.

At the end of the war, Israel had conquered an area three and a half times bigger than its territory, which included the whole Sinai desert, the Golan heights, the Gaza strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Morris 2001, p. 416). In these areas there were also many places of great religious importance, above all the Western Wall, the 488 meters long retaining wall of

the Temple Mount in the old town of Jerusalem, but also, just to cite some, Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Bethel, north of Jerusalem. This, coupled with the duration of the war, six days like the time that took God to create the world, contributed to fueling religious and messianic interpretations of Israel's success.

### **III.II The Occupation**

The famous author Amos Oz, at the time still a young journalist and promising novelist, covered the war for the leftist newspaper of the Labor Zionists, Davar ("Word"). In August 1967, he wrote an article titled "The Defense Minister and Lebensraum" ("the living space", referring to the expression used by the at the time defense minister Moshe Dayan addressing the occupied territories). In his essay, the author warned against the occupation and the consequences that the occupation could have on Israel and on Zionism overall. He argued that the war presented Israel with two possible interpretations of Zionism: Zionism as liberation of people or Zionism as redemption of land. If Israel interpreted Zionism according to the first meaning, it would have withdrawn from the conquered territories. Otherwise, it would have ended up enslaving an entire people, because it could have not absorbed the Palestinian population except through a regime of permanent occupation. In his view, «even unavoidable occupation is a corrupting occupation» (Times of Israel 2018). Even in the jubilant climate that characterized the country during those months, Oz understood that Israel was at an existential crossroad, which would have had crucial consequences for Israeli society (Times of Israel 2018, Taub 2010, p. 3).

As mentioned, the climate in Israel after the war was euphoric: both the secular and the religious sectors of society perceived the country's victory as a decisive turning point in its history. Morris reports:

«'It was as if we were dreaming', declared Eshkol's military advisor, General Lior, describing the mood of the Israelis when the guns fell silent. A wave of expansionism with messianic overtones swept the country. Believers spoke of a 'miracle', and of 'rescue'; the Land of Israel had been returned to its former inhabitants. But the secularists were also deeply moved. On June 8th, the editorial of 'HaArez', an authoritative Israeli daily newspaper with a liberal orientation, stated, among other things: 'The glory of ancient times is no longer a distant vision; from now on it will be part of the new State of Israel, and its splendour will illuminate the achievements and successes of Jewish society, an element of continuity in the long history

of the people of this country... All of Jerusalem is ours. Rejoice and celebrate, inhabitants of Zion!’» (2001, p. 420).

This overwhelming sense of triumph fostered a newfound national confidence, reinforcing the belief that Israel had not only secured its survival but also reclaimed its historical and biblical heartland. The fascination for the newly conquered Jerusalem touched even the more secular communities and, as Rubinstein highlights, it inevitably fostered new reflections on the meaning of Zionism:

«For the nonreligious sector, too, these were great days. Anxiety gave way to exhilaration, peril to euphoria. The siege was lifted, and beyond the barbed wire lay the enchanted lands to which no Israeli could be indifferent. Within Israel the war unleashed a national debate as to the aims and goals of Zionism and its relationship with Judaism. A new sense of history began to permeate the public debate, and the words ‘Jewish fate’ became almost ubiquitous. The need to go back to the original Jewish sources, to return to the roots, was constantly expressed. The Sabra [Jews born in Israel] paratroopers' weeping at the Wailing Wall - true or alleged, nobody knew - became an enduring legend» (2000, p. 94).

This surge of national pride and historical consciousness blurred the lines between secular and religious identities for a period of time. The war’s aftermath reinforced Zionism’s connection to Judaism and ignited debates about the nation's future direction, its territorial aspirations, and the role of faith in its identity. While the euphoria eventually settled, the emotional and ideological shifts it triggered left a lasting imprint, influencing both political discourse and religious-nationalist movements in the years to come. «The seeds of a polarized society were thus sown during the days of the war» (Rubinstein 2000, p. 95).

During the months that followed the Six-Day war, the government, still predominantly headed by labor Zionists, started to divide on the question of what to do with the conquered territories. This led to the development of two groups, usually referred to as the hawks and the doves. The hawks, including figures like Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan, saw the territorial gains as both a strategic necessity and a historic opportunity to reclaim parts of the biblical land of Israel, advocating for settlement expansion and a firm stance against territorial concessions. In contrast, the doves, represented by leaders such as Abba Eban and Levi Eshkol, believed that continued occupation posed long-term security and demographic risks, advocating for diplomatic engagement and the possibility of trading land for peace, which will become the most adopted rationale in the future peace talks. The position of the hawks was then strongly reinforced by the September 1967 Arab League summit in Khartoum, where the Arab states came out with the famous three “no”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no

negotiations with it. This hawk-dove split, which characterized most of the leftist parties, remained a theme and influenced Israeli politics in the following decades (Bar-Tal 2024, pp 183-189; Taub 2010, pp. 49-51).

