

The Paradox of Liberation

Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions

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To the memory of Clifford Geertz (1926–2006)
colleague and friend
who would have argued with me about this book

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Preface

My project in this book is to describe a recurrent and, to my mind, disturbing pattern in the history of national liberation. I will discuss a small set of cases: the creation of three independent states in the years after World War II— India and Israel in 1947–48 and Algeria in 1962—and I will focus on the secular political movements that achieved statehood and the religious movements that challenged the achievement roughly a quarter century later. In the first chapter, I will refer to all three liberation movements— the Indian National Congress, Labor Zionism, and the Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front), but chiefly to the FLN. I will also refer, because I have written about it and because it has been a general reference for Western writers about revolution and national liberation, to the exodus of the ancient Israelites from Egypt, which is arguably the earliest example, in literature if not in history, of the liberation of a nation from foreign rule. In the second chapter, I will examine the recurrent pattern in detail in the case I know best, the Zionist movement and the state it created. In [chapter 3](#), I will consider an alternative view of all three cases, defended primarily by Marxist writers. And in the fourth chapter, I will take up a second alternative view, developed by Indian writers in postcolonial studies, and then ask whether national liberation has a future, looking first and most extensively at India and then, again, at Israel.

I won't pretend that the pattern I am going to describe is universal or that it is precisely the same in all its iterations. I follow the maxim about political life that nothing is the same as anything else, but that some things—events, processes, movements, and regimes—are similar to other things, and careful comparisons can help us understand the similarities and the differences. Friends and colleagues whom I consulted about my project worried about the extent of the differences and called my attention to this or that outlying case. In India, for example, I was told very emphatically that Algeria was the outlier because of the authoritarian character of the state the FLN established— and I have adopted something like that position here. A number of colleagues and early readers argued that the Zionists are the outliers because of the Jewish exile and the initial and ongoing struggle with the Palestinian Arabs. I mean to deal with those issues, but my primary subject is national liberation itself and what I will call, for the moment, its internal relations. Here, as readers will see, the similarities across the three cases are very strong.

It is important to stress that my aim throughout is understanding, not scientific explanation. I make no claim that the three case pattern can be expressed as a set of covering laws; there are historical and contemporary cases that the “laws” wouldn't cover. Indeed, these three can each be described in ways that would greatly complicate my schematic account. I will supply some of the complications after laying out the general scheme. But I believe that my account, even in its simplest version, provides a useful beginning for a necessary inquiry: What happened to national liberation?

Initially, at least, this is a success story: the three nations were indeed liberated from foreign rule. At the same time, however, the states that now exist are not the states envisioned by the original leaders and intellectuals of the national liberation movements, and the moral/political culture of these states, their inner life, so to speak, is not at all what their founders expected. One difference is central to my analysis, and I will keep coming back to it: all three movements were secular, committed, indeed, to an explicitly secular project, and yet in the states that they created a politics rooted in what we can loosely call fundamentalist religion is today very powerful. In three different countries, with

three different religions, the timetable was remarkably similar: roughly twenty to thirty years after independence, the secular state was challenged by a militant religious movement. This unexpected outcome is a central feature of the paradox of national liberation.

The same story could be told with other cases and other timetables. Two very different versions of secular politics made their appearance in the twentieth century. The first version was openly authoritarian: Lenin in Russia and Atatürk in Turkey are its primary representatives; Nasser in Egypt and the Baath parties in Syria and Iraq are later examples of authoritarian secularism. The Algerian FLN could be included in this group; the state that it established immediately after independence allowed only one political party, and even that party was soon taken over by the army it supposedly controlled. But since the FLN was, at the beginning, formally committed to democracy, and since at least some of its militants sustained that commitment, I have chosen to link it with the more consistently democratic examples of India and Israel. The combination of democratic and secularist commitments is, to my mind, critically important to the project of national liberation; it is the key reason for calling the movements I will be discussing “liberationist.” Or, better, it is my reason for distinguishing them from other revolutionary and nationalist movements, even though some of these others have also been challenged, down the road, by a religious counter-revolution.

All three of the national liberation movements considered here have been attacked as “Westernizing” by their religious (and also by their postcolonial) critics. The charge is undoubtedly true. In important ways, the liberationists imitate the politics of the European left. Since that is the source of my own politics, the criticism doesn’t particularly bother me. But it points to another aspect of the paradox of national liberation: the militants go to school with the very people whose imperial rule they are fighting, and they have a view of their own nation that is remarkably close to what Edward Said called “orientalism.” That term, like “Westernizing,” is meant to be pejorative, and yet there is much to be said in favor of the “orientalists”—and some things also to be said against them. The problematic connection of the national liberation militants to the nation they aim to liberate is central to my argument in the chapters that follow. This is the “internal relation” that I mean to examine; it goes a long way toward explaining the religious counterrevolution.

My first question—What happened to national liberation?—points us toward another: What happened to the secular democratic left? Here is the deeper question—perhaps I should call it the anxiety—that led me to write this book. It is a question that transcends my three cases, but I don’t want to write about it in abstraction. I have always had difficulty sustaining an abstract argument for more than a few sentences. I want to write concretely, and India, Israel, and Algeria provide useful examples of the secular left’s difficulties with political hegemony and cultural reproduction. There are other possibly illustrative cases. I could even discuss these difficulties with reference to the United States, whose revolution wasn’t a national liberation struggle, although it provides an impressive example of secular (and at least quasi-democratic) commitment. Readers who doubt that there has ever been a significant secular left in this country should take a look at our earliest history. The first settlers and the political founders freed themselves or, better, began to free themselves, from the religious establishments of the Old World, and they set up what I think is the first secular state in world history. In a brief postscript, I will explain why the paradox that marks the twentieth-century cases is absent in eighteenth-century America. This is an argument for American exceptionalism, which I will make with one important qualification. However exceptional Americans were in the eighteenth century, we are less exceptional today.

The Paradox of National Liberation

I

National liberation is an ambitious and also, from the beginning, an ambiguous project. The nation has to be liberated not only from external oppressors—in a way, that's the easy part—but also from the internal effects of external oppression. Albert Memmi, the Tunisian Jew who wrote perceptively about the psychological effects of foreign rule, makes the critical point. The Jews will have to be delivered from “a double oppression: an objective external oppression made up of the ... incessant aggressions inflicted on [them] *and* an auto-oppression ... whose consequences were just as harmful.”¹ One of the consequences of these two together is the internal domination of traditional elites, the mediators of foreign rule—the men and women, mostly men, who move back and forth between the subject nation and its rulers, negotiating with the rulers, bribing them when necessary, accommodating their demands when that seems necessary, making the best of a difficult and often humiliating relationship. The figure of the “court Jew” has parallels in every nation ruled by foreigners, and one of the aims of national liberation is the elimination of this role and the defeat of the people who made it their own.

