

## Gil Troy: Zionist Salon – Zionism in the Sukkah

INTRO FOR EVERY DAY: The holiday of sukkot pivots on the tension between the ephemeral and the eternal. We build flimsy huts through which we can see the stars, to symbolize how transient life can be, even the basics like shelter. Yet, typically, we Jews have turned this lesson in evanescence into a lasting tradition.

This paradox is a central Zionist tension, which the founder of modern Zionism Theodor Herzl, captured in his novel “*Altneuland*,” Old-New Land, spurring homeless Jews to erect a modern state on our ancient homeland. This Sukkot, as we welcome the traditional guests – the Ushpizin Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David -- consider welcoming a Zionist guest text too. For every day of Sukkot, we will provide a text from Gil Troy’s newest book, an update of Arthur Hertzberg’s classic Zionist anthology, *The Zionist Idea*. Troy titled his update, [\*The Zionist Ideas\*](#), to open the conversation, from right to left, religious to secular, traditional to modern. He organizes the book into three defining periods: Pioneers until 1948, Builders from 1948 until 1998, and Torchbearers – modern Zionists. In each time period, he identifies six schools of thought – whose ideas echo in all these essays: Political Zionism, Labor Zionism, Revisionist Zionism, Religious Zionism, Cultural Zionism, and Diaspora Zionism. Since April, thousands of people have participated in Zionist Salons, reading these texts, developing their Zionist Ideas.

### 1. Day 1: Tradition and change

Berl Katzenelson (1887–1944)

*“A renewing and creative generation does not throw the cultural heritage of ages into the dustbin. It examines and scrutinizes, accepts and rejects.”*

Immigrants to Palestine of “the Second Aliyah,” born in Russia in the 1880s, quickly became the leaders of the new Zionist settlement, called the Yishuv. The movement these mostly socialist Zionists fashioned dominated the government of Israel throughout the first decades of its existence. David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi became its highest officers.

Berl Katzenelson was their contemporary and, until his death in 1944, a central figure of Socialist Zionism. While still an adolescent in Bobruisk, the White Russian city of his birth, he entered the whirlpool of ideologies and parties that was then the predominant concern of advanced young Russian Jews. Always a lover of the Hebrew language and emotionally a Zionist, he nonetheless wandered among the parties of the left for a few years without committing to any particular doctrine. After turning twenty he decided to go to Palestine and prepared himself in several skills, including blacksmithing.

In 1909, at age twenty-two, he arrived in Jaffa. Like the older A. D. Gordon and his near contemporary Joseph Hayyim Brenner, who became his friends, Katzenelson started his life in Palestine as a day laborer on the farm—and a labor organizer. He

led a strike, founded a traveling library for farm workers, helped create a labor exchange for newcomers, and wrote frequently for the periodicals of the Labor Zionist movement.

During World War I, Katzenelson remained in Palestine. When the British army conquered its southern part, he enlisted in 1918 in its newly formed battalion of Palestinian Jews. After 1920 he became a front-rank official of Palestinian Jewry and the World Zionist movement. He remained consistently at the center of Labor Zionist affairs and spoke frequently before international bodies and Jewish communities abroad until his death in Jerusalem in 1944.

Katzenelson's major importance, however, was not in politics, but in journalism and cultural affairs. In 1925 he founded the Tel Aviv newspaper *Davar* as the organ of the trade union organizations, the Histadrut. He remained its editor until his death. Am Oved, the publishing house of the Histadrut, was also his creation; indeed, he influenced the entire cultural program of Palestinian labor.

In this essay, Katzenelson's Cultural Zionism – focusing on Jewish identity and renewal – comes across more strongly than his Labor Zionism. He tackles not just a central Zionist tension, not just a defining Jewish debate, but a compelling human dilemma: how much do we remember, preserve, revere from the past -- and how much must we change?

#### Revolution and Tradition (1934)

**We like to call ourselves rebels—but may I ask, “What are we rebelling against?” Is it only against the “traditions of our fathers”? If so, we are carrying coals to Newcastle. Too many of our predecessors did just that. Our rebellion is also a revolt against many rebellions that preceded ours. We have rebelled against the worship of diplomas among our intelligentsia. We have rebelled against rootlessness and middlemanship, and not only in the forms in which they appeared in the older Jewish way of life; we have rebelled against their modern version as well, against the middlemanship and rootlessness of some of the modern Jewish nationalist and internationalist intellectuals, which we find even more disgusting than all the earlier manifestations of these diseases. We have rebelled against the assimilationist utopia of the older Jewish socialist intelligentsia. We have rebelled against the servility and cultural poverty of the Bund. We are still faced with the task of training our youth to rebel against “servility within the revolution” in all its forms—beginning with those Jews who were so much the slaves of the Russian Revolution that they even distributed proclamations calling for pogroms in the name of the revolution, and including the Palestinian Communist Party of our day, which is acting in alliance with the pogromists of Hebron and Safed.**

**There are many who think of our revolution in a much too simple and primitive manner. Let us destroy the old world entirely, let us burn all the treasures that it accumulated throughout the ages, and let us start anew—like newborn babes! There is daring and force of protest in this approach. Indeed, there really were many revolutionaries who thus pictured the days of the Messiah. But it is doubtful whether this**

conception, which proceeds in utter innocence to renounce the heritage of the ages and proposes to start building the world from the ground up, really is revolutionary and progressive, or whether there is implicit within it a deeply sinister reactionary force. History tells of more than one old world that was destroyed, but what appeared upon the ruins was not better worlds, but absolute barbarism. . . .