While the debate at the time was lively, historical research has highlighted that the Israeli leadership, in reality, always planned and envisioned a long-term occupation, if not annexation, of the conquered territories, particularly of the West Bank. Notably relevant in this sense was the Allon Plan, which was never officially adopted, but strongly influenced future policies. The plan sought to balance security concerns with potential peace negotiations and, to summarize, it envisaged the annexation of some key areas of the West Bank, while granting either some degree of autonomy or the restitution to Jordan of the most populated regions. Importantly, the plan also included the construction of Israeli settlements in some areas to solidify their control. This would demonstrate how Israeli leaders, since the beginning of the occupation, did not only intend to retain the territories as a bargaining tool for future negotiations, but saw it as an opportunity to extend the country's borders (Bar-Tal 2024, p. 185).

This vision is what gave birth to the development of settlements and the long-lasting Israeli occupation of the West Bank, with its inevitable consequences:

«The damaging process of occupation intensifies considerably when the leadership decides to settle a civilian population in the occupied territory. This makes it necessary to develop well-justified reasons for their settlement, to guarantee their security, to grant tax benefits to induce citizens to move to the occupied areas, and to construct a special legal status for them (as they are subject to Israeli law in a territorial space where the law does not apply). Thus, a judicial system, laws and regulations are developed that, in fact, separate the two populations living in close proximity, but with different ethnic origins. This necessarily entails a violation of the fundamental principles of justice, morality and human rights and, as a result, the occupying society is condemned to a process of degradation and degeneration, at least as far as its democratic, humane and moral character is concerned» (Bar-Tal 2024, p. 181).

Going back to what Amos Oz had written, it is clear how the Israeli leadership chose the second vision of Zionism: Zionism as redemption of land and not liberation of people. Bar-Tal perfectly describes what Oz meant when he mentioned the corrupting power of occupation. The secular labor leadership highly underestimated this process and, with the pragmatism that had characterized it in the previous decades, saw in the aftermath of the Six-Day war a chance to consolidate as a regional power and expand Israel's territory. Because of this, it tolerated and authorized initial settlements in the West Bank, but probably did not realize the extent of the consequences this would have generated.

### III.III The Settlers

In September 1967, just a few months after the end of the war, a small group of people settled just a few kilometers east of the so-called green line, south of Jerusalem, west of Bethlehem. At their head, there was a fervent disciple of Rav Kook, Hanan Porat (1943 – 2011). The place chosen for this endeavor was not casual, but was of highly symbolic importance. In fact, the group, after applying repeated pressures on the government, was authorized to create their settlement where once stood Gush Etzion, a village composed of four *kibbutzim* (plural for *kibbutz*) destroyed by the Arab Legion in 1948, where Porat had lived with his family when he was a child. In addition to this, the site was considered to have also important religious value, as it was the location of events such as the *Bar Kokhba* revolt and was located on the route going from Jerusalem to Hebron, often walked by Abraham, Isaac and David. Porat and his accomplices shared Rav Kook's views and considered their actions as part of a greater messianic process, as the "activation of history". They named their settlement Kfar Etzion and signed the beginning of the process of Israeli settlement in the West Bank (Marzano 2017, pp. 145-146). Taub argues:

«Gush Etzion was the symbol of the bond between secular and religious Zionism. Of all religious Zionist communities this one had the misfortune of paying the highest price in blood during the War of Independence. It was its terrible fate to prove that Orthodox no less than secular Jews could transform themselves into New Jews: no longer submissive and weak, but rather brave and tough, masters of their own fate. This 'return', then, clearly belonged simultaneously to modern Zionist history and ancient biblical tradition; it could be equally explained in terms of secular political resurrection and in reference to religious redemption. Here more than anywhere else could those who were caught up in nationalist euphoria and those who were caught up in religious redemptive enthusiasm ignore the differences between them» (2010, p. 48)

The reestablishment of Kfar Etzion thus became a powerful symbol of the fusion between religious and secular Zionism, intertwining historical memory, national resilience and messianic aspirations, ultimately laying the foundation for the broader Israeli settlement movement in the West Bank.