But another, even more important effect of this doubled oppression has to be overcome, and that is the passivity, the quietude, the deep lethargy of the dominated people. No nation can live for long under foreign rule, or, like the Jews, in exile, without accommodating to its condition and making its peace with the powers that be. Early attempts at resistance are repressed, often brutally; after that, resistance goes underground, where it finds expression in common complaint, mockery, and evasion. Leftist scholars have contrived to celebrate this sort of thing, and it ought to be celebrated.² But the larger, sadder story is one of accommodation, the practical alternatives generally being less attractive. Accommodation will be more or less profound depending on the severity of the conditions that have to be accommodated and the number of years, or decades, or centuries during which those conditions prevail. In the sphere of politics, accommodation takes a variety of forms: fatalistic resignation, withdrawal from political activity to familial or communal concerns, even acceptance of the political “superiority” of the foreign rulers. In this last case, the local culture is reconceived as somehow unsuited to politics, devoted to higher, more spiritual pursuits. “They,” the British, the French, Europeans generally, have a talent for politics; they have the ruthlessness necessary for imperial domination; “we” submit because we are focused on more important things; ruthlessness is alien to us.³

Even liberationists like Mohandas Gandhi, who didn't want to imitate the ruthlessness of imperial rulers, believed nonetheless that the old accommodation had to be overcome; it was necessary to “train the masses in self-consciousness and the attainment of power.” Gandhi's “constructive program” was aimed at producing men and women who were “fit” for independence, capable of “managing [their] own affairs”—though not, like the British, everyone else's.⁴ This task should rightly have preceded national liberation but was, in all my cases, unfinished at the moment when independence was won. From the beginning the constructive programs of the liberationists met with

difficulties.

Once people have settled in and adjusted themselves, one way or another, to a particular version of foreign rule, the men and women who suddenly appear and offer to liberate them are likely to be regarded with suspicion—as Moses was when he tried to explain to the Israelites that they were about to be delivered from Egyptian slavery.⁵ Here the biblical text tells a classic story, which is repeated again and again when young and enthusiastic liberators first encounter the people they mean to liberate and find them frightened and reluctant. The liberators soon discover that they need (in modern terms) to “raise the consciousness” of the people before liberation is possible.

What can this mean except to oppose the people’s already existing consciousness, which has been shaped by oppression and accommodation? Raising consciousness is a persuasive enterprise, but it quickly turns into a cultural war between the liberators and what we can call the traditionalists. Raising consciousness can be a tense business. It’s possible for a charismatic leader like Gandhi to adapt the traditional culture to the needs of national liberation, but adaptations along these lines are likely to face fierce opposition; their success may well be brief. And even Gandhi was deeply opposed to many aspects of Hindu culture, especially the fate of the “untouchables.” He was assassinated by someone committed to a more literal, or more traditional, or perhaps more radically nationalist version of Hinduism.⁶

I have taken this example, and all my examples, from the history of nationalism, but I want to stress that national liberation is a subset of that history, a piece of it, not the whole of it. Indeed, the liberationist project seems somewhat at odds with Webster’s definition of nationalism: “a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations.”⁷ There are certainly men and women with this sort of consciousness in all the national liberation movements—they form its right wing. Nationalism for them is a zero-sum game. But the “primary emphasis” of the movements’ leaders is doubly different: first, they aim to achieve political equality with, rather than a dominant position over, other nations, and, second, they aim to liberate their own nation from long-standing traditions of authoritarianism and passivity—indeed, from its own historic culture. Liberation is closer to revolutionary politics than to national aggrandizement. Like the liberationist militants, revolutionaries set themselves in opposition to established patterns of submission, accommodation, and (what Marxists call) “false consciousness.” They aim at a radical transformation. Social revolution requires a struggle against the existing society; national liberation requires a struggle against, rather than an “exaltation” of, the existing nation.

This is also, often, an antireligious struggle, for religion, as Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, teaches “a philosophy of submission ... to the prevailing social order and to everything that is.”⁸ Nehru was repeating here the standard liberationist view, which follows from the fact that accommodation to foreign rule commonly takes a religious form—in part for the obvious reason that otherworldliness offers comforts that are always available, however bad things are here and now. But the secular militants of national liberation are mistaken if they describe the comforts of religion as nothing more than pie in the sky. Religion also generates fantasies of reversal and triumph and then, intermittently, revivalist and millenarian movements that are sometimes tumultuous but always ineffective.⁹ Millenarianism looks like opposition to foreign rule, and may be that briefly, but over the long run it is a form of political accommodation—for it doesn’t produce a steady or persistent oppositional politics, and the millennium never arrives. Another, more concrete form of accommodation is resolutely this-worldly and doesn’t look forward to apocalyptic events. In fact, most religions prescribe a regimen that can and should be established right now. It requires submission from ordinary believers and assigns an authoritative role to traditional religious leaders—who are often already loc

officials and judges, appointed by and submissive in turn to foreign rulers.

But neither millenarian nor traditionalist politics invites ideological commitment or long-term activism. Nor does either politics promise individual freedom, political independence, citizenship, democratic government, scientific education, or economic advance. It is for the sake of all these that the national liberationist or revolutionary militants need to transform the people in whose name they are acting—and that transformation requires the defeat of the people's religious leaders and the overcoming of the people's customary way of life. V. S. Naipaul, writing thirty years after Indian national liberation, perfectly captures the attitude of the liberators toward the religion of the people:

Hinduism ... has exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation. It has given men no idea of a contract with other men, no idea of a state. It has enslaved one quarter of the population and always left the whole fragmented and vulnerable. Its philosophy of withdrawal has diminished men intellectually and not equipped them to respond to challenge; it has stifled growth.¹⁰

National liberation, by contrast, is a secularizing, modernizing, and developmental creed. It is, as its opponents say, a "Western" creed, and to the nation about to be liberated, it is something entirely new. Indeed, newness is the mantra of the liberators. They offer the oppressed people a new beginning: a new politics, a new culture, a new economy; they aim to create new men and women. Thus David Ben-Gurion: "The worker of Eretz Yisrael [the Land of Israel] differs from the Jewish worker in Galilee [exile] ... [He is] not a new branch grafted to an old tradition, but a new tree"—literally, in Ben-Gurion's eyes, a new kind of Jew.¹¹ Similarly, Frantz Fanon: "There is a new kind of Algerian man. The power of the Algerian Revolution ... resides in the radical mutation that the Algerian has undergone."¹²

We can gain some sense of what all this means from the history of the United States: what Ralph Waldo Emerson and his contemporaries called "the American newness" was achieved through the escape from Old World tyrannies and traditions. In American history, as in the history of ancient Israel, the victory of the new required a geographic move rather than a political movement. Indeed, the American experience led Louis Hartz to argue that the "only really successful revolution is ... a migration."¹³ But the same sense of starting over is present in all the cases of national liberation, even if the new beginning is in an old place.

