

## ONE

### POST-ZIONISM IN HISTORY

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On the whole, I am inclined to dismiss the “condition of postmodernity” as not so much a historical condition corresponding to a period of capitalism but as a psychological condition corresponding to a period in the biography of the western Left intelligentsia.

—Ellen Meiksins Wood, “Modernity, Postmodernity or Capitalism?”

In his 2000 book, *Localization a Global Manifesto*, the economist Colin Hines wrote, “localization is a process which reverses the trend of globalization by discriminating in favor of the local. Depending on the context, the ‘local’ is predominantly defined as part of the nation state.”<sup>1</sup> To Hines, the adverse effects of globalization, namely the manner in which transnational corporations and international capital have become—with the aid of the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF—de facto the new world government, could only be countered by a local government that has the interests and welfare of its citizens in mind.

For Hines, the world at the turn of the twenty-first century was defined by a basic struggle between a dominant global empire and peoples whose lives and well-being are determined by the interests of that empire. The modern empire, in Hines’s conceptual scheme, does not rely on direct political rule to satisfy its economic and political needs; it is very much a late capitalist, or as some would argue a postmodern, entity. It does not rely on steam engines, the assembly line, or the combustible engine to assert its power; the Internet, the satellite, and the jet constitute its infrastructure. This empire is, in many ways, a virtual entity, operating everywhere and nowhere. It has no traditional center of power, and most of its operations are carried out in cyberspace, by entities identified by their login name or their ticker symbol.

Over the past three decades, postmodernist critics have proclaimed that what Hines and other critics have identified as the forces of the modern-day empire was, in fact, a new cultural condition or epoch that offered a new and exciting horizon for human interaction. To the postmodernists, by the 1970s the Age of Aquarius, of anti-war struggles, gave way to the age of the floating signifier; difference became *différance*, and the weak and the dispossessed came to be known as the silenced other. In the West, as traditional modes of production were taken over by information technologies, consumerism, and the culture industry, the new intellectual battlefield was over signs, symbols, and means of expression. Power, we were constantly reminded, was everywhere, irrational and erratic, and it could not be harnessed or overcome; all that the radical activist was left with was the attempt to subvert the symbolic order and expose its limitations. And if there is no well-defined center, if there is no universal vantage point, then, as some critics have argued, there is no longer a system—perhaps we indeed entered, at least in the West, a truly post-ideological age.<sup>2</sup> Theory was no longer viewed as transformative; it became an end of itself.<sup>3</sup> Critics accepted the totality of the new world order and its technologies of power as traditional class and national politics were replaced by identity politics. And, as Lyotard and others have proclaimed, this new era also signified the end of the nation-state (the very symbol of an ideological apparatus) and ushered in a post-national age of globalization—the transnational, border-crossing empire.<sup>4</sup>

But by the close of the twentieth century, the veil of the virtual had begun to lift, exposing some of the real forces and powers that continue to govern our historical reality and bringing the politics of the real back to the forefront. The anti-globalization movement; the failure of neo-liberal policies in developing nations; the growing problems with foreign workers; and, of course, terrorism have brought the West back to, borrowing the image of the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* via Slavoj Žižek, "the desert of the real," and have shown that fundamental differences and power struggles are still at the very core of civilization. And in this new political reality, the infinite possibilities of (virtual) wandering in the boundless expanses of the new empire—between the high-tech centers of Herzlia in Israel and Palo Alto or between Cambridge, England and Cambridge, Massachusetts—began, perhaps, to lose their luster. Instead, people have become more aware of other forms of travel in the late-capitalist empire: of immigrants cramped in cargo ships trying to make it safely to Europe or North America; of Mexicans trying to cross the border north to the U.S.; of Sudanese refugees trying to enter Israel; the long lines at security checkpoints at airports. Whereas in the happy 1990s the nation-state and the notion of the exercising of sovereignty were seen as relics of a bygone era, in the twenty-first century

they are again being regarded, much as they were by nationalists in the nineteenth century, as a viable framework to resist the globalizing forces of empire and their attendant violence, giving people a concrete sphere in which to exercise their basic political and social rights.

In a 2000 article, Adi Ophir, arguably the most comprehensive post-modern critic in Israel, has claimed that “the Zionist epoch, an epoch in which the Zionist project held center stage, has come to an end. The major political, social, and cultural problems faced by Israeli and Diaspora Jews today should no longer be formulated within the framework of a Zionist discourse.”<sup>5</sup> In “The End of History?” written in 1989, just as the Berlin Wall was about to come down and with it the rest of the Soviet Empire, Francis Fukuyama predicted that in the period after the end of history, when the great ideological contradictions have been resolved, “there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.”<sup>6</sup> In his article, published a year before the attacks of 9/11 and just before the second *Intifada* brought the Oslo peace process between Israelis and Palestinians to a violent end, Ophir similarly predicted that “in a few years, Zionism will become a relic, an object for museums and history departments only. Post-Zionism will be remembered as the name for the moment in which Israeli Jews became fully aware of the passing of the Zionist epoch in the history of the Jews.”<sup>7</sup> For Ophir, the age of Zionism—a modernist, national ideology—has passed, ushering in a post-Zionist epoch, which embodies the sensitivities of the postmodern world. Writing in a time when the Oslo process was still thought of as viable, when a plurality of Israelis still believed that peace was attainable and that the prosperity generated by massive immigration from the former Soviet Union and the high-tech boom of the 1990s would continue unhindered, one can understand Ophir’s sense of historical certainty—a revolutionary national movement with a collectivist, socialist ethos might seem like a relic, indeed. (As Terry Eagleton has argued, late-capitalism is fueled by a [Lyotardean] belief in infinity as opposed to socialism and its inherent sense of human limitations: “Capital accumulation goes on forever, in love with a dream of infinity. The myth of eternal progress is just a horizontalised form of heaven. Socialism, by contrast, is not about reaching for the stars but returning us to earth. It is about building a politics on a recognition of human frailty and finitude.”<sup>8</sup>) But a decade or so later, with the peace process all but dead, and with the growing economic uncertainty that has characterized the first decade of the new millennium, couldn’t it be argued that what Ophir was accurately describing in 2000 were changes that took place in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s, changes that brought about the transformation of Israel into an advanced late-capitalist society and the emergence of an Israeli postmodern (or post-Zionist) culture, but that by