A few weeks after the establishment of Kfar Etzion, some of the descendants of the Jews who had to flee Hebron after a massacre that swept away the Jewish community from the town in 1929 started to put pressure on the government to be allowed to resettle there. In April 1968 then, a group of 88 people was allowed to spend the Jewish festivity of Pesach (8 days) in town,

staying at the Park Hotel. At the head of this group there was Rav Moshe Levinger (1935 – 2015), another disciple of Rav Kook, friend of Porat and rabbi of the Nehalim *moshav* (a type of cooperative agricultural community similar to a *kibbutz*) from where many of the settlers of Kfar Etzion came from. Several members of the group disobeyed and remained in Hebron after the end of the festivity. In September, the government agreed to the development of a Jewish neighborhood in town and later, in 1970, thanks to the support of defense minister Dayan and labour minister Allon, it decided that a settlement would be established on the hill opposite the city of Hebron. It was thus founded Kiryat Arba, the “city of four”, whose name appeared in the sacred texts as the place where Abraham buried Sarah. The hill where the city was built was initially seized by the state for military purposes and then, after some time, left to the construction of the new settlement. This practice, the initial seizure of land for military purposes then given to the settlers, became in the following years a genuine *modus operandi* of the government to facilitate settlements in the West Bank (Marzano 2017, pp. 146-147). This time, compared to the establishment of Kfar Etzion, the religious character of this endeavor was more emphasized, but still maintained also a clear secular and political significance:

«This return, though it had a clear religious scent, could still be understood in both biblical and modern terms. Hebron too had a modern bridge between the ancient and the current. The Jewish community of Hebron had been wiped out in a pogrom two decades before Israel’s birth. Returning and renewing, modern politics and God’s promise, seemed close enough» (Taub 2010, p. 49).

Even if in practical terms the settlements were a clear success of the religious messianic Zionists community, and even more specifically of the inner circle of Rav Kook’s *Mercaz HaRav* school, this was not necessarily the perception in Israeli society at the time: «It was hardly considered a triumph of religious Zionism at the time. It was a triumph for hawks, and secular hawks still believed they could harness the young religious enthusiasts to their own purposes. The young religious enthusiasts, however, believed that their secular allies would soon be swept along by the near coming of redemption» (Taub 2010, p. 51).

In the eyes of the labor leadership, «religious settlers were an incidental curiosity within a political struggle that mainly took place elsewhere, in the cabinet and the Knesset, between hawks and doves. Rabbi Levinger’s band looked like folklore, not like politics» (Taub 2010, p. 52). In this context, though, erupted the 1973 Yom Kippur war. On October 6th, the day of the Jewish festivity of Yom Kippur, which provides for a day of prayer and fasting, Israel was taken by surprise by a combined attack from Egypt and Syria. After a tragic initial phase during which even the existence of the state seemed to be in danger, Israeli forces managed to counterattack

and the war ended in a substantial draw, without causing any territorial changes. The Israeli society perceived the war as a political failure of the labor leadership (Marzano 2017, p. 147). The euphoria and the feeling that anything was possible that characterized the years following the Six-Day war evaporated and gave way to a grim realism and a sharp awareness of the limits of Israel's political and military power (Taub 2010, pp. 51-54). This led the government to develop a more prudent attitude towards issues relating to the occupied territories, while messianic Zionists interpreted the war as labor pains preceding the days of the Messiah and as a wake-up call to engage even more actively in their activity of colonization. Because of this, «the differences between the political pragmatism of Labor Zionism and the boundless optimism of messianic settlers suddenly came into sharp focus». The deep ideological difference between the messianic settlers and the labor Zionists could no longer be ignored (Taub 2010, pp. 51-52).

In this context, the settlers decided to organize themselves politically and, in 1974, shortly after the war, they founded the extra parliamentary group "*Gush Emunim*" ("Bloc of the Faithful"). *Gush Emunim* was created by students of Rav Kook and he remained its leader until his death, in 1982. While the settlers' initial actions were based on the almost adventurous initiatives of some of their leaders, above all Porat and Rav Levinger, in that moment they felt the need to develop an organization to coordinate their efforts.