Of course, this newness encounters resistance, which begins as a stubborn allegiance to the-way-things-have-always-been but soon becomes ideological and therefore also new: fundamentalism and ultra-Orthodoxy are both modernist reactions to attempts at modernist transformation. The slogan of Jewish ultra-Orthodoxy, "Everything new is forbidden by the Torah," is itself a new idea; it would have made the historic accommodation to exile impossible.¹⁴ Jewish survival required a lively adaptability and a readiness for innovation. But the slogan works well against attempts to bring the exile to an end, and one can find similar examples of opposition to the newness of national liberation in India and Algeria. What is more surprising is the reappearance of this opposition after the achievement of political independence, when the defenders of traditional religion, themselves renewed and modernized, begin the construction of a counterrevolutionary politics.

I had better tell a particular story now or at least provide a brief example of what I am talking about, to avoid too schematic an account. I will begin with the Algerian case because it is in several ways the outlier among my three. First of all, French repression in Algeria was more brutal than that of the English in either India or Palestine, and it was mirrored in the brutality of the National Liberation Front's internal wars, in the FLN's terrorist campaign against European settlers (advocate

of terrorism were marginal in India and a small minority among the Zionists), and also in the FLN's postindependence authoritarianism. Second, the commitment to secular liberation in Algeria, although it finds an avid spokesman in Frantz Fanon, was probably weaker than in my other cases. The most visible leaders of the FLN were indeed secular and Marxist, or at least socialist, in their political commitment. But the movement's initial manifesto, read over Cairo radio in 1954, called for an "Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam."¹⁵ There were people in the FLN who took this framework seriously—and who demanded immediately after independence that it be put in place. In the early years, however, FLN militants displayed little interest in Islamic principles, and the Soummam Platform of 1956, the work primarily of the internal FLN and its Berber leaders, actually left the principles of Islam out of its description of the movement's goal: "the birth of an Algerian state in the form of a democratic and social republic—and not the restoration of monarchy or of a theocracy." In Cairo a year later, a compromise was reached with a new text that called for "the establishment of a democratic and social Algerian republic, which is not in contradiction with the principles of Islam."¹⁶

In any case, the leaders of the FLN did not spend much time learning about the principles of Islam. Sitting in a French prison, Ahmed Ben Bella, the future first president of Algeria, read the leftist publications of the Paris publisher Maspero and studied the works of Lenin, Sartre, and Malraux. In the aftermath of independence, he argued for something he called "Islamic socialism," which was, as his Muslim critics claimed, more socialist than Islamic. His chief advisors as president were Trotskyists. Ramdane Abane, one of the FLN's leading intellectuals and a defender of terrorism, spent five years in prison (1950–55), where he "applied himself to a voracious reading of revolutionary studies, Marx and Lenin—and even *Mein Kampf*." He had already gained his *baccalauréat*; he must have done all his reading in French. Many of the FLN militants, and a larger number of the intellectuals, were Francophone. The establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Algeria was announced in French by Ferhat Abbas, then the head of the FLN.¹⁷ The FLNers were certainly committed Algerian nationalists: "It's not with you but against you that we are learning your language," declares a character in a novel by an Algerian writer (who wrote in French).¹⁸ At the same time, many of these nationalists were culturally Francophile or, perhaps better, Europhile: Hocine Aït Ahmed—a Berber and, along with Ben Bella, one of the "*neuf historiques*," the Historic Nine, founders of the FLN—concentrated in his prison years on English literature. Although militants like Ben Bella and Ait Ahmed aimed at ending foreign rule, they were remarkably at ease in a foreign culture.

Important Muslim scholars, organized in the Association of Algerian Ulama, condemned the eager reception of European culture by many Algerians, especially in the cities, and demanded the exclusive use of Arabic in Algerian schools. The association foreshadowed the Islamic revival of the 1980s and 1990s—whose militants fiercely opposed the bilingualism advocated by Mostefa Lacheraf, an old FLNer who was cultural affairs minister in the late 1970s. As Clifford Geertz writes about similar reformist groups in Morocco, "These were *oppositional* Muslims ... Into what had been a fine medieval contempt for infidels crept a tense modern note of anxious envy and defensive pride."¹⁹ But the ulama were unable to produce a modern nationalist politics, and they were opposed in turn by Muslim "moderates." The moderates urged the French to allow the imposition of Islamic family law and to make many lesser concessions to Muslim sensitivities but, given that, had no further difficulty with French rule. Muslim officials in Algeria were fully engaged in the politics of subservience; the Soummam Platform contemptuously described them as "domesticated, chosen and paid by the colonial administration." These officials were the more immediate opponents of the FLN militants, whose political agenda included, as the writings of Fanon make clear, not only ending French rule but

also overcoming the colonial mentality and the Algerian past.²⁰

FLN radicalism helps explain the highly visible role that women were given in the movement, not in the leadership—an absence that signaled things to come—but on the ground, in military (and terrorist) activities. Compare the role of women among Zionist militants, especially in the Haganah, the military arm of the Zionist movement. (The Indian National Congress had no military arm, but for the sake of symmetry, let me note Nehru's boast that Congress's political and social movements "have drawn tens of thousands of middle-class women into ... public activity" for the first time.)²¹ Putting women forward in the FLN was not an affront to the French oppressors; it was directed against the internal oppression of Algeria's religious tradition. Fanon, in his portentous way, makes this a central theme: "The militant man discovers the militant woman, and jointly they create new dimensions for Algerian society." And again: "The freedom of the Algerian people ... [is now] identified with woman's liberation, with her entry into history." And again: "[In the movement] the woman ceased to be a mere complement of the man. Indeed, it might be said that she pulled up her roots through her own exertions."²²

This uprooting succeeded brilliantly for a time but, as contemporary Algerian politics attests, it ultimately failed. "Alas," Alistair Horne wrote in his 1977 history of the Algerian war, "the promissory notes issued [to women] in the heat of battle have yet to be fully honored."²³ Now it seems fair to say that they have hardly been honored at all. Although the political standing of Islam in Algeria today is contested, its cultural authority is unquestionably greater than FLN militants would have predicted it would be after fifty years of "liberation." And the social standing of women in Algeria today, though also contested, is far short of the equality that the same militants promised the "sisters" in the 1950s. The FLN was a revolution in the making; resurgent Islam is the counterrevolution.