the time Ophir was declaring the death of Zionism, post-Zionism itself was waning? Or, to put it differently, isn't the fundamental question that Ophir's argument raises, "What were the historical conditions that gave rise to post-Zionism in Israel?" And is post-Zionism still relevant today in the twenty-first century? This chapter sets out to explore the historical conditions that brought about the "post-Zionist condition" in Israel; to examine how this social and cultural condition facilitated the emergence of post-Zionism as an intellectual and ideological platform; and to explore how the historical changes of the twenty-first century may impact our understanding of post-Zionism and what may lie ahead beyond it.

### THE POST-ZIONIST CONDITION

From its inception, Zionism was an ideology predicated on internal contradictions: torn between its universalist claims and its obligation to a particular group of people, trying to be a modern secular movement that is committed to the preservation and maintenance of an ancient religious tradition; but it remained viable, in the early years of statehood, and provided a unifying framework to a highly divided and fractured society, as long as Israeli Jews felt that they were facing extraordinary challenges. In the aftermath of the 1948 War, in which nearly 1% of the new state's Jewish population perished, and facing the challenge of absorbing new immigrants who would, in a matter of a decade, more than double the small country's population, collectivism was the order of the day in Israel.<sup>9</sup>

The early years of Israeli independence comprised the era of *mamlachtiyut*, a concept associated primarily with the country's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, that has been variously translated as "statism," "nationalism," or "republicanism."<sup>10</sup> In that period, ideological and social tensions were relegated to the margins of the public debate, and expressions of individuality were regarded as a hedonistic challenge to the collectivist ethos of self-sacrifice and patriotism. As the political scientist Yaron Ezrahi has described it, "In the atmosphere of nation-building, the absorption of mass immigration (mostly from poor countries), and the state of almost permanent war with the Arabs, liberal individualism could not be attractive or a feasible practice. It was identified with negative values that appeared opposed to Israeli communal idealism."<sup>11</sup> The sociologist and social anthropologist Haim Hazan has argued, "From Zionist thinkers to Israeli citizens, collectivism has been long perceived not as threatening the autonomy of the individual but rather as an emancipatory force. Collectivism became the 'civil religion' of Israel."<sup>12</sup>

This was the period of *tzena* (austerity), a government program that rationed food, clothes, furniture, and other consumer goods (the program

officially lasted from 1949 to 1959, and though there were several changes in its scope and limitations, it defined the social and economic contours of Israel's first decade of existence).<sup>13</sup> The daily routine of Israelis at that period included long expeditions in search of basic necessities and standing in long lines to receive their meager rations (and, of course, a thriving black market).<sup>14</sup> Tom Segev has noted that the poet and Knesset member Uri Zvi Greenberg proposed to call the *tzena* program "pioneer poverty" and wanted the program to become the country's life-long constitution.<sup>15</sup>

Already in the 1950s, some changes began a long process of economic expansion that would ultimately lead Israel from the Spartan collectivism that marked its first decade to the unbridled consumerism of the 1990s. The reparations agreement with West Germany that was signed in 1952 provided Israel with 3 billion DMs (Israel received this sum over the period 1953–1965), and the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli ships after the 1956 War against Egypt offered the burgeoning Israeli economy new trading markets in Africa and Asia. But it was in the 1960s that Israel began its rapid transition from a heavily state-controlled economy to a more free-market economy.

The 1962 economic reforms launched a process of dismantling protective economic policies and loosening restrictions on imports (the Israeli currency was devalued by some 50% and the Israeli market was exposed to greater competition from foreign markets).<sup>16</sup> In the 1960s, the government made substantial investments in defense and construction projects (both civilian and military) that were also sourced out to private contractors (between 1961 and 1972, Israel's GDP grew annually by an average of 9.7%). And all these processes were dramatically intensified by the 1967 War.

Today, we tend to focus on the political implications of what Israelis call the Six-Day War: the conquest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Golan and Sinai and its impact on Arab-Israeli relations and international politics more broadly. But the economic impact of the war on Israeli society was profound and mostly overlooked. Initially it was the euphoria that engulfed Israelis after their stunning victory that helped lead the country out of a prolonged recession. But soon thereafter, some of the more tangible outcomes of the war helped expand the Israeli economy: the vast new territories and abundant cheap, unregulated labor. Israelis, who lived for nearly two decades in a sense of claustrophobic fear, were suddenly the masters of a regional power. And two of the regions that Israel captured, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, were densely populated, but unlike in 1948, Israel did not annex these territories (excluding East Jerusalem), thus potentially making the local Palestinians Israeli citizens, nor did it expel a large number of the local residents. Rather, Israel imposed military rule on the newly conquered territories: hundreds of thousands of people now

lived under Israeli control, without the protection of Israeli labor and civil laws, and in a matter of few years they would become an integral part of the Israeli work force, dominating the construction, textile, farming, and service industries (by 1973, roughly 60,000 Palestinians who were not Israeli citizens worked in Israel; Israel's population then was slightly more than three million).<sup>17</sup>