People are endowed with two faculties—memory and forgetfulness. We cannot live without both. Were only memory to exist, then we would be crushed under its burden. We would become slaves to our memories, to our ancestors. Our physiognomy would then be a mere copy of preceding generations. And were we ruled entirely by forgetfulness, what place would there be for culture, science, self-consciousness, spiritual life? Arch-conservatism tries to deprive us of our faculty of forgetting, and pseudo-revolutionism regards each remembrance of the past as the “enemy.” But had humanity not preserved the memory of its great achievements, noble aspirations, periods of bloom, heroic efforts, and strivings for liberation, then no revolutionary movement would have been possible. The human race would have stagnated in eternal poverty, ignorance, and slavery.

Primitive revolutionism, which believes that ruthless destruction is the perfect cure for all social ills, reminds one, in many of its manifestations, of the growing child who demonstrates his mastery of things and curiosity about their structure by breaking his toys.

...

A renewing and creative generation does not throw the cultural heritage of ages into the dustbin. It examines and scrutinizes, accepts and rejects. At times it may keep and add to an accepted tradition. At times it descends into ruined grottoes to excavate and remove the dust from that which had lain in forgetfulness, in order to resuscitate old traditions which have the power to stimulate the spirit of the generation of renewal. If a people possesses something old and profound, which can educate man and train him for his future tasks, is it truly revolutionary to despise it and become estranged from it? . . .

The Jewish year is studded with days which, in depth of meaning, are unparalleled among other peoples. Is it advantageous—is it a goal—for the Jewish labor movement to waste the potential value stored within them? The assimilationists shied away from our Jewish holidays as obstacles on the road to their submergence among the majority because they were ashamed of anything which would identify them as a distinct group—but why must we carry on their tradition? Did not bourgeois assimilationism and Enlightenment, and even the Jewish socialism which followed in their wake, discard many valuable elements of social uplift which are contained in our tradition? If we really are Zionist Socialists, it does not befit us to behave like dumb animals following every stupid tradition, just because it calls itself “modern” and is not hallowed by age. We must determine the value of the present and of the past with our own eyes and examine them from the viewpoint of our vital needs, from the viewpoint of progress toward our own future.

Let us take a few examples: Passover. A nation has, for thousands of years, been commemorating the day of its exodus from the house of bondage. Throughout all the pain of enslavement and despotism, of inquisition, forced conversion, and massacre, the Jewish people has carried in its heart the yearning for freedom and has given this craving a folk expression which includes every soul in Israel, every single downtrodden, pauperized soul! . . . I know no literary creation which can evoke a greater hatred of slavery and love of freedom than the story of the bondage and the exodus from Egypt. I know of no other remembrance of the past that is so entirely a symbol of our present and future as the “memory of the exodus from Egypt.”

And Tishah b'Av. Many nations are enslaved, and many have even experienced exile. . . . Israel knew how to preserve the day of its mourning, the date of its loss of freedom from oblivion. . . . Our national memory was able, with these very simple means, to make every Jewish soul, all over the world, feel heavy mourning at the same day and the same hour. . . .

I am not setting specific rules as to the form our holidays should assume. Suitable forms will grow from a living feeling within the heart and an upright and independent spirit. . . . As long as Israel is dispersed and is prey to persecution and hatred, to contempt and to forced conversion, as in Yemen in Asia, Algiers in Africa, and Germany in Europe—or even though they enjoy emancipation purchased through assimilation in capitalistic France and communistic Russia—I shall never forget, I shall never be able to forget, the most fearful day in our destiny—the day of our destruction.

## 2. Political Redemption and Social Revolution

Joseph Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921)

*“Workers’ settlements—this is our revolution. The only one.”*

Joseph Hayyim Brenner’s first novel, *BaHoref* (In the winter), ends with his autobiographical hero, Feierman, put off a train because he has no ticket, left stranded beside a snow-covered road in the middle of nowhere. By other names, Feierman (i.e., Brenner) is the protagonist of all his succeeding novels, and his destiny is always the same: abortive beginnings, unrealized strivings, and bitterness against himself and the world.

Both in his art and his personal life, Brenner wandered between the blackest pessimism and qualified affirmation. His childhood and youth were conventional—born in the Ukraine, educated in the usual orthodoxy, then a break to general studies—but there seems to have been an extra dimension of poverty and personal suffering. He matured in the 1890s during a particularly hopeless period for Russia and Russian Jewry. All thought of accommodation with the tsarist regime had ended; there were only three alternatives—to labor for a revolution, to migrate westward, or to turn Zionist and go to Palestine. In turn, Brenner attempted each of these solutions.

In his late teens Brenner was attracted by the Bund, the newly formed group of revolutionary Jewish socialists violently opposed to Jewish nationalism—they wanted the workers of all peoples to unite. After three years of working illegally for the party, he drifted out of that movement to reaffirm his Jewish loyalties through Zionism. From 1902 to 1903 he served in the Russian army—depicting this period of his life in a novella, *Shanah Ahat* (One year)—then escaped to London.

His experiences in England made him no happier. The new East European immigrants were packed tight in its Whitechapel section, London’s East Side, living in indescribable misery, eking out their existence in sweatshops.

In 1909 he left for Palestine, where he led the then small labor and pioneer groups. He also taught in Tel Aviv’s first high school while editing and writing. A dozen years later, he was found dead, murdered near Tel Aviv during the Arab outbreaks against the Jews in May 1921.

When Brenner had begun to write in the 1890s, he found inspiration in Russian literature, particularly Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, Russian masters who

offered uncompromising criticisms of society and treated convention as a sham. Brenner was also influenced by Mendele Moher Sefarim (Shalom Jacob Abramovitz), the greatest nineteenth-century novelist writing in both Hebrew and Yiddish, who targeted the disintegrating Russian ghetto. Invoking a conscious proletarian perspective, Brenner repeated this social criticism with greater vehemence.