Truth to tell, the retreat from revolutionary feminism began soon after the FLN victory in 1962, as Horne suggests, and it was confirmed in the Family Code adopted in 1984, despite the fierce opposition of many female veterans of the liberation struggle—including Djamilia Bouhired, who had been captured and tortured by the French after trying to plant a bomb in a café during the Battle of Algiers. She was a hero of the liberation struggle (for the record: not one of my heroes), but she was not a political force in the post-liberation FLN. The new law made it a legal duty for Algerian women to obey their husbands, institutionalized polygamy, and denied wives the right to apply for a divorce unless they gave up all claims to alimony.²⁴ Still, the Islamist zealots who terrorized Algeria in the 1990s demanded many more restrictions on the everyday lives of women—on dress, mobility, and employment. Imam Ali Belhadj, a founder and leader of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), has called for the seclusion of women in the home, which they should not leave "except under conditions provided by law." In an article published in 2003, Zahia Smail Salhi writes, "Harassment has been relentless and unbearable, particularly for women who live alone or who refuse to wear the veil in the workplace." One FIS tract warns women against using "the Jewish word 'emancipation' to attack the Islamic values of your ancestors."²⁵ The writer may have forgotten that emancipation was a central concept of the early FLN radicals.

Emancipation was central also to the program of Indian national liberation, where it required a direct attack on the religious culture and social practices of both Hindus and Muslims. When the Indian Constitution was being debated, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, one of the founders of the All India Women's Conference, urged the drafting committee to make sure that the religious liberty clause allowed the "wiping out" of religiously sanctified "evils" like purdah, child marriage, polygamy, unequal laws of inheritance, the ban on intercaste marriage, and the dedication of girls to temples.²⁶ Kaur, who became the minister of health in Nehru's first cabinet, had been educated at the Sherborne

School for Girls in Dorset and at Oxford University. She was in many ways a modern Western woman and at the same time an Indian nationalist and an early feminist. Needless to say, the evils were not immediately wiped out, although the new civil code for Hindus, adopted in the 1950s, made many of them illegal.

A Francophone and even a Francophile Algerian militant was not unusual. Similarly, the organizations that came together in 1885 to create the Indian National Congress were dominated by Anglophone and Anglophile lawyers, journalists, and officials. The architects of liberation have a lot in common with the architects of oppression (who produced, according to Marx's famous articles on India, "the greatest and, to speak the truth, the only social revolution ever heard of in Asia").²⁷ The liberationists have often gone to school with the oppressors, who commonly claim to represent a more "advanced" culture—materially, intellectually, and militarily. Moses in Egypt is the classic example: he was raised in the palace of the Pharaoh and was certainly more at ease with the Egyptian elite than with the people he came to lead. Sigmund Freud claimed that Moses was actually an Egyptian; whatever he was by birth, he was culturally a man of Egypt.²⁸

The training of the liberator in the home country and culture of the oppressor is a common theme in the history of national liberation. Nehru spent eight years in British schools (Harrow; Trinity College, Cambridge; and the Inns of Court) and, as a young man, was probably more conversant with the history and politics of Britain than with the history and politics of India. Late in his life, he told the American ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith, "I am the last Englishman to rule in India."²⁹ B. R. Ambedkar, the untouchable (Dalit) lawyer and Nehru's first minister of justice, received both a master's degree and a doctorate from Columbia University and the London School of Economics; he also studied for the bar at Gray's Inn. Several leaders of the Indian Communist Party were educated in England and, in an ironic reproduction of the colonial relationship, received their instructions from the Comintern via the Communist Party of Great Britain, whose militants had closer ties to Moscow.³⁰

Theodor Herzl, author of *Der Judenstaat*, was another entirely typical nationalist leader. With a very good Austrian education and not much of a Jewish education, he knew far more about other nations than about his own and was at home with the idea of Jewish statehood because he was at home with people who already had a state. Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president, studied in German universities and then secured a position as research scholar and lecturer in the University of Manchester, where he became a political Anglophile.

Frantz Fanon received his medical and psychiatric education in France and also studied literature and philosophy there. None of the other leaders or intellectuals of the FLN went to school in France, but almost all of them attended French lycées in Algeria, and many of them (Fanon too) served in the French and Free French armies—another kind of education. Ben Bella received France's highest military honor and a kiss on each cheek from Charles de Gaulle himself.

Often the leaders of the oppressed identify with an oppositional ideology in the imperial country—like the Marxism of some FLNers, or the Fabian socialism of Nehru and the Indian National Congress (Winston Churchill was simply wrong when he called Nehru a communist), or the east European social democracy of David Ben-Gurion and Mapai, the dominant party in the Zionist movement and then in Israel's first three decades. But the oppositional nature of a doctrine in, say, England, didn't make it familiar in India. Here, too, the militants of national liberation are the carriers of ideas that are largely unknown to the people, or most of the people, to whom they are carrying them.

What can the militants tell the people? They can say that the people are oppressed because they are backward, passive, mired in superstition and ignorance, "un-exposed to modern scientific rationality" (to quote Nehru again), led by men who are the accommodators in chief, the accomplices of oppression. The militants raise the hope of newness and give it body in one of the modernist

ideologies—nationalist, liberal, socialist, or some combination of these three. They promise enlightenment, scientific knowledge, and material advance, but perhaps more importantly, they promise victory over the oppressors and equal standing in the world. They appeal especially to the young (they are usually young themselves) and often urge a radical break with family and friends and with all forms of established authority. They demand total commitment to the movement or perhaps physical move to an all-encompassing community (like the Zionist kibbutz or a Gandhian village cooperative). The old ways must be repudiated and overcome—totally. But the old ways are cherished by many of the men and women whose ways they are. That is the paradox of liberation.

II

Still, the liberators do win; they lead a genuinely national struggle against the foreign rulers of their people. No doubt, the people themselves are far less sympathetic to the culture and politics of their rulers than the liberators are, and once a vanguard of militants has demonstrated that victory is possible, many men and women who don't share the ideology of liberation nonetheless join the struggle. The traditional political and religious leaders are pushed to the side, or they withdraw (passivity is their style), or they go along with the liberators, accepting a marginal role. The odd man out in this schematic story is Mohandas Gandhi, who succeeded in turning traditionalist passivity into a modern political weapon. There is no comparable figure in Zionist history or in or near the FLN—or in any other national liberation movement that I know about. Even when Gandhi openly opposed Hindu beliefs and practices, he spoke to the people in a religious language that was largely foreign to the other leaders of the national liberation movement. In 1934, for example, he suggested that an earthquake in Bihar was divine punishment for the sin of untouchability. Nehru, who would one day help draft a constitution that abolished untouchability, found this remark “staggering.” He wrote, “Anything more opposed to the scientific outlook would be difficult to imagine.” On occasion, reports B.R. Nanda, the founder and first director of the Nehru Memorial Library, “Gandhi appeared to Jawaharlal as ‘a medieval Catholic saint.’”³¹ The comment reveals the cultural references that guided Nehru's political judgments (a more local description of Gandhi was certainly possible). The two men managed to work together, but it was crucial to their cooperation that Gandhi conceded the political succession to the secularist and modernist Nehru.