If the 1950s in Israel was a decade of incredible national challenges that called for collective sacrifice, the 1960s was a decade of expansion and development. Israelis ceased to view the world from the perspective of a society caught in an existential battle for survival (in the period that preceded the 1967 War, when IDF reserve units were mobilized and as Nasser closed off the Gulf of Aqaba, ordered UN troops out of the Sinai, and advanced his military towards the Israeli border, Israelis began to use Holocaust imagery to describe their perceived state of siege—several weeks later, they regarded themselves as invincible).<sup>18</sup> Even Hannah Arendt, not the most ardent supporter of Israel to say the least, couldn't hide her joy with the outcome of the war. In a letter to Gertrud and Karl Jaspers dated June 10, 1967, the last day of the war, she wrote, "The Israelis did a wonderful job, even though Nasser was a paper Tiger."<sup>19</sup>

After the 1967 War, personal pursuits began to erode the overwhelming grip of a collectivist, Zionist ideology on the daily experiences of Israelis. As Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled put it,

Labor's hegemony had been eroding . . . ever since, in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, it became paralyzed by conflicting pulls. As against the lure of the past—the state-building project of piecemeal colonial expansion and settlement over which it had presided almost since the beginning of the century—stood the "New Israel"—an emergent civil society whose key actors sought to scale back the state-building efforts, pursue vigorous economic development.<sup>20</sup>

And these social and economic changes had some important cultural implications: They brought some of the characteristics of the rebellious spirit of the 1960s from the West to Israel.

Writing on the relationship between abundance and creativity, and suggesting that it is in fact abundance, not necessity, that is the mother of invention, Adam Gopnik has offered the following metaphor: "The early bird races to the worm and, worn out, croaks the same few flat notes as his fathers; the songbird that wakes at ten and ambles to the worm of his choice in a land where worms are cheap has time and energy to get up on a branch and improvise a new song."<sup>21</sup> Moving away, ever gradually, from

the all-encompassing austerity of a Soviet-like statist ethos, Israelis began to discover the (hitherto all but forbidden) attractions of consumerism and individualism. To draw on Gopnik's imagery, they ceased to be Spartan early birds that dressed, ate, celebrated like their fathers and began to act more and more like proud songbirds. Or as Arendt wrote in another letter to the Jaspers dated October 1, 1967, "Israel: In many respects, in most actually, very encouraging. It's really quite wonderful that an entire nation reacts to a victory like that not by bellowing hurrah but with a real orgy of tourism—everybody has to go have a look at the newly conquered territory."<sup>22</sup> As Arendt so acutely observed, for Israelis, after the war, collectivist mobilization gave way to tourism, the activity of affluence and leisure par excellence.

One of the principle characteristics of the 1960s culture in the West, and also in Israel, was the popular revolt against the "establishment" and the conservative values that it stood for. In some important ways, this revolt was not all that different from the modernist explosion of the turn of the previous century that challenged the accepted means of representation of Western culture. Artists looked for new ways to experience and describe the world. They sought to uncover the complexity of human consciousness and release it, artistically, from strict representational conventions. Some of the leading writers who emerged onto the Israeli cultural scene in the 1960s explored ways to represent reality while liberating the individual experience and point of view. A. B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, for example, experimented with new narrative forms that challenged the old authoritative voice of the Zionist novel while offering a critical look at some of the core values of Israeli society.<sup>23</sup> And Ya'acov Shabtai, in the quintessentially high modernist *Zichron Devarim* (*Past Continuous*, 1977), stretched the limits of modern Hebrew syntactical forms while depicting the disintegration of the Zionist collectivist ethos.

Another, and perhaps the more important, aspect of the 1960s "modernist" outburst were new technologies and the artistic options that they created. New visual technologies allowed artists and movie directors to compose and decompose visual images that went well beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries that the Cubists or Dadaists had to contend with. In Israel, several movie directors reacted directly to this avant-gardiste spirit: The movies of Uri Zohar (*A Hole in the Moon*, 1965; *Peeping Toms*, 1972) and Jacques Katmor (*A Woman's Case*, 1969), influenced by Fellini's carnivalesque collages and Michelangelo Antonioni's probing into the essence of representation, offered both idiosyncratic narratives and a portrayal of an Israeli equivalent of 1960s counter-culture. But what characterized the counter-culture of that period was not necessarily high art (early twentieth century avant-garde rarely broke the limits of the museum or the literary salon) but rather its dissemination into popular culture.

The demographic and economic “boom” that followed the Second World War created by the 1960s a young and affluent society that turned culture into a central consumer product. Radio, television, and cinema rendered culture more accessible and allowed the cultural codes of the counter-culture to penetrate a larger proportion of the population. As opposed to earlier popular protest movements, the 1960s counter-culture was motivated by abundance of resources and free time that also enabled the masses to consume more cultural products. Or as Terry Eagleton phrased it, “The post-war economic boom may have been on its last legs by the late 1960s, but it was still setting the political pace. Many of the problems which preoccupied militant students and radical theorists in the West were ones bred by progress, not poverty.”<sup>24</sup> This was a cultural movement that did not speak in the name of universal redemption; rather, it represented a revolt against institutional stagnation in the name of individual expression. It was the kind of movement that allowed a generation to define itself as culturally different from the previous generation. Hair, clothes, drugs, and music became the rebellious symbols of the era. And from the sounds of the electric guitar of Aris San—the Greek musician who became the godfather of Israeli rock n’ roll in the 1960s with his unique synthesis of traditional Greek music and Anglo-American electric rock—in the clubs in Jaffa, to Arik Einstein singing about the rebellion in Prague, to the protagonists of Uri Zohar’s *Peeping Toms*, who, like the young characters in Antonioni’s *Zabriskie Point*, were seeking alternative lifestyles outside the warm yet stifling embrace of the establishment, this spirit of rebellion, against the perceived stifling uniformity and conformity of the previous decades, also reached the shores of Israel (albeit in a somewhat more muted form than in the West).