The considerably shortened excerpt is from Brenner's essay, *Ha'arachat Azmenu be-Sheloshet Ha-Krahim*. (The estimate of ourselves in three volumes). While he reviews a collected edition of Mendele's works, he comments upon his own hatred of the Jewish past, both its culture and its society, and his faith that a new, sound, healthy Jew could be made to arise only if he were to begin over again in Zion. Brenner captures here the classic Labor Zionist bank shot, reacting to the misery of European oppression by seeking a state like all Political Zionists, but seeking to make that state a Socialist paradise too. Agree with him or not, Brenner challenges us all not to silo our identities, but to integrate them.

### Self-Criticism (1914)

Yes, indeed, we have survived, we live. True, but what is our life worth? We have no inheritance. Each generation gives nothing of its own to its successor. And whatever was transmitted—the rabbinical literature—were better never handed down to us. In any case, by now it is more and more certainly passing away. Everything we know about our lives tells us that there are only masses of Jews who live biologically, like ants, but a living Jewish people in any sociological sense, a people each generation of which adds a new stratum to what preceded it and each part of which is united with the other—such a people hardly exists any longer. . . .

A “living” people whose members have no power but for moaning, and hiding a while until the storm blows over, turning away from their poorer brethren to pile up their pennies in secret, to scratch around among the goyim, make a living from them, and complain all day long about their ill will—no, let us not pass judgment upon such a people, for indeed it is not worth it.

...

It would be a sign of steadfastness and power, of productive strength, if the Jews would go away from those who hate them and create a life for themselves. That I would call heroic sacrifice. . . .

History! History! But what has history to tell? It can tell that wherever the majority population, by some fluke, did not hate the Jews among them, the Jews immediately started aping them in everything, gave in on everything, and mustered the last of their meager strength to be like everyone else. . . . Even when the yoke of ghetto weighed most heavily upon them—how many broke through the walls? How many lost all self-respect in the face of the culture and beautiful way of life of the others! How many envied the others! How many yearned to approach them!

. . . Yes, our environment is crumbling. This is nothing new, for this environment has never been stable; it has always lacked a firm foundation. We never had workers, never a real proletariat. What we had and have are idle poor. Basically nothing has changed, but now the very forms of life have dissolved. . . .

We have to start all over again, to lay down a new cornerstone. But who will do that? Can we do it, with our sick character? This is the question.

This is the question: In order that our character be changed as much as possible, we need our own environment; in order to create such an environment ourselves—our character must be radically changed. . . .

Our urge for life says: All this is possible. Our urge for life whispers hopefully in our ear: Workers' Settlements, Workers' Settlements.

Workers' Settlements—this is our revolution. The only one.

### 3. Belonging to the nation, rooted in the homeland

Avraham (Yair) Stern (1907–42)

*“There is no sovereignty without the redemption of the land, and there is no national revival without sovereignty.”*

The founder of Revisionism, Ze'ev Jabotinsky's decision to declare a truce with England to fight Hitler split the Irgun, the underground army forming to fight for Jewish independence in the 1940s. The charismatic classicist, poet, and militarist Avraham Stern led a breakaway faction eventually called Lechi, Lochamei Herut Yisra'el, the Freedom Fighters of Israel. Critics, however, disparaged the group as zealots and called them “The Stern Gang.”

Born in Poland in 1907, Stern, whose nom de guerre was Yair, arrived in Israel in 1925 and defended Jewish Jerusalem during the 1929 riots. In 1933 he turned from studying the Greek and Roman classics to fighting full time for his homeland.

Stern had written an anthem for the Irgun—“Unknown Soldiers”—that reflected the ferocity of a generation of fighters ready to die—but hoping to live as free Jews in their homeland. It became the Lechi anthem after the split. As the fight against the British intensified, Stern's words rang louder, as the Jewish warriors sang: “In days red with slaughter, destruction and blood, Nights black with pain and despair, Over village and town our flag we'll unfurl, Love and freedom the message 'twill bear. . . . And if we must die our people to free, We are willing our lives to surrender.”

Stern also articulated eighteen principles to guide Lechi. Here, we see his powerful Political Zionism – understanding the compelling Jewish need for a nation state on our ancestral homeland. His principles also capture the dual nature of Revisionist Zionism, the Zionist school of Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Clearly, these are territorial maximalists not afraid of fighting. But they are also liberal nationalists, committed to the rule of law, social justice, and fulfilling the Prophet's ethical traditions not just their ethnocentric impulses.

On February 12, 1942, two years after Lechi's founding, British soldiers raided Stern's hideout and killed him.

Eighteen Principles of Rebirth (1940)

1. The Nation: The Jewish people is a covenanted people, the originator of monotheism, formulator of the prophetic teachings, standard bearer of human culture, guardian of glorious patrimony. The Jewish people is schooled in self-sacrifice and suffering; its vision, survivability, and faith in redemption are indestructible.

2. The Homeland: The homeland in the Land of Israel within the borders delineated in the Bible (“To your descendants, I shall give this land, from the River of Egypt to the great Euphrates River.” Genesis 15:18) This is the land of the living, where the entire nation shall live in safety.

3. The Nation and Its Land: Israel conquered the land with the sword. There it became a great nation and only there it will be reborn. Hence Israel alone has a right to that land. This is an absolute right. It has never expired and never will.

4. The Goals: 1. Redemption of the land. 2. Establishment of sovereignty. 3. Revival of the nation. There is no sovereignty without the redemption of the land, and there is no national revival without sovereignty. These are the goals of the organization during the period of war and conquest.

5. Education: Educate the nation to love freedom and zealously guard Israel’s eternal patrimony. Inculcate the idea that the nation is master to its own fate. Revive the doctrine that “The sword and the book came bound together from heaven” (Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 35:8).

6. Unity: The unification of the entire nation around the banner of the Hebrew freedom movement. The use of the genius, status, and resources of individuals, and the channeling of the energy, devotion, and revolutionary fervor of the masses for the war of liberation.