Still, secularists and modernists blame Gandhi for the surprising strength of religious nationalism in liberated India. Thus V. S. Naipaul:

The drama that is being played out in India today is the drama that [Gandhi] set up sixty years ago ... Gandhi gave India its politics; he called up its archaic religious emotions. He made them serve one another, and brought about an awakening. But in independent India the elements of that awakening negate one another. No government can survive on Gandhian fantasy; and ... spirituality, the solace of a conquered people, which Gandhi turned into a form of national assertion, has soured more obviously into the nihilism that it always was.³²

That censure was written in the late 1970s; leftist intellectuals in India these days are even more critical of the Gandhian legacy. I will come back to their arguments in the third chapter of this book.

In Israel and Algeria, the transition from national liberation to religious revival was accomplished without the mediating role of a Gandhi figure—so perhaps Gandhi in India was less central than his critics believe; perhaps *Hindutva*, the ideology of Hindu-ness, would be a powerful presence in Indian politics even if he had never inspired and led the liberation movement. Still, the story is harder to tell.

without him or without anyone like him. I don't mean that other liberationist leaders were unwilling to speak in religious terms. Zionist writers could hardly help but invoke the sacred geography of the biblical texts; their hope for an "ingathering of the exiles" was a secularized version of a messianic promise. In Algeria, the FLN's first magazine was called *El Moudjahid* (an embarrassment for Fanon who told his readers that this term "originally" meant a Muslim holy warrior but now meant nothing more than a "fighter"), and the FLN flag was green and white—green is the traditional color of Islam.³³ What united Arabs and Berbers in rejecting assimilation, writes John Dunn in his *Modern Revolutions*, "was the common tie of Islam under the pressure of colonial occupation."³⁴ Indeed, Islam drew a clear line between native Algerians and European colonizers: "The only thing the colonial elite was not and, a few ambiguous cases aside, could not become," writes Geertz, "was Muslim."³⁵ Algerian militants insisted on their respect for "Islamic principles"—banning the use of alcohol, for example, within the FLN and, where they could, among the people generally. Still, neither the strategy and tactics nor the long-term political agenda of the militants was significantly influenced by their people's religion. Even the Zionists aimed at a "normal" rather than a redemptive state. Gandhi remains a very large exception.

So what happened? The traditionalists seemed to be defeated or marginalized; the aura of liberation didn't attach to them; they didn't have much influence in shaping the constitutional arrangements, the economy, or the educational system of the new states; they didn't make much of an appearance among the new political elites. The story is more complicated in Algeria, where political authoritarianism, nascent in the FLN (though opposed by a number of leading militants), triumphed early on. The radical left regime of Ben Bella lasted only three years and was replaced by a more traditional military dictatorship. Houari Boumedienne, who overthrew Ben Bella in 1965, was certainly no Francophile. He had been educated in Muslim schools in Algeria and had studied for a year at El Azhar University in Cairo.³⁶ But the political leaders he most admired were Castro and Tito; he ran a socialist economy, which had always been the promise of the FLN, and sustained a form of politics that, while socially conservative (on issues like the status of women), would appear to the next generation of Algerian Muslims to have been radically secular. How, then, was political Islam, how were the political versions of Hinduism and Judaism, sustained or invented in the new world of liberation?

The story is different in each of my cases, but there are, again, common features. Some are peripheral to my interests here but perhaps critical to any full causal account. The militants of the ruling parties, Congress, Mapai, and the FLN, unchallenged in the early years of statehood, grew complacent and tired, and their immediate successors were often opportunists, more interested in power and its rewards than in liberation. Indeed, corruption seems to set in on roughly the same time schedule as religious revival—and the revivalists are not only zealous, they are also righteous (at least until they come to power). But we might expect a tired and complacent Indian National Congress, say, to be confronted by liberationists to its left, like the socialists J. P. Narayan or Asoka Mehta.³⁷ Early on, it looked as if the Socialist Party would become a leading contender for power in India, but it failed to establish itself in opposition, probably for the same reasons that Congress faltered in government. The decisive challenge to both came from Hindu militants. In Israel and Algeria, too, left oppositionists gave way to religious nationalists and zealots. Why?

In all three countries, religion remained a force in everyday life during the years of liberation and its aftermath. Nationalist leaders often found religion useful for their most immediate political purpose: sustaining the unity of the anticolonial struggle in the new state. Although a few of the militants might have liked to mount a Bolshevik-style attack on religion, the new rulers did not dare do that; perhaps the Russian example was already a warning against a totalizing secularism. In any

case, they believed that decline was the destiny of all religions; what Nehru called the “scientific outlook” was bound to triumph. Secularization did not require radical coercion, and it allowed for temporary compromises, because it was an inevitable historical tendency. “Some Hindus dream of going back to the Vedas,” Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*, “some Muslims dream of an Islamic theocracy. Idle fancies, for there is no going back to the past ... There is only one-way traffic in Time.”³⁸ The Zionist perspective was strikingly similar, as the historian Ehud Luz writes: “The assumption that the Jewish religion ... was destined to pass from the scene sooner or later, because it contradicted the needs of modern life, was accepted by practically all the Zionist intelligentsia.”³⁹

That is more or less what we all believed in those years and for many years after, social scientists and political activists alike. Or, it’s what almost all of us believed. Clifford Geertz, who studied nationalist movements in both Indonesia and the Arab world and whose work on Islam I have already cited, thought otherwise. Writing about religion in Bali, in the new Indonesian state in the early 1960s, he argued that religious belief might be swamped by “modern materialist ideas,” but probably not. For “such overall drifts—when they do not turn out to be mirages altogether—often pass over deeply rooted cultural configurations with rather less effect upon them than we would have thought possible. He went further, suggesting that “today in Bali some of the same social and intellectual processes that gave rise to the fundamental religious transformations of world history seem to be at least well begun.”⁴⁰ In other places, too, the drift, or perhaps the storm, of national liberation passed over ancient societies and reborn nations with “rather less effect” than the movements’ militants expected and the processes that eventually led to religious revival were already begun, under the eyes of the militants but out of their sight.