Gilberto Tofano’s movie *Siege* from 1969 might be the most pronounced artistic expression of the kind of social and cultural changes that Israel was experiencing at the time. The movie follows the attempts of Tamar, a war widow with a young son, whose husband died in the 1967 War, to come to terms with her personal loss while negotiating societal expectations. Tamar is expected by her neighbors and by her husband’s fellow soldiers to dress and behave in a certain, restrained manner; any manifestation of individuality becomes the source of rumors and innuendos. In one scene in the movie, Tofano juxtaposes images of Tamar in Dizingoff Street, then the main commercial street in Tel Aviv, that are themselves interspersed with pictures of swinging London, and images of Tamar, dressed in black, at an official memorial ceremony. On the street Tamar sees televisions that have just arrived in Israel that year; she observes the latest fashions; she buys a pop record (that image is followed by the picture of a Beatles album), a mini skirt, and a wig. This scene is constructed like some psychedelic collage in



which consumer goods, in a very Warholian manner, become the source of individualistic rebellion—commodities allow Tamar an escape from the rigid demands that society imposes on her and allow her (if only for a fleeting moment) to unleash her deepest wants and desires. And this was the kind of rebellion that was only possible in a post-1967 Israel: a rebellion fueled by newly found abundance.

The social and economic changes in the West also had a deep impact on the politics of the left—the camp from which the 1960s counter-culture emerged (and which had dominated the Zionist movement and later the State of Israel since the 1920s). If, until the 1960s, the socialist left in the West was still closely identified and affiliated with labor unions and the struggle for workers' rights, then by that decade the working class, the historical subject of the left, ceased to be the driving political force in the West.<sup>25</sup> If the historical image of the left consisted of a white, working-class male who lived in a rough urban environment (or in the Zionist case, as we will discuss in chapter 5 of this book, the pioneering laborer)—a kind of antithesis to the refinement and cleanliness of the bourgeoisie—then starting in the 1960s, students (mostly from the middle classes), professionals, and women came to be associated with the political subjects of the left.<sup>26</sup>

As Perry Anderson has convincingly shown, post-World War II Western Marxism, which in many ways provided the intellectual backbone for the student movements of the 1960s, all but abandoned the economic and materialist analysis of society. Thinkers like Adorno and Marcuse ultimately accepted the hegemony of the market economy and turned their critical gaze toward the cultural realm: to the way the culture industry sustains the market and its logic.<sup>27</sup> In an era of prosperity and consumerism, the classical lexicon of Marxism seemed anachronistic, as some relic of an industrial past that had all but vanished from the West; in a society in which culture is a dominant commodity, cultural producers, not assembly-line workers, are the new (leftist) heroes. If the more traditional socialist left believed in revolutionary violence, the rallying cause of the new left was to become the peace movement. In the 1960s, *The Internationale* gave way to institutions like Bertrand Russell's International War Crimes Tribunal (together with Sartre) as defining the spirit of the age. In the early 1960s, the Beatles were working-class lads from a dreary port city who challenged the puritan ethos of the previous generation—by the end of that decade, they sang peace songs and were photographed naked in fancy hotel rooms protesting the Vietnam War. For the left, freedom—from occupation, tradition, silencing—that at its core is a liberal concept, substituted equality as an ideological banner. The left, it seemed, was motivated more by a fear of totalitarianism and violence than by the desire to alter society; the pursuit of individual expression that promises total freedom came to define the left.

Also in Israel, especially after the 1967 War, the left, which had dominated Zionist and Israeli politics since the 1920s, ceased to be associated with the workers and their interests (or with the early Zionist pioneering ethos). The 1967 War created Greater Israel and with it the Israeli peace camp. Until 1967, by and large, the main division between left and right in Zionist and later in Israeli politics had more to do with social and economic issues and less, as counterintuitive as it may seem now, with Arab-Jewish relations or territorial concerns. Private, as opposed to collective, ownership of land and factories; debates about government's role in the market; and questions of Hebrew labor tended to be the lines of demarcation in the political arena. Post-1967, however, it was almost exclusively questions related to territories and the Arab-Israeli conflict that defined Israeli politics.

In 1993, the Israeli writer S. Yizhar (the penname of Yizhar Smilansky), arguably the greatest writer of the 1948 generation, whose realistic prose, as we discussed earlier, provided the most painstaking portrayal of the 1948 War and its profound implications for both Jews and Arabs, addressed a conference in honor of Martin Buber. In that address, Yizhar talked about his two uncles: the writer Moshe Smilansky and the Labor activist Yoseph Weitz. The former, a member of the first Aliya (the first wave of Zionist immigration to Palestine, 1882–1903) was a farmer who owned his plot of land and hired (cheaper) Arab workers. Weitz was a member of the second Aliya (1904–1914), a champion of Hebrew labor and fighter for workers' rights. Smilansky at the time was considered a rightist while Weitz, according to those categories, was a leftist. However, Yizhar continued,

Moshe Smilansky employed Jewish and Arab workers in his orchard according to the principle that two peoples would always live here, and both should have equal opportunity for work and an equal basis for co-existence. He spoke Arabic, intermingled with them, and wrote stories and romances under the pseudonym "Hawaja Musa." . . . [A]nd at the end of his life he was also a member of Brith Shalom, along with Buber, Magnes, and others who desired to come to a common understanding with the Arabs. . . . In short, he was a complete "leftist," according to our contemporary categories. My second uncle, Yoseph Weitz, a laborer, a vineyard watchman, and a vineyard planter . . . was the largest among the land purchasers, and in the language of those days was among the "redeemers of the land" from Arabs. . . . In today's idiom, he came to be a "rightist."<sup>28</sup>

Although it is true that the Zionist Revisionists (the main right-wing Zionist faction) in the pre-State era and after 1948 were the champions of