7. Pacts: Make pacts with all those who are willing to help the struggle of the organization and provide direct support.

8. Force: Consolidate and increase the fighting force in the homeland and in the Diaspora, in the underground and in the barracks, to become the Hebrew army of liberation with its flag, arms, and commanders.

9. War: Constant war against those who stand in the way of fulfilling the goals.

10. Conquest: The conquest of the homeland from foreign rule and its eternal possession. These are the tasks of the movement during the period of sovereignty and redemption.

11. Sovereignty: Renewal of Hebrew sovereignty over the redeemed land.

12. Rule of Justice: The establishment of a social order in the spirit of Jewish morality and prophetic justice. Under such an order no one will go hungry or unemployed. All will live in harmony, mutual respect, and friendship as an example to the world.

13. Reviving the Wilderness: Build the ruins and revive the wilderness for mass immigration and population increase.

14. Aliens: Solve the problem of alien population by exchange of population.

15. Ingathering of the Exiles: Total in-gathering of the exiles to their sovereign state.

16. Power: The Hebrew nation shall become a first-rate military, political, cultural, and economical entity in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean Sea.

17. Revival: The revival of the Hebrew language as a spoken language by the entire nation, the renewal of the historical and spiritual might of Israel. The purification of the national character in the fire of revival.

18. The Temple: The building of the Third Temple as a symbol of the new era of total redemption.

#### 4. Not the only Ethno-national state \* Shmuel Trigano (b. 1948)

*“A generic state exists nowhere in the world: No one asks whether France can be French and democratic.”*

To Shmuel Trigano, Paris University emeritus professor of sociology of religion and politics, the agonizing pitting “Jewish” versus “democratic” reflects the neurotic emancipated Jew’s internalization of Marxist, now postmodernist, antisemitism. Every democracy, he argues, expresses a collective national identity. Politics that reject a particular peoplehood and seek a universalist utopia become dictatorships.

An Algerian-born Jew, Trigano spent most of his academic career as a sociologist and political philosopher in Paris before moving to Tel Aviv. From this outsider perspective, he has questioned some of the Western Enlightenment’s governing assumptions, seeing its negation of genuine Jewish self-expression as exposing its narrowness. His “otherness” also helped him recognize the antisemitism in France at the start of the twenty-first century as an epidemic, when most French Jews and leaders still denied it. His cataloguing of hundreds of antisemitic incidents finalized his break with French leftists, who rejected his defenses of Israel and French Jewry. Trigano concluded that modern France is no longer a welcoming place for proud Jews.

Trigano’s 1979 book, *The New Jewish Question*, rejected the Western obsession with normalization, replacing it with a *Mizrahi* reading of Zionism rooted in Jewish ethics and ideals. This analysis inaugurated his decades-long quest, in more than two dozen books, to articulate a Hebrew-based political theory endorsing particularist collective identities as keys to healthy democracies. To him, the post-Zionist cry for Israel to become a “state of all its citizens” shorn of its Jewishness threatens Israel’s democratic character, as well as its national mission and identity. His fluency in postmodern theory and rootedness in his non-Western narrative makes Trigano a formidable advocate for Zionism as an authentic, truly postcolonial, movement. In the shadow of this summer’s harsh debate over Israel’s Nation-State Bill, Trigano raises important questions about the need to belong and to be free, as well as the often unfair standards by which Israeli democracy is judged.

There Is No “State of All Its Citizens” (adapted from *The New Jewish State*, Paris, 2015, 2017).

To become citizens and benefit from the French Revolution’s “emancipation” in 1791, Jews had to renounce their specific collective status as a people. The birth of “antisemitism” forty years later proved that generic human rights don’t work; without *national* civic rights, without a state, courts, and a military, individuals were unprotected.

The Dreyfus Affair taught Herzl that lesson. The Shoah and the expulsion of Jews from ten Muslim lands (1940–70) proved this later too: the Jewish fate is collective and therefore political. These historic events explain why a Jewish nation state responsible for the Jews’ collective destiny had to be declared.

Who would have expected that in this Zionist state of Israel a new ideology would emerge, “post-Zionism,” advocating the renunciation of *Jewish* national identity in Israel to create a “state of all its citizens”? This strange phenomenon stems from “post-modernism.” This post-Marxist ideology inherited the Marxist hatred of any identity, especially Jewish identity.

Post-Zionism also stemmed from the impulse with Zionism that seeks “normalization.” Even though Zionism tried correcting the Emancipation’s approach of only granting Jews rights



as individual citizens, this movement of Jewish “auto-emancipation” echoed the essential principle in creating a generic “Israeli,” the product of a new state, not a three-thousand-year history. The citizens of this new state thus experienced the same condition modern Diaspora Jews experienced. The place of Jewishness, of Judaism, became the problem.

Today, a new version of “normalization” demands “a state for all its citizens.” But this vision would again reduce Jews to being anonymous holders of rights in an exclusively constitutional state which undoubtedly would stop being called “Israel” soon enough.

Finally, post-Zionism reflects a weakness within modern democratic doctrine. If the nation simply results from a “social contract” among individuals, the collective identity disappears. Within this vacuum, modern national identities emerged—but so did the totalitarian movements praising a “universal” state, lacking any historical identity. Post-Zionism and postmodernism reflect a new, totalitarian, democratic utopianism claiming we have entered a post-national era: but it’s just not true.

This background explains the typically “Israeli” dilemma: Can Israel be a Jewish and democratic state? Interestingly, such a question is asked only about the State of Israel. No one asks whether France can be French and democratic, or if the United Kingdom, whose Queen heads the Anglican Church, is really democratic. Behind the question about Israel lies the gnawing doubt—inherited from the now-obsolete Emancipation—about the Jews being a people. The title “Jew” indicates the collective, political, legal entity, which is what counts in a democracy. After all, “democracy” means “rule of the people.” The Tower of Babel teaches there is no “universal” people. If there is a Jewish people there can be a Jewish democracy, without reservation.