The old ways were sustained in temples, synagogues, and mosques, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in interpersonal relations, in families and in life-cycle celebrations, where the sustaining behaviors were hardly visible to secular militants busily at work on the big projects of modernization. Indeed, the coming revivals were fueled by the resentment that ordinary people, pursuing their customary ways, felt toward those secularizing and modernizing elites, with their foreign ideas, their patronizing attitudes, and their big projects. They were fueled even more by the authoritarian or paternalist politics that was forced upon the new elites in their war against the customary ways. Some would argue that authoritarianism was not so much forced upon as embraced by the elites: the idea of modernity, writes Ashis Nandy, a critic of Nehruvian secularism, gave its protagonists “seemingly deservedly, a disproportionate access to state power.”⁴¹

The authoritarianism of Boumedienne’s Algerian state was particularly brutal; indeed, the politics of the FLN before liberation was already murderous, reaching to a full-scale civil war between the FLN and Mesali Hadj’s National Algerian Movement (where many of the leaders of the FLN had gotten their political training)—some ten thousand Algerians were killed.⁴² By contrast, the Indian National Congress and the Labor Zionists were committed to democracy and mostly managed their internal tensions in nonviolent ways. But even the leaders of these movements, when they exercised political power, did so with a sure sense that they knew what was best for their backward and often recalcitrant peoples.

Then the backwardness came back—and the democracy that the liberationists created (even in Algeria, briefly, from 1989 to 1991) was the chief instrument of its return. “The present crisis of liberal democracy [in India],” writes the political theorist Rajeev Bhargava, “is due in large part to its own success.” Religious men and women, previously passive and inarticulate, entered the newly created public domain in numbers that “greatly exceeded” the number in the “tiny upper crust that led the national movement.” Democratic politics encouraged “ethno-religious political mobilization,” and the mobilized men and women did not “come from a cultural background with an obviously liberal or

democratic character.”⁴³

But it wasn't the old backwardness that these people, or the politicians they followed, brought back. Religion appeared now, as I've already suggested, in militant, ideological, and politicized form—modern even in its antimodernism. Its protagonists claim to embody the ancient traditions, the faith of the ancestors, even to represent a pure, authentic version of it; oldness is their mantra. And although the claim is false, the sense of oldness must account, at least in part, for the appeal of their program. They connect the liberated people to their own past; they provide a sense of belonging and stability in a rapidly changing world. With the old imperial oppressors gone, they also provide recognizable, even familiar “others” as objects of fear or hate—who can be blamed for all that has gone wrong since the day of liberation. Sometimes the “others” are members of a rival religion; sometimes they are “Westernizing” leftists, secularists, heretics, and infidels—traitors, it is said, in our midst.

But what happened to the Indian, the Israeli, and the Algerian newness? Where are the new men and women, each the equal of the others, standing straight, tall, and smart? I am not sure how to answer that question. There are a lot of people like that—national liberation reached beyond the tiny upper crust—but nowhere near as many as the liberationists expected. The culture of liberation was apparently too thin to sustain these people and enable them to reproduce themselves; the radical rejection of the past left, as it were, too little material for cultural construction. The liberators did generate a set of holidays, a set of heroes, a set of commemorative rituals; they made up songs and dances; they wrote novels and poems (compare the French Revolution with its new calendar, its neoclassical revival, its fetes and pageantry). For a while, enough people seemed to engage with all these so that it was almost possible to believe in the new beginning. But the newness was too artificial, too recently constructed, and after a couple of generations, the heroes lost their aura, the commemorations lost their charm; young people drifted away, moving toward the excitements of global pop culture or toward the fervency of religious revival. The attraction of pop culture is no doubt a disappointment to the aging militants of national liberation, but their biggest disappointment, their biggest surprise, is the large number of young men and women who are drawn to the ideologies of Hindutva, messianic Zionism and ultra-Orthodox Judaism, and radical Islam. And aren't they right to be surprised? Daughters of the women whose self-uprooting Fanon celebrated are willingly rerooting themselves, returning to religious faiths that are—at least to this secular eye—as misogynist as ever. Isn't this unbelievable?

I suppose it is believable after all; it is just the sort of thing that social science claims to be able to explain or at least to understand. Marxist writers, who are committed to scientific explanation, search for the social class whose material interests religious revivalism might serve. A recent study of “left discourses in contemporary India” finds different writers attributing the rise of Hindutva to the petty bourgeoisie (the classic Marxist candidate) and also to the rich peasants, the poor peasants, the lumpen proletariat, the urban workers, the old Brahmins, and the new capitalists. I have some sympathy with a despairing comment that appeared in the leftist magazine *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1993: “Whatever the analytical difficulties of reducing an ideology to its material base, unless one posits ... such an epistemological relation, one will be left with a politically debilitating agnosticism.” But either the reduction doesn't work or it needs more work. Two years later, the same writer in the same magazine wrote that Hindutva isn't only “an instrumentality protecting a material interest ... Over and above that, it is a set of values, attitudes, and norms of behavior that can only be countered with the aid of alternative values and norms.”⁴⁴

That acknowledgment seems to me the beginning of understanding. I wouldn't give up on the search for a material base. Marxist writers are right to look for the people most likely to benefit from

what V. P. Varma identifies as the central goal of Hindu revivalism, “the restoration of the Vedic principles [that require] the functional organization of society.”⁴⁵ The old elites, the upper castes, the capitalists, and patriarchs everywhere, in the family, the local community, and the state—these are the obvious beneficiaries. Still, it is necessary to acknowledge the populist appeal of revivalism, the staying power of the old religion up and down the social hierarchy. Without that appeal the religious revival would be of no use to Brahmins, capitalists, and patriarchs. Countering the revival with a set of alternative values and norms is not so easy; doing it ex nihilo seems pretty much impossible.

But perhaps the militants of national liberation, like all revolutionaries, had to insist on radical cultural negation—in Ambedkar’s words, the “complete destruction of Brahminism ... as a social order”—and then on radical newness.⁴⁶ Perhaps that is the essential or necessary character of their project. Years ago, when I was writing about the Puritan revolution in England, I came upon a sermon preached in the House of Commons in 1643 that expresses a sentiment common to revolutionaries everywhere: “Take heed of building upon an old frame,” the preacher told the MPs, “that must be all plucked down to the ground. Take heed of plastering when you should be pulling down.”⁴⁷ The difficulty is that such a radical pulling down doesn’t appeal to the people living in the house; they are too attached to it, even if they recognize, even if they complain about, its discomforts. Maybe what is necessary is only a partial demolition and a renovation of the rest—a renovation, that is, of values and norms.

There actually were intellectuals in the national liberation movements who aimed at a critical engagement with the old culture rather than a total attack upon it. I like to think that had they won, the story might have turned out differently. The liberators might have made their peace with at least some part of their nation’s past, fashioned a set of beliefs and practices that were new but also familiar, and avoided the extremism of religious revival. Maybe. I want to argue something like that, but it’s best to begin with skepticism. Some commentators insist that engagement was never possible and place their hopes in the dialectic: first comes the politics of radical secularist rejection, then the politics of militant religious reaffirmation, and then, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* says, “the contradictions merge ... in a higher truth that comprehends them both.” But the dialectic doesn’t seem to be working these days the way it used to. I don’t see many signs of the coming synthesis. In India, Israel, and Algeria—and probably in other places—the struggle that the liberationists thought they had won still has to be won. Secular liberation hasn’t been defeated, but it has been challenged in unexpected ways and with unexpected strength. The struggle is going to continue for a long time, and its outcome is as uncertain as it was at the very beginning. Like the ancient Israelites, the modern militants thought they had reached the promised land, only to discover that they carried Egypt in their baggage.