Greater Israel (on both banks of the Jordan River) as well as free market economics, there were members of the leftist flank of the Labor movement, like Yoseph Weitz, who too were territorial maximalists. (In fact, after the 1967 War, *Ha-Tnuah lema'an Eretz Israel ha-Shelemah* [the movement for Greater Israel], a group of artists, politicians, and intellectuals that called for Israel to make the conquests of 1967 permanent, included several prominent members of the [previously] leftist establishment, including Nathan Alterman, for years the poetic voice of Labor Zionism; the writer Moshe Shamir, previously a member of the left-wing Mapam party; as well as the Labor leader Yitzhak Tabenkin). In the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Revisionists and Laborites clashed, at times violently, it was predominantly over labor disputes, not partition plans. And when Ephraim Kishon, the great right-wing Israeli satirist, wanted to mock the Labor party in movies such as *Sallah Shabati* from 1964, he did not focus on its leaders' foreign policy or their dovish inclinations, but rather on the perceived corrupt nature of their state apparatus (more on that film in chapter 3 of this book). After 1967, the dividing line between left and right in Israel was the Green Line (the June 4 borders between Israel and its Arab neighbors).

The emergence of the Israeli peace camp also left an immediate mark on the Israeli cultural scene. In 1969, Ya'akov Rotblit wrote *Shir la-Shalom* (Song for Peace), which called on people to focus their eyes on hope, not have them gaze through the sights of rifles, and to sing a song for love, not for wars. Hanoach Levin, then an up-and-coming playwright, in a series of satirical revues—"You, I and the Next War," "Ketchup," and "The Queen of the Bathtub"—that were produced between 1968 and 1970, used macabre humor to debunk the Israeli militaristic ethos and sense of national grandeur. In those shows, soldiers sang from their graves, from captivity, and from the afterlife—confronting the audience with the dark reality of war. One soldier sang about losing both his hands and informing his wife that he would no longer be able to zip his pants or caress her white breasts,<sup>29</sup> while in the skit titled "The Queen of the Bathtub," a petit-bourgeois family goes to war against a relative who lives with them in the same apartment. First they deny him access to the bathroom, then they take over the toilets, and later the mother declares herself queen of the greater bath kingdom<sup>30</sup>—the references to a post-1967 Greater Israel could not be clearer.

Levin's satirical revues were highly controversial, but they had a limited run and very few people actually watched them in person.<sup>31</sup> Yet Levin was able to reach a much broader audience when the group *Ha-Halonot ha-Gevochim* (The High Windows), in one of the first Israeli pop albums that was released in 1967, sang his *Bo Hayal shel Shokolad* (Come Here Chocolate Soldier)—a clever play on the famous Bialik children's poem, "Come To Me Nice Butterfly," which included the following stanza:

The cook hands meat to the master cook  
 The master cook serves fodder for the cannons  
 The graves unite all people  
 Cannons roar, children weep<sup>32</sup>

Although the political implications of Levin's writings in that period were fairly obvious, they were not only directed at Israeli militarism. They seemed also to attack the core of what was starting to be perceived as the suffocating collectivist ethos. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Levin's shows and songs were received as forceful political satire, but with greater historical perspective they can also be seen as an attempt to upend the very principles of the Israeli experience, which was predicated to such a large degree on the idea of sacrificing the individual at the alter of the collective. Levin's was one of the more pronounced instances of the radical spirit of the 1960s entering Israeli culture—but it was also indicative of the broader changes that Israel was undergoing.<sup>33</sup> Levin's satire was a prime example of the radicalization of culture in the name of individual expression at a time when more and more Israelis began to prefer fulfilling their individual pursuits rather than sacrificing in the name of a collective destiny. This does not mean that Levin's radical leftist (in the post-1967 context) politics became the norm in Israel; it only suggests that Levin's (and others') new radicalism was a reflection of broader social changes that placed the individual before the collective.

This, as we have seen before, was the notion of post-Zionism promoted by Uri Avineri, one of the leaders of the Israeli peace camp. To him, until the 1967 War, Israel faced such daunting challenges that it needed a collectivist identity to carry it through those trying times. But the great victory was proof that Israel had reached a certain level of maturity that rendered that collectivist ethos a relic of bygone era. To him, 1967 meant that Israeli society had moved beyond its early, existentialist condition (when it faced that real possibility of physical destruction) and into a new phase when the rights of individuals (all individuals, Jews and Arabs) came before the concerns of the collective.

A more nuanced (politically) artistic expression of the new attitudes in Israeli society toward collectivism and individualism can be gleaned from a comparison of two poems: Nathan Alterman's "The Silver Platter" from 1947 and Nathan Zach's "The Seven" that was published in 1979. Alterman, for decades perceived as the poetic voice of Labor Zionism and the Ben-Gurion administration—he wrote a weekly column in *Davar*, Mapai's official newspaper, called "The Seventh Column" that, as Almog Oz put it, "served as a kind of a barometer of the public mood"<sup>34</sup>—wrote "The Silver Platter" a month into the Arab-Israeli War that followed the UN partition resolution. This is the poem's dramatic climax:

Weary without end, deprived beyond rest,  
 Young Hebrew curls dripping—  
 Silently come forward  
 And stand without moving.  
 No sign if they're alive or shot through

Then the people, spellbound, steeped in tears,  
 Say, Who are you? And the two  
 Answer in silence: We are the silver platter  
 Upon which you will have the State of the Jews.<sup>35</sup>

Youth making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of the national cause. This poem quickly assumed an iconic status in Israel, symbolizing the courage of the Zionist youth for the sake of the collective ethos.