Democracy developed only within the framework of the nation-state, tapping into the majority’s historical identity. When a democracy goes from a national regime to a utopia promising a “universal democracy,” or the universalist’s democratic individualism causes some kind of social disintegration, it jeopardizes the collective’s national identity—and totalitarianism erupts.

Viewed in this context, the post-Zionist slogan of a “state of all its citizens” is clearly demagoguery. A generic state, a universal society without a particular identity, does not exist anywhere in the world (and certainly not in the Muslim or broader postcolonial worlds). Obviously, the future of a country so “pure” is expected to be swallowed up by the Palestinian Muslim minority or a future Palestinian state—which, according to its planned constitution, will be declared as Muslim (its official religion), Arabic (belonging to the Arab nation/ “Ummah”), and Palestinian. The “monotheistic” religions would be reduced to the “dhimmi” status Jews already endured for centuries under Islam.

Multiculturalism, as well as the universal utopia of a state relying only on its constitution and not on a national identity, fails to address the problem of singular collective identity. No being can exist without an identity, even an alienated one. Every “universal” identity is an imperialist one. Today, postmodernism is the ideology of a new European empire, a truly non-democratic regime: the European Union.

This challenging dilemma concerns more than the Jewish case. Perhaps a creative Israeli solution allowing identity and justice to coexist can open horizons for European democratic regimes too.

## 5. The broader fight against post-modernism

Einat Ramon (b. 1959)

*“My particularist perspectives: I am a Womanist and a Zionist.”*

Increasingly, Zionism felt countercultural in the twenty-first century. Radical activists tried turning progressive movements like feminism against Israel because many of Zionism’s philosophical underpinnings were no longer trendy. Einat Ramon became the first Israeli-born woman rabbi in 1989, and the first woman and first sabra to head a Conservative rabbinical school, the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary in 2005. Today a scholar and a pioneer in pastoral care, she endorses Zionism and feminism as counters to contemporary identity politics. Resisting postmodernism’s homogenizing cosmopolitan identity soup, she stands for Jews – and women – standing out and standing strong.

Born in 1959 to a family steeped in Labor Zionism, Ramon appreciates that, for the pioneers, Zionism was “a personal, existential redemption, a one-time opportunity to endow their lives with meaning . . . reclaiming their souls from assimilation, emptiness, decadence and alienation.” Hoping to renew that old-new existential vision, Ramon champions “Torah learning with modern Hebrew culture” to access “the stories of Jewish inner, spiritual strength.”

Ramon represents a broader Zionist impulse to liberate Jewish learning and ideas from the ghetto. Studying Jewish texts in different contexts, applying them to everyday life, living them—and sometimes ignoring them —has invigorated religious and secular Jewish culture. The sovereign state has taken Ahad Ha’am’s cultural revolution further than he imagined, expanding the range of cultural expressions and intensifying Zionism’s cultural impact, in the Land of Israel—and beyond. In embracing Jewish particularism, Ramon not only shows how to fight back against post-modernism from the left, she joins the chorus moving beyond a more narrow, state-based Political Zionism to a more expansive, meaning-seeking Identity Zionism.

#### Zionism: A Jewish Feminist-Womanist Appreciation (2017)

Living in the Land of Israel grants Jews the opportunity to indulge their particularism at its best, expressing Jewishness every moment. We are just learning how to master this huge spiritual challenge. A. D. Gordon explained that here was our chance to follow the Torah’s philosophical teachings fully, naturally. We not only celebrate the Sabbath and the holidays on Jewish time and in our Jewish space, but, today, we run Israeli military, agriculture, industry, and economics on Torah time and in the Torah’s sacred space. These wonderful opportunities also offer daily challenges for a young state struggling with the curse of terror and facing the blessed challenge of absorbing Jews from so many different countries and cultures.

Both nationhood and Womanist perspectives are particularistic perspectives. The term “womanist” was coined originally by African American women seeking an alternative to the feminism that strives to blur and ignore “essentialist” differences between men and women. Post-gender feminists are not even allowed to speak about “men” and “women” anymore, as these are regarded as “compulsive” terms. By the same token, the postmodern and post-Zionist climate rejects any affirmation of the uniqueness of any people, let alone the Jewish People.

In the same way that I long for the moment when women and men, once again, will not be ashamed to speak about their concrete female or male experiences, encouraging discussions

about how to create the conditions of covenant between them, I long for the moment when all Jews can again revel in their uniqueness, as we did when the State of Israel was declared. Jewish uniqueness is rooted in the Torah's ancient traditions translated into secular realities in daily Jewish life. Celebrating the plurality of human experiences, we must promote just enough pluralism—but not too much as to create chaos by denying a common denominator.

We Israeli Jews are the “dry bones” that came to life (Ezek.37). We become a living people as we gather here in Israel from our different diasporas and as we (re)discover our common denominator rooted in the Hebrew Bible and made relevant through our learning and actions. Yes, we are not yet the holy “kingdom of priests” that God and the world expect us to be. There is much to learn, much to improve. We do not always succeed in defeating all the patriarchal ills that affect the rest of the world: sexual abuse, pornography, economic and cultural discrimination, etc. But following the Zionist thinker, Ahad Ha'am, we trust that we will eventually find our own unique Jewish moral voice and wisdom in the face of modern and postmodern challenges.

Our modern experience teaches us that when Jews gather as a sovereign nation in the Land of Israel, they bestow many blessings to the world. Today, we proud Zionist men and Zionist women hope to bring even more, through innovations in all fields of life, through fulfilling the vision and the goals set out for us when we stood thousands of years ago at Mount Sinai.