The Paradox Illustrated

Zionism vs. Judaism

I

Zionism is one of the success stories of twentieth-century national liberation. The first generation of Zionist leaders proposed a solution to the “Jewish question” that to just about every realistic Jew and non-Jew in the world seemed impossible to realize, and the next generation realized it. The realization came too late for most of the Jews of Europe; it is darkened by the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history. Nonetheless, Zionism reached the unreachable goal that Theodor Herzl set for it, within the fifty-year time span that he envisioned.

Viewed in historical perspective, Israel is a much greater surprise than India or Algeria, whose nations were liberated, as it were, in place. The Zionist movement, born in exile, managed to establish a sovereign state in what Herzl called an “old-new land,” inhabited mostly by Arabs and colonized by the Ottoman Turks and the British. Today, Jewish self-determination, impossible for almost two thousand years, is an everyday fact. So why isn’t that the end of the story? Everything after independence is “post-Zionist.” What we should talk about now is Palestinian national liberation.

But the Zionist victory is more complicated than this brief telling suggests, and it is complicated in much the same way as the victories of the Indian National Congress and the Algerian FLN. Zionism isn’t entirely a success; its liberationist project isn’t yet completed. What I called in the first chapter the paradox of national liberation has its specifically Jewish version, which is my subject here.

Imagine that a group of the Zionist “founders” found themselves in contemporary Israel, a ghostly congress discussing the history of the movement. A few of the *Bilu'im*, the earliest settlers, would be there; some cultural Zionists, followers of Ahad Ha’am, would join the discussion; representatives of the Herzlian or political Zionists would certainly be there, and also a delegation from Chaim Weizmann’s Democratic Faction; the early socialists, Labor Zionists from the Second Aliyah, the future hegemonic group, would be a large presence; and a few of the Mizrahi rabbis, the Orthodox minority who supported the Zionist project, would attend.¹ Most of these people, I believe, would not think that their hopes had been fully realized. The state as it is today would not match their vision; even the political Zionists, who were often said to want nothing but a state, any state, anywhere, had a particular state in mind—and Israel isn’t quite that kind of state. It also isn’t the kind of state that the Mizrahi rabbis had in mind, but I shall focus on the expectations and disappointments of the others, for Zionism was, at its center and in the years of its greatest achievements, overwhelmingly a secular project. That’s what makes its relation to Judaism so interesting. I propose to look closely at that relationship, taking it as a special case of the internal tension or contradiction illustrated also in the history of national liberation in India and Algeria—and in Palestine. This further case is bound to come up, for Palestine already, even before statehood, has its own history of secular nationalism and religious revival.

The Jewish version of the story begins with exile. Over the course of almost two thousand years, a span of time that our imaginations cannot easily encompass, the stateless and scattered people of Israel developed a religious/political culture adapted to statelessness and scatteredness. I don't know how long it takes to develop a culture of that kind. We can find signs of the adaptation very early on—as in Jeremiah's famous letter to the exiles in Babylonia sometime around 587 BCE (the prophet speaks, as always, in God's name): "Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper."² But the social construction of exile as the prototypical Jewish condition took many centuries, and the construction is very powerful. It is the deep architecture of Jewish life. Judaism in the late nineteenth century, when Zionism was born, was a religion of exile. A yearning for return to the long-lost homeland played an important part in that religion; the idea of political independence played no part at all. The Jewish people had forgotten, wrote Leo Pinsker in *Auto-Emancipation*, what political independence is.³

Exilic politics had only two aspects. First, Jews submitted to gentile rule; they practiced a politics of deference. Second, they patiently waited for divine redemption; they practiced a politics of deferred hope. In fact, a lot more can be said about the political experience of the Jews, but it is this dualism that is reflected in their law and literature. Jewish submission would last until the coming of the Messiah, and the coming of the Messiah was in God's hands and seemed to be indefinitely postponed.⁴ Deference and deferment: the words and practices that this politics (or anti-politics) required had to be reinvented in each Diaspora setting. But the inventions were in no sense makeshift nor would it be right to say that the politics of exile was reluctantly accepted. This was the natural politics of the Jews in the eyes of the Jews themselves, the necessary consequence, so it was commonly thought, of the place that God had assigned them in world history.

It follows, then, that any political effort to escape from the exile, any nationalism aiming at statehood and sovereignty, would have to be the work of people who rejected this divine assignment, who broke with the culture of deference and deferment. But since this culture was a central part of Judaism as it existed in the nineteenth century, Zionism was, and could only be, the creation of people who were hostile to Judaism. If pressed, I would qualify that statement in all sorts of ways, but in its naked form, unqualified, it helps to explain a centrally important Zionist goal: "negation of the exile." This is not the same as the end of the exile. Of course, Zionists wanted to bring the exile to an end, but they also believed, or many of them believed, that ending it would be impossible without first "negating" the cultural predispositions and habits, the mentality, of the exile. "Everything," Albert Memmi wrote, "is paralyzed, fettered, and inhibited" by that mentality.⁵ To escape exile it was necessary for the Jews to overcome their long-term adaptation to captivity among the gentiles. The name of that adaptation was "Judaism."

Overcoming the mentality of exile was a project that could find support within the Jewish world, but its most prominent and successful advocates were likely to be Jews who had assimilated into the world of their oppressors and who viewed their own people with a foreign eye. Herzl, a nationalist leader of exactly that kind, wanted the Jews to have a state like any European state. This Zionist dream of normality, which looks back to the demand of the biblical elders in First Samuel 8—"We will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations"—is born out of persecution and fear, but it also has two intellectual sources, both of them at odds with exilic culture. The first is a close-up knowledge of other nations, and the second is a belief that imitation of these other nations is both possible and desirable. Indeed, Herzl imitated the most progressive European ideas, especially with

regard to the status of women. In his Zionist utopia, *Old-New Land* (1902), women have “equal rights with men and are obligated, like men, to do two years of national service.”⁶ Herzl doesn’t explicitly set this equality against traditional Judaism’s exclusion of women from all public roles, but it is an obvious challenge to the tradition.

Leaders like Herzl and Max Nordau, his most prominent intellectual supporter, had no second thoughts, no anxieties, about the negation of the exile, because nothing in their experience suggested that what was being negated contained much of value; they had few sentimental ties to the old way of life—what Herzl called the “thousand-year-old hereditary disease.”⁷ This may be the key to their effectiveness; they are single-minded in pursuit of their goals.