Nathan Zach began publishing poems in the 1950s. His early poetry featured some of the collectivist, socialist themes that were still very much within Alterman's poetic and political mold.<sup>36</sup> But by the end of that decade, he published an article in which he attacked Alterman's poetics and, inspired by Bergsonian philosophy and Anglo-Saxon modernist poetry (Pound, Eliot), called for new poetic forms that avoided what he described as Alterman's static conception of time in favor of more liberated forms of expression, which serve the individual "I" rather than the collective "we."<sup>37</sup> "The Seven" (*Ha-Shiv'ah* in Hebrew, which also denotes the Jewish ritual of mourning the dead) is composed of seven short monologues by different Israelis who describe, from the grave, their very ordinary and decidedly unheroic lives and deaths. The aspirations of the different characters are middle class (they wanted a nice car, a good family, trips abroad), and their deaths were either natural, accidental, or in a war that they did not want to take part in. As they declare in the poems concluding stanza,

We're seven  
 Buried on the hill on the outskirts of town.  
 A flock will not graze the grass over our graves  
 A thorn will not pierce our flesh.  
 The cycle of life, as they say, opens and shuts.  
 We were, as they say, a door to a wide world, really wide  
 We walked, gave birth, suffered.  
 We were a corridor  
 that leads to nowhere  
 We realize this now.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the heroes of the "Silver Platter," whose deaths ushered in the new state, the characters (and their deaths) in "The Seven" serve no

higher purpose; they lead nowhere. One of the speakers in “The Seven,” which was composed two years after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, a reservist soldier who was waiting for his discharge papers as war broke, said, “I used to say if you go to one war you’re a patriot. If you go to two you’re just out of luck. If you go to three you’re an idiot, pal.”

Zach was able in this poem to capture a vivid Israeli voice that valued individual pursuits and goals before nationalistic ones. His characters are not leftist radicals, pacifists, or detached intellectuals; in fact, they are the embodiment of an imagined Israeli “center” (as one of the poem’s characters’ declared, “It’s the politicians and the media who are to blame, on both sides; Something should have been done; To make plans, draw maps, to give back land—but not Jerusalem.”). Their withdrawal from the collective is not motivated by some political awakening; it is driven by simple, mundane concerns that are emblematic of the profound changes that Israeli society as a whole underwent. Zach’s embrace of modernist poetics that challenged the authoritative poetic voice of “statist” Zionism has been harnessed here into a series of first-person narratives that speak ordinary Hebrew in the name of simple, bourgeois ideals that are competing against the cult of collectivism and sacrifice that typified the early Israeli experience.

The process by which cultural currents from the West began to impact Israel in the 1960s, though, was slowed down by the deep-structured legacies of Israeli statism and collectivism. Both the market and its cultural representatives found it hard, initially, to fully impact the Israeli experience. An example is the case of Ya’akov Ori, a concert promoter and entrepreneur, who tried to bring the Beatles to Israel in 1965. As Alon Gan has shown, the Israeli authorities at the time were alarmed by the potential devastating effects that the British pop group might have on Israeli youth—and ultimately prevented them from performing in Israel.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the Israeli authorities were able to delay television broadcasting in Israel until 1968, again associating television with individualistic cultural decadence.<sup>40</sup> But these processes were sped dramatically after 1977, when the conservative Likud party dethroned the Labor party after nearly seven decades of dominating Zionist and then Israeli politics.

When Menachem Begin led Likud to victory in May 1977, one may have had reason to assume that the champion of Greater Israel and the former commander of the Irgun—the right-wing underground movement in the pre-State era that launched attacks on both British and Arab targets in Palestine—would lead Israel into a violent confrontation with the Arab world. Instead, in his first few months in office Begin instigated peace negotiations with Egypt that concluded two years later with a land for peace deal in which Israel withdrew, completely, from the Sinai Peninsula in return for peace with the Egyptians. But this was not the only dramatic change

brought about by the new Likud administration. In the economic realm, Begin and his finance minister, Simcha Ehrlich, introduced new economic programs, informed by the teachings of Milton Friedman, which afforded Israelis open access to foreign currency and dramatically reduced tariffs on imported goods (automobiles and electronics).

In that regard, Begin was a true disciple of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the "founding father" and chief ideologue of the Zionist right, despite some deep personal tensions between the two men. Jabotinsky, who played a key role in the formation of the Jewish Legion that fought as part of the British army in the later stages of the battle against the Ottomans in Palestine, was the herald of Zionist militarism and Jewish power. In 1931, he wrote that, "For the generation that grows before our eyes and who will be responsible, probably, for the greatest change in our history, the Aleph Bet has a very simple sound: young people learn how to shoot."<sup>41</sup> But as fervent as he was in his advocacy of Jewish military power, Jabotinsky preached with equal zeal the virtues of the free market and his opposition to socialism. In an article titled "Class," he argued that, "If it were possible to build the Hebrew majority in Palestine on the basis of 'national funds,' we were all very happy; but it is impossible, and the success of our enterprise depends, as we all know, on private property."<sup>42</sup> Begin, despite his penchant for populist rhetoric, began implementing free-market reforms and setting a new course for the Israeli economy that would see the gradual dismantling of the Israeli welfare state and the deregulation and privatization of the market.

With this new economic and social outlook that was ultimately embraced by most of the political parties, Israel caught up with the rest of Western world, becoming a consumer-oriented society. However, this transformation did encounter some challenges: The initial liberalization program brought about hyperinflation, which led to the emergency economic stabilization plan of 1985, in which the government forcefully intervened in the market to curb the spiraling consumer index.<sup>43</sup> By the late 1980s, Israel was on its way to becoming a capitalist powerhouse.<sup>44</sup> Between 1989 and 1995, the GDP grew by an annual average of 5.6%, while private consumption grew by an average of 7% annually.<sup>45</sup> In 1997, the IMF added Israel to the list of industrial nations.