## We all balance competing identities Yedidia Z. Stern (b. 1955)

*“A member of a minority group within the religious minority group whose members internalize simultaneously and without reservation both the Jewish world of values in its Orthodox religious version, and the humanistic liberal world of values.”*

While balancing loyalties to Judaism and the State, the Religious Zionist also balances modernity with tradition. Yedidia Stern, for one, happily juggles what he calls Israel's cultural duality rooted in Jewish tradition and Western ideas. He identifies himself as “a member of a minority group within the religious minority group whose members internalize simultaneously and without reservation both the Jewish world of values in its Orthodox religious version, and the humanistic liberal world of values.” He agrees with Rabbi Benjamin Lau that the Religious Zionist mission entails taking responsibility for the complexities arising from Western values and the challenges facing Israel's minorities.

Born in England, now a full professor at Bar-Ilan University Law School and the vice president of research at the Israel Democracy Institute, Stern has spearheaded efforts to draft a constitution for Israel. Although some religious Jews consider the Torah Israel's constitution, Stern and others seek to protect the government's defining arrangements and citizens' fundamental rights from legislative whimsy. Stern, along with Rabbi Benjamin Lau and others, fights to separate Judaism from rabbinic coercion so that Israeli Judaism can flourish naturally, organically, popularly.

Even those who are not religious can find inspiration in the breadth of Stern's Zionist vision – and a model for how to understand one's own identity, synthesizing defining commitments with eternal values. And in an age of

polarization, the very messiness, the many contradictions within Stern's worldview, is itself refreshing – and a blessing.

*Ani Ma'amin, I Believe* (2005)

The Jewish sovereign existence, an exceptionally rare commodity in history, is the fundamental experience of my life. For me, the Jewish state is not just a socio-political framework which allows for the national group to organize conveniently—in terms of security, society, economics, or otherwise—but it is a prime component of identity, an important manifestation of my Judaism, of my existence, of who I am. . . .

[My] personal compass [consists of] four circles of identities which I share (and their respective values which I continually try to balance).

The first: as a citizen of the State of Israel I am very much aware of the unique character the only Jewish state in 2,000 years should have. Israel is simultaneously a link in the chain of Jewish existence, which ties it to its heritage in a diachronic axis, and a link in the chain of democratic existence, which ties it to its own period in a synchronic axis. It is dissimilar to the other links in each of the two chains: it is the sole appearance of a dominant democratic culture in the annals of the Jewish nation, while also being the only appearance of a dominant Jewish culture in the midst of the democratic nations. . . .

The second: being a member of the Jewish majority in Israel, I bear the responsibility for reining in the force of the majority in order to prevent it from aggressively promoting its particular interests while systematically harming “the stranger who dwells among us”: the Israeli Arabs—as individuals and as a minority group. . . . The necessary balance requires recognition of the uniqueness of the Arab Israeli national community, without permitting it to exist as autonomy (politically, geographically, or otherwise).

The third: being a member of the religious minority group which sees in Judaism not just a nation and culture but also a religion, I perceive it to be my duty to create a normative framework which will not foment continuous friction between state and religion. . . .

The great prominence of the struggle surrounding religious legislation has blurred the cultural value of the religious experience in all its nuances, a rich tapestry from which and within which it would have been possible to weave a Jewish Israeliness.

The struggle has not helped fortify the ramparts of Jewish law in the state, and, unfortunately, has contributed to transforming Jewish law, our national historic law, into a failed name brand in the Jewish state. Coercion of religious norms strengthens secular movements which are liable to be seduced to use the force of the majority in order to dictate arrangements which do not consider the unique needs of the religious minority. . . .

The fourth: I am a member of a minority group within the religious minority group whose members internalize simultaneously and without reservation both the Jewish world of values in its Orthodox religious version, and the humanistic liberal world of values. This dual obligation is not free of symbolic, principled, and practical difficulties. Yet, nonetheless, members of this group are always inescapably subject to two masters: the Sovereign of the World and the state sovereign; the King of Kings and the earthly kingdom. Two systems of law rule over their lives a priori and unconditionally: Jewish law and Israeli law. These two spheres of loyalties—like a pair of parents—guide them in existing in a cultural and normative duality. The central challenge for the members of this group is to create a harmonious and integrative existence bridging both

worlds, and this is a task which few, far too few, in Jewish society in Israel confront seriously and with the necessary firmness. . . .

## 7 Zionisms not Zionism - Progressive Zionism is not an Oxymoron

Stav Shaffir (b. 1985)

### *Occupy Zionism!*

Perhaps the most dramatic attempt by younger Israelis to revive a sense of Zionist mission occurred in tandem with the social protests and tent cities of the summer of 2011. A twenty-five-year-old video editor, Daphne Leef, received notice from her landlord that she had to move because her apartment was being renovated. Frustrated, she began a Facebook protest against Israel's high rents and high cost of living. Soon, hundreds had massed on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard to live in tents, wave placards, and demand government assistance for middle-class Israelis—not just the poor. Reflecting Israel's increasingly global perspective, the protesters modeled their grassroots campaign on the Arab Spring protests that tried democratizing Arab lands and America's anti-capitalist Occupy Wall Street movement, which also featured tent cities in town squares. Hundreds of thousands more joined the protest as it broadened from the actual cost of rent and cottage cheese to the social and ideological price of rampant capitalism. The 2011 movement peaked on September 3 with half a million Israelis rallying in Tel Aviv.

The protesters invoked Zionist symbols. Pictures and impersonators of Herzl and Ben-Gurion abounded, as did Herzl's phrase, "If you will it, it is no dream" and Ben-Gurion's supposed pronouncement, "I declare an *egalitarian* state." Addressing the crowd, Leef drew on one of the most powerful Zionist symbols, "Hatikvah," calling the summer of 2011 "the big summer of the new Israeli hope."

Some polls estimated that 87 percent of Israelis supported what many simply called "The Social Protest." And while it did not launch a movement and the government's reforms were limited, it did spawn a renewed progressive call for economic equality and social dignity rooted in Labor Zionism.