«The *Gush* was formed in direct reaction to what the settlers perceived as Israel's weakness in the face of postwar shuttle diplomacy, led by American secretary of state Henry Kissinger and designed to set in motion a process that would eventually lead to peace in exchange for large territorial concessions. It was the prospect of territorial compromise that worried the settlers most and moved them to action. They were no longer content to be cheerleaders, sitting on the sidelines and waiting for the state, or Zionism at large, to finally understand its role in the process of redemption. They were not content even just to prod it here and there in the right direction. They wanted greater influence. The *Gush* was not a political party. It was a movement. But it was formed in order to apply pressure on the political system from without. It was also the organ that would strategically plan and execute further extralegal settlement» (Taub 2010, p. 53).

Based on their vision that the entire land of Israel was sacred and promised to the Jews, every hypothesis that would have exchanged land for peace was perceived not only as unacceptable, but also as blasphemous. It was their duty to oppose it in every possible way.

*Gush Emunim* published a founding manifesto in which they described their vision and their scopes. They defined themselves as “a movement for the renewal of the Zionist endeavors” and in the following sections defined their scope and their vision of Zionism:

«To create a great revival movement in the Jewish people in order to realize the full scope of the Zionist vision, based on the understanding that the source of the vision lies in the Jewish heritage and the roots of Judaism, and that its goal is the complete redemption of the Jewish people and the entire world. [...] The illumination of the Jewish heritage firmly embedded in the foundation of the return to Zion imparts another, inestimably more profound dimension to the entire Zionist idea, embodying the meaning of our obligation toward the Land of Israel, through immigration and settlement, nurturing the message of Redemption that will shine steadily until the time is right.» (Taub 2010, pp. 54-55).

The manifesto presents simultaneously the attempt to introduce themselves as the continuators and legitimate heirs of the first socialist, pioneering Zionism and the introduction of elements that distance them in a fundamental way from it. One is the essentially religious perspective, which identifies redemption as the ultimate goal “for the entire world”. Another crucial one is the “obligation towards the Land of Israel”: the land, not the people. In this view of Zionism, the land is no more a mean through which Jewish people can achieve their goal (call it self-determination, a state, redemption or whatever), it gains a new centrality, it becomes a goal itself. There almost seems to be an unintentional reference to what Amos Oz wrote years earlier, but in a completely opposite sense. Rav Kook's vision has now finally taken shape in an explicitly religious-political organized movement.

The West Bank settlement movement led by *Gush Emunim* gained broad support across Israeli society, including from many who did not necessarily subscribe to a religious interpretation of Zionism. Arguably, this is exactly because of the above-mentioned ambivalence it demonstrated in its relationship with previous currents of Zionism:

«*Gush Emunim* managed to integrate the values and symbols of socialist Zionism into the messianic theology of Zvi Yehuda Kook. The settlers who went on to create settlements in the West Bank saw themselves - and presented themselves - as the authentic heirs of the first and second aliyah, since they took possession of the Zionist ethos and ideals that had characterized the early years of Yishuv [the Jewish community in Palestine before the foundation of the state of Israel] settlement, above all the conquest of the land, and incorporated them into the messianic framework that saw the colonization of Judea and Samaria as the duty of every Jew. In this way, religious Zionism subtracted from Labor Zionism the banner of values and symbols

on which the latter had founded its pre-eminence, and presented itself as the authentic interpreter of the Zionist message» (Marzano 2017, p. 150)

*Gush Emunim* presented itself as the new bursting torch of Zionism in a moment in which all the others were in crisis (Shavit 2014, p. 216).

While the relationship between *Gush Emunim* and the Labor governments remained ambivalent, with some members supporting the movement's activities and other trying to oppose it, the situation changed when, in 1977, Menachem Begin's *Likud* party unexpectedly won the election and formed the first right-wing government in Israel's history. Begin had been a fervent supporter of *Gush Emunim* and had participated during the previous years in many of the movement's marches, ceremonies and inauguration of settlements. Under his leadership, the government strongly supported the settlers, both financially and politically, and every time there was a disagreement, the movement prevailed (Rubinstein 2000, p. 117). Even the Camp David Accords, which saw the restitution of Sinai to Egypt, did not hinder this relationship. The main goal, the settlement of Judea and Samaria (as *Gush Emunim* referred to the West Bank), was still shared. In the following years, then, the large-scale settlement of expropriated land took on a new dimension with the creation of "dormitory suburbs" in the West Bank, enticing many Israelis to buy affordable homes within a short commute from their workplaces. *Gush Emunim* served as the ideological pioneers, paving the way for thousands of ordinary Israelis to follow in their footsteps. This alliance between the secular heirs of the revisionist Zionists and the faithful messianic settlers changed and reshaped the Israeli right:

«Thus, after the 1967 watershed, the *Gush* became the spearhead, the guiding light, of the new Israeli Right. This new Right had three components: the Labor supporters of the Movement for Greater Israel; the new religious zealots; and the old nationalist Right, formerly the Jabotinsky-led Revisionists, now transformed into the Begin-led *Herut* Party. The *Gush* transformed the old Revisionist Right. The new Right was hardly recognizable as the heir of the old nationalists» (Rubinstein 2000, p. 118).