In a matter of two decades, Israel all but leapfrogged the era of assembly-line capitalism, becoming an integral part of the international order of late capitalism—a society whose main products are knowledge and technology. If, in the 1960s, the idea of a car for every worker propelled the government to invest in car-manufacturing plants, it was in the 1980s and 1990s, with the massive decrease in import tariffs, that this became a reality as the conquest of consumerism replaced the idea of the conquest of labor, a staple of second-*aliya* Labor Zionism that continued to inform

the Israeli collectivist ethos into the 1960s and beyond, as the defining ideological platform in Israel.<sup>46</sup> Or as the sociologist Oz Almog termed it, Israel has entered a “supercapitalist” era.<sup>47</sup>

These transformations were not unique to Israel. In the 1970s and 1980s, Thatcherism in Britain and Reaganism in the U.S. also implemented economic plans that privatized state agencies and services and dismantled welfare programs, which were critical tools in the West’s long road to recovery from the economic crisis of the 1930s and World War II. From this perspective, the 1960s counterculture and student movements were the left’s “swan song” as a relevant social force as a wave of new conservatism overtook the West, presenting itself as the only true alternative to the totalitarianism of communism and the left more generally. And in the name of this alternative, most of the social and economic barriers that may have contained the spread of unchecked global late-capitalism were lifted. As Shlomo Ben-Ami has noted,

Today, the leftist elites follow the rightist formulations in all areas: the free market, global economy, privatization and popular capitalism. Two stubborn and unimaginative leaders—Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher—contributed more to the definition of the West’s ideological framework than any other leader over the past quarter of the century. The left could only offer in opposition to them minor amendments.<sup>48</sup>

(One is tempted here to add two more leaders to this equation: Clinton and Blair, as the two “leftist” architects of third-way socialism/liberalism, which in many ways cemented the hegemony of the free market in the 1990s.) And in this new politico-economic order, under this new ideological regime, a new culture that was postmodern, seemingly post-ideological, and in the Israeli case post-Zionist, began to establish itself, dominating wide swaths of the Israeli experience in the last two decades of the previous century.

If the cultural outburst of the 1960s, which was grounded in modernist traditions, was rebellious at its core, in Israel (as it did elsewhere in the West) with the rise of global late-capitalism, to follow the Jamesonian paradigm, it gave way to postmodernism—mass culture was no longer an arena of resistance but an expression of the totalizing qualities of the market (its ability to penetrate and dominate every aspect of our lives) and its consumerist ethos. In a society powered by telephone lines, jets, and ultimately the Internet, traditional borders no longer restrict (certain) people. Government and its various agencies, which tend to be less relevant in a globalizing market, gradually lose their centrality in the daily lives of individ-



uals (the post office is rivaled by private carriers; private insurers supplement government-provided healthcare; private security forces offer alternatives to the police; private military companies supply the military, train it, and in some cases fight in its stead). The world—at least the Western component of it—was becoming, as Marshall McLuhan quite presciently predicted in the mid-1960s, a global village unified by knowledge and media technologies. Traditional divisions into center and periphery, high and low cultures, reality and representation began to lose their meaning, clearing the way to the totalizing democracy of the floating signifier that eludes all firm definitions or lines of demarcation, to the postmodern condition.

While in the 1960s we witnessed the rise of the “culture industry,” culture still maintained its critical aspects, representing reality and striving to shape or change it. The philosophers of the New Left gave up on the economic sphere as an arena of political change—but they looked to avant-garde art as a radical alternative to the “dumbing” down of the masses by cheap consumerist cultural products. As Louis Menand has argued, “For the Frankfurters, too, had made a marriage between anti-capitalist politics and modernist aesthetics.”<sup>49</sup> By the 1980s, culture, or at least the idea of culture, became synonymous with reality itself. And the abundance of consumerist society became the trademark of the new cultural age. In this regard, McLuhan was not forceful enough in his predictions regarding the electronic-dominated future: The medium is no longer the message; it is everything: it is (virtually) reality.

Alain Badiou has offered the following, piercing description of the late-capitalist world:

Our world is no way complex as those who wish to ensure its perpetuation claim. It is even, in its broad outline, perfectly simple. On the one hand, there is an extension of the automatisms of capital, fulfilling one of Marx’s inspired predictions: the world finally *configured*, but as a market, as a world-market. This configuration imposes the rule of an abstract homogenization. Everything that circulates falls under the unity of a count, while inversely, only what lets itself be counted in this way can circulate. . . . On the other side, there is a process of fragmentation into closed identities, and the culturalist and relativist ideology that accompanies this fragmentation. . . . What inexhaustible potential for mercantile investments in this upsurge—taking the form of communities demanding recognition and so-called cultural singularities—of women, homosexuals, the disabled, Arabs! And these infinite combinations of predictive traits, what godsend! Black homosexuals, disabled Serbs, Catholic pedophiles, moderate

Muslims, married priests, ecologist yuppies. . . . Each time a social image authorizes new products, specialized magazines, improved shopping malls. . . . Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market. The capitalist logic of the general equivalent and the identitarian and cultural logic of communities or minorities form an articulated whole.<sup>50</sup>

In late capitalism, as Badiou has described it so forcefully, politics is no longer the arena for economic or social battles. In the late-capitalist framework the market has already won—all that remains (for the radical intellectual) is to endow it with a veneer of subversiveness or change. Instead of politics that rearranges social relations, we have identity politics. Freedom is no longer a question of material conditions (bondage as material, physical restrictions) but rather the ability or right to become a voice in the public sphere. The ability of a group to tell its story, to add to or undermine the “grand” narrative, has been regarded as a prime political act. When the dominant logic is that of the market and its attendant values—competition, choice—it seemed that all that was left to do was not to challenge the dominant system but rather to join it, to accept its very rationale: to compete. In a market where culture is simultaneously the representation of reality and reality itself, all that is left to do as an activist gesture is to extend the boundaries of cultural expression: If you are represented, you exist. And struggles, it seemed, were no longer over control of the means of representation (ownership of media outlets or studios seemed, for a while, an anachronistic idea—the new technologies were supposed to dismantle the old media conglomerates and democratize the means to spread information) but over the production of the symbols themselves. And in this type of world, the elite, not the upper class that controls the means of production of the information technology, the one that produces symbols (or symbolic capital, as Bourdieu might have put it), becomes both the agent of production and criticism of the public discourse—a kind of postmodern, self-referential cultural universe.