The protests also brought new leaders to power. Although Leef started the outcry, other protesters—like Stav Shaffir—ended up in the Knesset. A young journalist who became the movement's public-relations whiz, Shaffir had one "grandmother who escaped from Iraq" and a "grandfather who escaped during the Holocaust." Recruited by the Labor Party, she was elected to the Knesset in 2013, becoming at age twenty-eight the youngest female Knesset member ever. She remains a member as of this writing.

Insisting that "the Zionist dream will not be accomplished until Israel is equal as well as secure," Shaffir fights settlement subsidies for moral, political, and fiscal reasons. She believes "Zionism has been kidnapped by voices that are not ours." That, she explains, "is why I often use the terms 'occupy Zionism' or 'reclaim Zionism'—to say we still have to fight for security, democracy, and defined borders."

In her Knesset debut, Shaffir acknowledged her role as "the voice of this generation" and vowed to "act on behalf of the Zionism of this state's founders."

Here, from a three-minute Knesset exchange that went viral, she confronts right wingers to offer her own Zionist hopes. Reading Shaffir illustrates Zionism's deep liberal roots and the stunning range of Zionist thought – then and now.

Knesset Speech (January 2015)

Don't preach to us about Zionism, because real Zionism means dividing the budget equally among all the citizens. Real Zionism is taking care of the weak. Real Zionism is solidarity, not only in battle but in everyday life, day to day, to watch out for each other. That is Israeliness. That is Zionism.

To be concerned about the future of the citizens of Israel. In the hospitals, in the schools, on the roads, on welfare. That is Zionism.

And you're taking it, and destroying it. You're taking it and turning the public purse into a license for your own political machinations, instead of worrying about the country.

You forgot about the Negev and the Galil to transfer 1.2 billion shekel bonuses to the settlements. You forgot Israel. You lost Zionism a long time ago.

Friends, when we sing "Hatikva," we sing it in the fullest sense of the word, "Hope": a politics of hope, a politics that has a future, a politics that is forward-looking, that wants to make life here better, more secure, that wants to make peace, that wants to improve relations between the different sectors within Israeli society, that believes in equal rights, in budgetary equity, that thinks that every single Israel citizen deserves an equal portion, and deserves to live a truly good life here. That is the true Zionism. That's Hatikva.

If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had written our national anthem, it would have been called "the hymn of despair" not hope. Against your politics, we fight. Against the slander and against the lies. And for a politics of hope.

8. Zionism is about Israelis and Diaspora Jews trying to perfect the state – not just defend it

Donniel Hartman (b. 1958)

*"Beyond Crisis Zionism to a values discourse for a 'Values Nation.'*

Amid fears of a "distancing Diaspora," the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem began redefining Zionism. In 2009 its new president Donniel Hartman initiated what became the iEngage educational curriculum encouraging a mutual, critical, dynamic engagement between Israel and "world Jewry." Starting with what its liberal Jewish target audience could agree on before tackling tough issues, iEngage addressed peoplehood, then sovereignty or statehood, then power, then a Jewish-democratic state, concluding with Israel's aspirations as a "Values Nation." This five-part journey helped many communities that had avoided discussions about Israel as too polarizing start engaging again—and healing.

An American-born Israeli rabbi with a philosophy PhD who served in the Israel Defense Forces, as did his children, Hartman has been far more effective than most outside critics in balancing patriotism and dissent. In one widely-forwarded article during the stabbings in Jerusalem in fall 2015, "My Gun and I," he wrote

movingly about detesting “the occupation” but detesting terrorists more, about defending himself while pursuing peace. In words that could have been written on a border kibbutz a century ago, he said: “I am grateful for my gun. I hate that I need it, but I am grateful for the fact that when I do, I have the ability to carry it. I hate the fact that the people I love are in danger, but I love the fact that neither I nor my people are helpless victims anymore. I love the gift of Israel, that if and when I need it, I do not merely have the right but the ability to protect myself.”

Ultimately, Hartman tired of rallying Jews around threats to Jews. He advocates advancing the Israel-Diaspora relationship from a “crisis narrative” mired in judgmental notions of *galut*, exile, and *geulah*, redemption, to a refreshed, mutually respectful and inspirational – but nevertheless realistic --“values narrative.” Through his writing and his leadership of the Shalom Hartman Institute, particularly in founding iEngage, Hartman has helped shape the North American Zionist conversation to start with the fundamentals that have long united us before jumping into a candid—and now contextualized—discussion about the flashpoints that occasionally divide us. His essay testifies to the vitality of Diaspora Zionism and its multidimensionality, as Hartman echoes Political Zionism and Cultural Zionism, Labor Zionism and Religious Zionism.

Israel and World Jewry: The Need for a New Paradigm (*Havruta*, August 24, 2011)

Today, we face a challenge: the crisis model may still have its place, but it is not as compelling or comprehensive as it used to be, and does not adequately reflect the new realities of Jewish life.

...

After the formation of the state, the two categories of *galut* and *geulah* continued to deeply influence the way the Diaspora and Israeli Jewish communities viewed themselves as well as each other. From the perspective of Israelis, the modern Diaspora remained the quintessence of *galut*, inferior to their own experience of *geulah*. . . . At the same time, many Jews around the world remained imprisoned within the categories of exile and redemption. Diaspora as *galut* was an appropriate perspective in a post-Holocaust world, and the crisis narrative framed the relationship to Israel. If Diaspora is *galut*, fraught with potential or imminent danger, then Israel is its *geulah*, a haven where all Jews could go in times of need. As such, Israel was worthy of one’s support, both for its role in saving Jews at risk in the present and as one’s own insurance policy for the future. . . .