But this same alienation from the people they mean to liberate can bring down the leaders of national liberation movements—as the Uganda episode suggests in Herzl’s case. The story is probably sufficiently well known that I can discuss it briefly.⁸ It began in 1903, when a British colonial official suggested that a large tract of territory in Uganda might be made available for Jewish settlement—in lieu of Palestine. Herzl was eager to accept the offer, which represented the first official recognition of the Zionist movement as a territorial claimant; he apparently had little sense of the opposition it would arouse. Zionist leaders closer to their people understood immediately, instinctively, that this was negation gone one step too far. However desperate the condition of the Jews (the Uganda debate unfolded immediately after the Kishinev pogrom in Russia), a specifically Jewish nationalism could have only one country as its object, *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel. These leaders, most of them Russian Jews, wanted to acknowledge the British offer with gratitude and then reject it (which is what happened three or four years later, after Herzl’s death).

In a curious way, the idea of settling Jews in Uganda, under British rule, was simultaneously too radical and too conservative. Its radicalism appealed to (some) secularist and socialist Zionists, who worried that the mystique of the Land of Israel would make the work of cultural transformation more difficult—or perhaps defeat it entirely. Years earlier, a prominent advocate of Jewish enlightenment, Judah Leib Levin, had argued against settlement in Palestine (he preferred America): “I worried about the orthodox and feared the rabbis, because of the air of *Eretz Yisrael*, permeated with ancient prejudices, [where] the *maskilim* [the enlightened intellectuals] would be unable to bring their influence to bear.”⁹ Hillel Zeitlin put the argument even more forcefully during the Uganda controversy—and in a way that resonates today: “The same tradition that burdens us in the Diaspora will burden us a thousand times more in *Eretz Yisrael*, because that is its home. The rabbinic dominion over the masses will not be weakened there, as the freethinking Zionists hope, but on the contrary will get stronger and stronger.”¹⁰ Uganda (or at least the idea of Uganda) offered a new beginning, a chance to establish national life on a modern footing.

At the same time, however, a Ugandan settlement would also be a continuation of the exile and the subjection it entailed. The new rulers would certainly be more benign than the old; the king of England was far preferable to the Russian tsar or the Turkish sultan, but he was not King David; he did not represent Jewish sovereignty. That may be why the Mizrahi rabbis were so comfortable with Herzl’s scheme: they would not have to face the challenge of sovereignty.¹¹ At one of the earliest Zionist meetings, the Kattowitz conference in 1884, an Orthodox delegate from Romania argued against political independence for reasons that may seem trivial to contemporary secular Jews (and non-Jews) but in fact go to the heart of the conflict between Zionism and Judaism: No state, he said, can maintain itself without a postal service, railways, and the telegraph, and these have to be operated day and night throughout the week. “But if the officials of Israel were to rest on the Sabbath, according to the laws of Moses, other states ... would protest, while if we were to permit our officials to violate the Sabbath and the festivals, our brethren ... would rise up and destroy us.”¹² Other

examples abound: the maintenance of gas (and, soon, electricity) services, police work and firefighting (if lives were at stake, these would be permitted; if not, not), the ordinary functioning of hospitals and clinics, garbage collection, street cleaning, and so on. In the lands of the exile, gentiles did all this necessary work on the Sabbath; in Uganda the British presumably would arrange for it to be done. Religious Jews could not yet imagine doing it themselves. In their private lives, they relied on the “Shabbos goy,” a gentile friend, neighbor, or servant, to perform all the necessary chores forbidden to Jews on the Sabbath—and what was the state, what else could it be in pre-messianic times, but a large-scale Shabbos goy?

I doubt that Herzl ever worried about the possible incompatibility of the laws of Moses and a Jewish state; his visionary description of a state where the army would stay in its barracks and the rabbis in their synagogues did not include the laws.¹³ From a political standpoint, the sacred geography of the Jews should have worried him more, but he had little sense of that either until the Uganda controversy erupted. Accounts of his conversations with British officials suggest that he argued for as much autonomy as he could get in a Ugandan setting; the setting itself was of less importance to him. And yet sacred geography was one feature of exilic culture that neither he nor any of the other Ugandans (later they called themselves “Territorialists”) could negate.

The cultural Zionists, followers of *Ahad Ha’am* (“One of the People”—the pen name of Asher Ginzberg), opposed the Uganda plan and sharply criticized Herzl’s lack of Jewish culture and learning—and, even more, his insensitivity to Jewish emotional attachments. They regularly insisted on the need for continuity with the past, and a few of them, like the poet Hayim Nahman Bialik, aimed consciously at a critical engagement with, rather than a negation of, the exile. Bialik’s call for a cultural “ingathering,” alongside or even before the demographic ingathering, suggests the road not taken, which I will defend later on as the better path.¹⁴ *Ahad Ha’am* himself attacked Zionist writers who understood the whole of Jewish history “to be one long mistake that requires immediate, complete rectification.” Although he acknowledged in a private letter that Zionism may involve a “latent contradiction [with Judaism] deep within the soul,” he consistently opposed what he called “defiant apostasy [*apikorsut le-hakhis*—the phrase is taken from the Talmud].”¹⁵ Nonetheless, his own ideas about continuity were selective, focused mainly on “prophetic morality,” and the ideas of many of his followers and admirers were more selective still.

Zionism is in no sense a “direct continuation of the ancient culture,” wrote Leo Motzkin. “Even though it means to refashion something rather than create something *ex nihilo*,” argued Joseph Klausner, “Zionism is a highly radical Jewish movement ... It aspires to a total revolution in Jewish life: to a revolt against the diaspora.” A total revolution: there was little in Jewish life and culture that would be spared by these Jewish liberators. Isaiah Berlin’s essay on Chaim Weizmann beautifully illustrates this paradoxical point. Weizmann was at one with his people, Berlin says: “his language was theirs, and their view of life was his.” Yet he recognized the people as “a semi-helot population, relegated to an inferior and dependent status, which produced in them the virtues and vices of slaves. For this condition, Weizmann thought “there was no remedy save a revolution—a total social transformation.” Men like Motzkin, Klausner, and Weizmann would probably have agreed with Simon Bernfeld that “it is impossible to ensure the future of a nation by destroying its past”; still, there was much that they wanted to destroy.¹⁶

The chief object of their critique was religion itself—a point made most strongly by Haim Hazaz in a short story, “The Sermon,” written in the 1940s: “Zionism and Judaism are not at all the same, but two things quite different from each other, and maybe even two things directly opposite to each other ... When a man can no longer be a Jew, he becomes a Zionist.”¹⁷ In partial disagreement with this radical position, Martin Buber insisted that he was opposed only to Judaism’s decadent, exilic forms

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