Menachem Begin was a disciple of Jabotinsky, a man who «was so detached from ways Judaic that he advocated the adoption of Latin script for modern Hebrew» (Rubinstein 2000, p. 118). There is no doubt that the founding leader of Revisionist Zionism would have laughed at the theories of Rav Kook and that he would have rejected even the blandest connection between the establishment of the state of Israel and the advent of the messiah. Nonetheless, the new contemporary Israeli right would have found one of the keys for its ideological success in a pact between his heirs and the most extremist fringes of religious Zionism. This ideology proved to be immensely successful and, with a few exceptions, dominated Israeli politics in the

following decades, until present times: «In short, the religious Zionist component of society has acted as an ideological incubator, motivational force and, above all, as an executive body leading the right-wing camp, with enormous influence on the supporters of these ideas and on government institutions» (Bar-Tal 2024, p. 196).

The evolution of this ideological block in society provoked a shift in the perception of Jewish-Israeli identity, which, in Bar-Tal's opinion, radicalized. The supporters of the "Great Israel" theory, along with the settlers and their accomplices in government put the occupied territories at the center of this new collective identity. They put the West Bank at the center of the nation and gave centrality to biblical themes that would grant the exclusive property of that land to the Jews. In line with this, there has been for example the elimination of the green line from maps and the renomination of the West Bank with its biblical names Judea and Samaria. Bar-Tal argues:

«The occupied territories have been presented as the place where the roots that developed into Jewish identity originated, so that, it is argued, Jews have a right to the territories. This ideology fits perfectly with the narratives supporting a continuation of the conflict as presented in the ethos of the conflict and in the collective memory: the arguments of the land of Israel belonging exclusively to the Jewish nation; Zionism, not in the sense of being inclusive and open, but rather in a narrow exclusive and limited sense, excluding the rest of the world and other peoples. In the emphasis of the existential danger facing the Jewish people throughout the generations, the exclusion of the Jewish people throughout history, the heroes who defended the land, the dehumanization of the enemies who sought to harm the Jewish people, the victimization that characterizes Jewish history, the patriotic spirit that beats in the heart of the nation, and the desire to live in peace (but only ideally): all this has been absorbed as the foundation of the collective identity» (Bar-Tal 2024, pp. 197-198).

This vision of Israeli identity carries with it important consequences. In fact, this new identity, designed under national-religious guidelines, has become an obstacle to any political solution that would require compromises on the division of land and require a perception of Arabs as human beings and as equal partners in a peace agreement. It is constantly fueling and being fueled by the conflict, for which it does not present any long-term solution. Furthermore, it has also excluded the Arab minority of Israeli citizens from the political space, as Arabs are not considered legitimate decision-makers in the country nor can they be accepted as coalition partners in the government (Bar-Tal 2024, p. 200).

In conclusion, the ideological framework that emerged in the wake of the Six-Day War continues to shape Israeli policies and perceptions, presenting significant obstacles to any

negotiated resolution to the conflict. Synthetizing very well, it is undeniable what Morris wrote: «the settlers were an expression of the will to make the achievements of '67 final. And as such they would have been an obstacle on the road to peace, as many Israeli, Arab and American politicians would have noted in the 1980s and 1990s» (2001, p. 403). By placing the West Bank at the heart of national consciousness and intertwining Zionism with religious narratives, this ideological shift has reinforced an exclusionary vision of Jewish-Israeli identity that leaves no room for compromise. The initially marginal ideas firstly developed by Rav Kook the father, then reinterpreted by his son and spread by the *Mercaz HaRav* school found in the post Six-Day war political scenario and societal climate the possibility to blossom and exert a fatal fascination on important sectors of Israeli society.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyze the most relevant currents of Zionism and to explore the evolution of the relationship it has had with the Jewish religion. The Zionist approaches selected have been Herzl's, sometime referred to as "political", Zionism, as expressed in his pamphlet "The Jewish State"; Socialist Zionism, the ideology that guided the Jewish leadership who had the most predominant role in the foundation of the state of Israel, embodied by its leader, Ben Gurion; and Revisionist Zionism, the militarist movement considered to be the originating core of the Israeli right, personified by its charismatic guide, Jabotinsky.