We are living in a reality unprecedented in Jewish history, with two vital and powerful Jewish communities living side by side—one in Israel, and the other dispersed around the world, with its center in North America. A Jewish life built in isolation from either one will be impoverished. . . . We each have much to contribute to and learn from each other. . . .

We also strive for the opportunity to fulfill our purpose as a people—to live a life of value, meaning, and service. To do so, we need to cease to lean exclusively on the narrative of crisis and add to our vocabulary a narrative of values, whereby we work together as partners, Israel and world Jewry, to determine the moral principles which must govern our national and collective lives, and bring about their implementation. . . .

The first rule is that in this relationship, no one can claim seniority. In a crisis narrative, one side always has a greater voice, either because it is the one doing the saving, or because its life is on the line. In a relationship built on shared values, we must learn to see each other as

equals, as partners with much to contribute to one another. . . .

Second, we will need to redefine our notion of loyalty. In a crisis narrative, loyalty means standing together against the enemy and advocating steadfastly for one's side. Criticism, in this context, is an act of treason. In a values narrative, where we work together to fulfill our mission as a people and a nation, loyalty may also express itself in disagreement and in healthy criticism that helps the other partner fulfill its potential. Far from being an act of betrayal, criticism aimed at helping the other is the ultimate act of love and respect.

Third, in a crisis narrative, differences are set aside for the sake of the ultimate concern, namely, survival. But in a values narrative, differences about values, and the ways to implement them, are a permanent feature. No single worldview or political position can be allowed to define the values and aspirations that shape the relationship, or define what it means to be a lover of Israel. The same pluralism which has become self-evident when it comes to the practice of Judaism must also apply to Israel and its policies. Only under these conditions will we be creating a wide enough tent under which all Jews can enter into the relationship.

Finally, in a crisis narrative, we must see each other as we are, in order to meet the real dangers that we face. In a values narrative, we must see each other for what we can become. The conversation is not about embracing and accepting what is, but rather about building a common vision of what ought to be. . . .

#### 9. Simchat Torah – our ties to the land are Jewish, whether secular or religious

Leah Shakdiel (b. 1951)

*“Zionism was a big bet!”*

Contrary to public impressions, some Religious Zionists also support a Palestinian state. In 1978 Leah Shakdiel, a Religious Zionist peace activist, chose to move to Yerucham, a development town in the south, rather than the territories, where many of her childhood friends settled—expressing the Zionist value of *“hagshama”* [fulfillment], Shakdiel explains, “the realization of your ideals, the application of your ideals . . . on the ground.” Looking back, she says from that move came “Everything else . . . my involvement in politics, social action, social justice issues, peace, human rights, feminism.”

In 1986 she was elected to the local Religious Council, only to have the appointment vetoed because of her gender. A two-year fight concluded with her landmark Supreme Court victory. Now Shakdiel challenges secular Jews who renounce their Judaism just as she challenges religious Jews who reject liberalism—calling for a Jewish state that fulfills the Torah's commitment to social justice and to the “other” as the ultimate fulfillment of Religious Zionism. Amid fears that many Religious Zionist rabbis are veering toward ultra-Orthodoxy, Shakdiel offers an alternative Religious Zionist vision—seeing modern progressive ideas as natural outgrowths of the Torah and the Zionist movement. In so doing, she demonstrates the power of adding that extra “s,” speaking of Zionisms – in all their dimensionality – not just a monolithic, command-and-control, my-way-or-the-highway Zionism.

The Reason You Are Here Is Because You Are a Jew! (2004)



[M]y parents were part of a trailblazing generation. They broke new ground, they said, “Okay, we have this *historia lachrymosa* [history of weeping], but that’s not all there is in life for us.” It’s not as if we forget anything, we don’t. But while keeping account of our past, we also want to do the optimistic work of building a living, palpable future in the land.

You see, Zionism was a big bet! It’s not as if anything was secured in advance, it was a very important bet to make that there’s going to be a future—if we cast all our weight in one direction, it’s going to happen. . . .

We have a state . . . a successful state . . . that’s a major thing. . . . We all complain about it, it has many problems. . . . But . . . we have it. It’s a fact. . . .

On the one hand, there is my people, the Jews, who are very ancient, have a very distinct identity . . . with its religion, language, ancient culture, rich literature, traditions, history. We can take pride in a lot of moral and ethical achievements, and this is our land. On the other hand, you have an entity [the Palestinians] that has been created on the same land . . . as a result of recent events in the history of this region—the European powers meddling with it and dividing it up. . . .

If you are religious you are supposed to be right-wing. If you are left-wing, you’re supposed to be secular. Now, it’s not just the fault of the religious that have moved so dramatically to the right, I think it’s also the fault of the secular Israelis who have gotten it into their heads that they can do away with their Jewish identity, with their Jewish culture. This is ridiculous. I annoy my secular Israeli friends by telling them from every podium that if they do not see themselves as Jews that means that they are imperialists, colonialists, who have no business being here. They should leave the land to its native people. The indigenous people are Palestinians.

The reason you are here is because you are a Jew! . . .

The fact that the religious cling so much to right-wing politics also has to do with the fact that the leftists don’t do very much about being Jewish, so we have a dichotomy where people feel pushed against the wall. Who are you? Are you a peacenik or a Jew? This dichotomy, as if being a peace seeker and being a good Jew are mutually exclusive, is a horrible thing. . . . Both sides sort of participate in the maintenance of that stupidity, which goes nowhere, because unless we can recruit self-identified Jews in this country to the peace camp, we’ll get nowhere. . . .

I’m fifty-three years old. I want to see the two-state solution before I die. . . . If I get to see a Palestinian state in my lifetime, it’s going to be a big thing, because it means an internal reorientation of the State of Israel, a complete reorientation, which was bound to happen. You take in the exiles, you do all those interesting experiments in populating the desert, you build an army, and then you have to reorient the whole thing by arranging it so that there is another state on the same piece of land. It’s a tremendous thing.