The old leftist insistence on the necessary relationship between theory and praxis was no longer relevant. Praxis and theory were one and the same: all part of the new culture industry that became the platform for political action. (When Benjamin Netanyahu ran for prime minister in 1996, one of his main lines of arguments, refined by his American political consultant at the time, the conservative Arthur Finkelstein, was to attack the leftist elites

in Israel. He was referring to members of the media, academics, and artists, not the owners of media outlets who were supporting him and his ideological commitment to deregulate the markets, including the media markets.) Thus, ostensibly, new democratic options emerged in this advanced technological age. There is no need for the labor-intensive process of altering real, material conditions. All that you have to do is add more voices to the marketplace of voices and to undermine the perceived control of the old elites over the symbolic realm. And a variety of voices and identities indeed became one of the major characteristics of the postmodern and post-Zionist culture.

A prime example of these changes in Israel is what happened to the media market. In the area of electronic media, from a market dominated by one government-controlled broadcasting authority that operated one television channel (since 1968) and several radio stations (there was also an army-operated radio station and a “pirate” radio station: Abie Nathan’s—the pilot, entrepreneur, and peace activist—“The Voice of Peace,” which broadcasted, starting in 1973, from a boat in the Mediterranean), by the early 1990s Israelis witnessed the start of a privately owned second Israeli television channel and a variety of other television channels (From MTV and CNN to ESPN and Discovery) that had been available to a growing number of Israelis since the 1980s, first through satellite dishes and then also by cable providers, as well as a variety of regional radio stations (and a growing number of pirate radio stations).<sup>51</sup> Israelis who grew up listening to “The Voice of Israel” were suddenly exposed to soap operas, game shows, and talk shows from all over the world. Like the scene in Gianni Amelio’s 1994 cinematic masterpiece *Lamerica*, one of the more piercing looks at globalization and its social consequences, in which Albanian kids recite skits from Italian television shows without understanding their meaning (neither the language nor the cultural significance of the shows), so could Israeli kids in the 1990s conduct basic conversations in the Argentinean dialect of their favorite *telenovelas*.

As the media scholar Tamar Liebes has argued, in Israel’s first two decades of existence, in a highly collectivist society, radio provided a voice for that spirit of collectivism—reflecting it but also enhancing it. In the post-1967 period, when individualism and skepticism were on the rise, the single television channel provided a kind of communal bonfire that could unite the “tribe” around shows and special events that were shared by a plurality of Israelis. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, the growing choices in entertainment channels helped depoliticize a (perceived) consensual Israeli center (by bombarding the Israeli public with mind-numbing programming), and instead reinforced the growing breakdown of Israeli culture into separatist, cultural enclaves that now had their own radio stations (official or pirate) and later on even their own television outlets.<sup>52</sup>

Similar developments that reflect the growing age of consumerism in a competitive market have also impacted print media in Israel. The leading national dailies became (in their weekday editions) tabloids, which are competing for customers with colorful, sensationalist cover pages. Gossip columns, which in the 1960s in such publications as Uri Avineri's *Ha-Olam ha-Zeh* were a means to challenge the conservative values of the Israeli journalistic establishment, occupied prime printed real estate, as profile pieces on major and minor celebrities became the bedrock of the weekend supplements of the leading newspapers. Sport sections, in the meantime, expanded (becoming more and more like gossip columns), while literary supplements have shrunk. The number of national papers that were identified with a certain party or ideology has decreased dramatically over the past thirty years, while the number of local papers, many of which do little news reporting on local politics but rather focus on reviewing restaurants, clubs, music, and movies, has grown. As Gal Ochovsky, the former editor of *Ha-Ir*, Tel Aviv's leading local newspaper which began appearing in 1980, wrote in a 1997 column, "In order to normalize life one is encouraged to bring out of the closet an appetite for good time, shopping, stuff, sweets. . . . It is worthwhile to interview culture makers, not only in the fluffy sections and not only when they reach the age of eighty. And most importantly to place our engagement with culture as a kind of center."<sup>53</sup> Or as Yaron Peleg, in his study of Israeli culture in the 1990s, has observed, "The new civic agenda the weekly promoted, and especially its celebration of consumerism, were eagerly seized by a public tired of an oppressive siege mentality and thirsty for better times, for a compensation for years of sacrifice and abstention."<sup>54</sup> (In the case of the local papers, the basic paradox of [late] capitalism and postmodern culture that Badiou addressed has manifested itself quite bluntly: There is an appearance of plurality of voices and decrease in the centrality of "dominant" or "national" voices, but most of these local papers are published and distributed by Israel's leading newspapers in an attempt to further stratify the market and increase their potential readership.) Israel, in the 1980s and 1990s, became a Western society with a media market that is driven by a consumerist agenda, and to paraphrase Ochovsky, a market where the coverage of culture by the agents of culture became a kind of self-referential cycle.

Another aspect of the emerging postmodern culture in Israel, and arguably its most conspicuous, was the transformation of Israeli culture from a culture dominated by the image, and voice, of an Ashkenazi, secular (and predominantly Laborite) native Israeli *Sabra* into a multi-faceted culture that features a variety of voices—women, Mizrahi Jews, orthodox Jews, Arabs—a kind of cacophony of identities.