By analyzing Herzl's "The Jewish State", it is possible to identify some of the key-features of the author's vision of Zionism. Herzl was a convinced liberal and, throughout the text, he includes many references to modernity and even technological advancements, highlighting an almost positivist perspective on history. In this context, he presents the establishment of a Jewish state not only as the solution to the "Jewish Question" but also as a form of progress that, through the "normalization" of the Jews, would benefit humanity as a whole. The pamphlet adopts a very practical tone and focuses much more on pragmatic issues than on philosophical or historical considerations. In Herzl's view, Jews should activate politically and mediate with the global powers to obtain a piece of land where they could build their state. In order to do so, they should create a series of agencies and organizations, that will soon take life and represent a fundamental tool for the Zionists to succeed in the following decades. Herzl did not have a strict preference on where the Jewish state should be placed and did not refer to it as Israel yet, nonetheless he envisioned a secular, liberal, in majority Jewish state and presented a pragmatic political roadmap to reach this objective.

Ben Gurion and the Socialist Zionists were surely influenced by Herzl but, in a way, substituted Liberalism with Socialism. Ben Gurion's vision of Zionism was rooted in the principles of labor, community, and collectivism, which are values associated with socialism, but these ideals were ultimately secondary to the overarching historical objective of founding the state of Israel. Like Herzl, who foresaw that the lower social classes would be the first to migrate, socialist Zionists viewed the working class as the driving force behind nation-building. However, they placed less faith in the support of global powers and saw their mission as a revolutionary endeavor. While Herzl prioritized securing legal recognition of a territory as the first step, Ben Gurion probably regarded it as the final stage of the process. Also, by this time,

the idea of establishing a Jewish state anywhere other than Palestine was no longer a subject of debate.

Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism has been often associated with fascism, and it presents some common features with it, particularly in its militarist approach. Nonetheless, its leader remained a liberal throughout his life and, arguably, the adjective that would more suitably describe his views is Nietzschean: Jews should aspire to become new *Übermensch* and his political plans exude will to power. While revisionist Zionists did not necessarily develop a plan of the society of the Jewish state, they immediately identified opposition and hostility towards the Arabs as the key issue around which future policies should be developed. While this trend of Zionism seemed in crisis under the light of the great success of the Socialists, Jabotinsky's disciples will later be extremely successful in the Israeli political arena from 1977 onwards.

All these three currents of Zionism share two decisive elements: a secular approach and, to a greater or lesser extent, the ethos of the "New Jew". Both Herzl's, Ben Gurion's and Jabotinsky's perspectives maintained a strictly secular view on the Jewish people, considered much more as an ethnic group rather than a religious community, and did not attribute any theological value to their endeavors. This view is also reinforced by the fact that their leaders, and the vast majority of their followers, were non-observant. This translated also to the fact that they envisioned the establishment of a typically modern and secular state. In this context, the ethos of the "new Jew" functioned as a central unifying principle within Zionism, promoting both individual and collective transformation. It sought to overcome the perceived vulnerabilities of the Diaspora and cultivate a strong, independent, and modern identity. Grounded in cultural revival, linguistic renewal, and a secular reimagining of Jewish history, this ideal shaped the Zionist movement's goal of establishing not just a state but a new society capable of forging its own determined and confident future.

Religious communities reacted to Zionists initiatives in different ways. Most of them refused them, believing that, as they would go against the most adopted interpretations of the sacred texts, they should have been considered blasphemous. This provoked a series of reaction that went from indifference to explicit opposition, arriving even in some cases to extreme positions, such as holding Zionism responsible for the Holocaust. The response of orthodox communities living in Israel can be considered as a "parallel monologue" to Zionism: their world view and priorities are too distant from the Zionists' and move forward without intertwining.

On the other hand, some religious communities endorsed Zionism and tried to conciliate it with their perspective. The most relevant religious contributor to Zionism in its initial phase

has been Rav Reines' Mizrahi movement. Their view was characterized by a clear distinction of the political and the theological levels. Zionism was to be considered as a purely political movement which would have allowed for the creation of a space where Jewish tradition and religious study could have flourished, without attributing to it any deterministic or messianic value. In a moment in which antisemitism was on the rise and the world of the study of the sacred texts was potentially in danger, Zionism represented a practical solution, nothing more. Mizrahi provided a framework for religious Jews to engage in Zionist efforts without compromising their adherence to Jewish law.

A different way to conciliate Zionism and religion was developed by Rav Abraham Isaac Kook. Before the state was even founded, he started attributing to the Zionists' successes a mythological and theological value. He saw in Zionism the beginning of a process of redemption in which it was every Jew's duty to participate. Even if the Zionists were mostly secular, they were unknowingly acting in function of a greater divine design. These ideas were then reinterpreted and reinforced by Rav Abraham Isaac Kook's son, Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook. What derived was the idea that they were already living in messianic times and should work to develop a truly Jewish state, synthesis of Judaism and political sovereignty, on every piece of the land that was promised by God to Abraham, and therefore sacred. While Rav Kook the father created a possibility for cooperation between religious and secular Zionism, his son went beyond, claiming the entirety of the land of Israel and justifying this claim in biblical terms, going then beyond any political authority. This view combined religion, nationalism and fetishism of the land. This interpretation of history and Zionism were then promoted by the Merkaz Ha-Rav yeshiva and, while it remained marginal during the years of the establishment of the state, it gained more and more influence after the Six-Day war, with important consequences on Israeli society.

The Six-Day war and the consequent Occupation played then a key role in rebalancing the relationship between religion and Zionism, which at this point has already produced the well-established state of Israel. Preceded by weeks of anxiety and apprehension, Israel's fulminous victory in the Six-Day war opened a completely new phase in the history of the Middle East and ignited a climate of euphoria in the country. The occupation of an area three and a half times bigger than its territory put Israel in front of the dilemma of which strategy to adopt. This choice, according to Amos Oz, would have represented a decisive crossroad for Zionism: Zionism as liberation of people or redemption of land? It is now clear that Israel chose the second, and began a military occupation that is still ongoing.

The disciples of Rav Kook, who were already advocating for the redemption of the land, saw the perfect chance to act and, with great strategic ability, started to settle in the occupied territories, starting from places with ambivalent symbolical importance, both political and religious. Exploiting the divisions inside the government between hawks and doves, the settlers gained more and more relevance and, in 1974, organized themselves in a movement called Gush Emunim. They explicitly defined themselves as the renovators of Zionism and presented themselves as the heirs of the pioneer Zionists of the first hour. Nonetheless, they had a very different vision and objectives, including an essentially religious perspective and an alleged “obligation towards the Land of Israel”, which in this view clearly includes the West Bank. With the victory of the Israeli right in the 1977 elections, the movement began to be politically and financially supported by the government and settlements expanded massively. This alliance between the settlers and the revisionist right, which shared the objective of maintaining control over the West Bank, represented one of the core axles of the new Israeli Right, which will dominate the country’s politics in the following decades.

The development of this ideological bloc led to a transformation in the perception of Jewish-Israeli identity, which, inevitably, became more radicalized. The West Bank was progressively put more and more at the center of the nation and of its national identity, with the consequence of making any political solution to the conflict that would require compromises on the division of land virtually impossible. Intertwining Zionism with religious narratives, this religious-nationalist identity inevitably challenges the premises on which the original Zionists had founded the state:

«Israel has closed its doors to the world dreamt of by many of the Zionist founders, a nation like all other nations: open, involved and integrated in the international community. And in many senses, it has abandoned the identity cultivated when the state was first established, an identity that emphasized the establishment of a new Israeli culture in the spirit of Jewish-universal values, one that would connect to the ancient identity of the nation based on the millennial Jewish culture, and a culture to be developed with the aspiration of a normal national life and membership in the family of nations» (Bar-Tal 2024, p. 200).

If Herzl’s original Zionism’s goal was the normalization of the relationship between Jews and the rest of the world, it can be argued that this objective is not even considered by the new Israeli messianic right, which, on the contrary, would advocate for its exceptionality.

Finally, even if what Bar-Tal writes is true, Israel remains a complicated country with many identities and opposing factions. Among them, and many other, remain all of those that have been described through this text and each of them developed a specific narrative:

«Beneath the surface of Jewish society in Israel, there is substantial disagreement about the ultimate purpose of the state and the appropriate interpretation of the entire Zionist enterprise. Everyday challenges (such as external security threats) often silence this disagreement by pushing it beyond conscious perception, but sometimes they stir it up and then it bubbles to the surface with full force (as in the discussion of the relationship between state and religion). However, the ebb and flow of national consensus among Jews in Israel, as evidenced by current events, cannot mask the blatant existence of ideological factions with opposing versions of the Israeli narrative. Each holds a unique and mutually exclusive view of the relationship between the diasporic past and the current sense of statehood» (Stern 2018, p. 11).

Because of this, Israel has and will find it always difficult to develop a univocal collective identity. Arguably though, the evolving overlap of religious and Zionist narratives has significantly shaped the dominant political discourse, reinforcing a vision of Israel that prioritizes territorial claims and religious-historical justifications over the pragmatic and secular ideals of its early founders. As these competing narratives continue to clash, the future of Israeli identity remains uncertain, with deep internal divisions and external pressures ensuring that the debate over the nation's character and direction will persist for years to come, often at the expenses of the oppressed Palestinians.

## Bibliography

### Books:

- Burg, A. (2011). *Sconfiggere Hitler*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.
- Cohen, I. (1959). *Theodor Herzl: Founder of Political Zionism*. London: Thomas Yoseloff.
- Goldberg, D. J. (1999). *Verso la terra promessa: Storia del pensiero sionista*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Greilsammer, I. (2007). *Il Sionismo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Hazon, Y. (2019). *Le virtù del nazionalismo*. Milano: Guerini e Associati.
- Herzl, T. (1989). *The Jewish State*. Introduction by L. Lipsky. Biography by A. Bein. New York: Dover Publications.
- Herzl, T. (2021). *The Jewish State*. New York: Passerino. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2905882/the-jewish-state-pdf>.
- Jabotinsky, V. (1949) *Early Zionist Writings*. Jerusalem: Jabotinsky Institute.
- Kornberg, J. (1993). *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Margalit, A. (2010). *Volti di Israele: lo stato e la religione nella società israeliana*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Marzano, A. (2017). *Storia dei sionismi. Lo Stato degli ebrei da Herzl a oggi*. Roma: Carocci.
- Marzano, A. (2022). *Terra laica: La religione e i conflitti in Medio Oriente*. Roma: Viella.
- Morris, B. (2003). *Vittime: storia del conflitto arabo-sionista 1881-2001*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- Oz, A. (2004). *Contro il fanatismo*. Milano: Feltrinelli
- Oz, A. (2017). *Cari fanatici*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Poliakov, L. (2003). *The History of Anti-Semitism. Vol. 4: Suicidal Europe, 1870–1933*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rubinstein, A. (2000). *From Herzl to Rabin: The Changing Image of Zionism*. New York: Holmes & Meier.
- Shavit, A. (2015). *La mia terra promessa. Israele: l'utopia incompiuta*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Sternhell, Z. (1999). *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Taub, G. (2010). *The Settlers*. 1st edn. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Traverso, E. (2013). *La fine della modernità ebraica. Dalla critica al potere*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Traverso, E. (2024). *Gaza davanti alla storia*. Roma: Laterza.
- Yehoshua, A.B. (2012). *Ebreo, israeliano, sionista: concetti da precisare*. Roma: E/O.

### **Book Chapters:**

- Stern, Y. Z. (2018). 'Lo Stato di Israele e l'identità nazionale', in Oz-Salzberger, F. e Stern, Y. Z. (eds) *Studi sul pensiero politico israeliano*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 3-31.
- Taub, G. (2018). 'Che cos'è il sionismo?', in Oz-Salzberger, F. e Stern, Y. Z. (eds) *Studi sul pensiero politico israeliano*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 33-57.

### **Journal Articles:**

- Rabinovich, I. (2018). The Rabin Assassination as a Turning Point in Israel's History. *Israel Studies*, 23(3), 25–29.

### **Websites:**

- Cordall, S. S. (2025) 'What is Israel's deadly "Iron Wall" military raid in the West Bank's Jenin', *Al Jazeera*, 23 January. Available at:  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/23/what-is-israels-deadly-iron-wall-military-raid-in-the-west-banks-jenin> (Accessed: 24/01/2025)
- Ginsburg, M. (2018) 'In forgotten article after Six Day War, Amos Oz warned of "eternal annexation"', *The Times of Israel*, 31 December. Available at:  
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-forgotten-article-after-six-day-war-amos-oz-warned-of-eternal-annexation/> (Accessed: 08/02/2025).
- Jabotinsky, V. (1923) *The Iron Wall*. Available at:  
<https://en.jabotinsky.org/media/9747/the-iron-wall.pdf> (Accessed: 30/01/2025)