Messianism, Utopia and Pessimism in the 1950s
A Study of the Critique of the 'Ben-Gurion State'[1]

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The 1950s are often categorized as the Ben-Gurion Era or the Ben-Gurion Republic in the annals of the state of Israel. The image of the founding father – elected prime minister and charismatic figure wielding unquestioned authority, in the tradition of Peter the Great or Lenin – is stamped on the period indelibly. The era is largely embodied in Ben-Gurion's personality and deeds; there is a likeness between the innovating leader and his times, for it was an era of creation. Ben-Gurion's active role in shaping various sectors of Israel during its formative years justifies the portrait. Besides the image of his supreme status as Father of the State and the man guiding its development, there was also a perception of thorough collaboration between him and broad groups of the intelligentsia. Current is the claim that Ben-Gurion sought to mobilize intellectuals for his own purposes, and that they usually responded with alacrity and unreserved enthusiasm, out of a deep admiration, and perhaps even worship, of Ben-Gurion the man, the authority and the symbol. Imputed to the intelligentsia is a willingness to be drafted thusly, and a dereliction in adhering to sceptical and critical values. An additional claim is that a kind of alliance formed between the intelligentsia and Ben-Gurion, with intellectuals of great repute becoming parties to it.[2]

Both sides, it is alleged, endeavored to turn the state into the object of national identification and the subject of cult; both sides spoke of the need to fashion a new society and a new man in the image of the values in which they believed. They perceived the founding of the state as an event fraught with dangers, but pregnant with prospects, and therefore it was of utmost importance to seize the opportunities and enable the state to take upon itself that project of total engineering.[3]

The picture of a harmonious pact between the leader and the intellectuals is incomplete. Already in the early 1950s, there was rather

less than full concord between Ben-Gurion and the intellectuals, before the stormy polemic over the Lavon Affair, beginning in 1960, which galvanized many intellectuals into formal opposition, and even before the Sinai Campaign. Inasmuch as Ben-Gurion symbolized the great achievement of founding the independent Jewish state, he also came to symbolize for many in the 1950s – in a no less exaggerated manner – the entirety of defects and distortions that attended the state from its inception. Inasmuch as Ben-Gurion for many was the symbol of action, zeal and Zionist optimism in the early years, he also became the lightning rod for all criticism of the state and pessimism. Although Ben-Gurion symbolized for many the Messianic idea, that is to say, he was seen as standard-bearer of a state whose goals seemed Messianic, integrating Zionist fulfilment with an ethical society, he also symbolized for many Zionist decadence in its Israeli incarnation. The Ben-Gurion who spoke of 'the chosen people' was perceived by it as responsible for the evolution of a defective and corrupt society.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the criticism directed at Ben-Gurion and the Ben-Gurion State was not only a critique of Israeli reality or of certain aspects of it, but was Messianic in nature. In other words, his censurers did not stop at exposing faults, perversions and failures in sundry fields, in the political establishment or economic system, in the operational mechanisms or international orientations. Their critique was Utopian, for they juxtaposed the so-called Ben-Gurion State alongside an alternative Utopian or Messianic model of national existence, in light of which ideal they passed judgement on the Israeli reality. Their model for a state, Messianic or Utopian in some other way, differed from the Utopian model of Ben-Gurion, a juxtaposition of one total ideal against another. The idealism of the critique was deep-rooted: the critics did not become Messianists or Utopianists from the force of the critique. The contrary was the case. The force of their critique derived from their prior Messianic or Utopian propensities.

Pessimism and disdain for reality characterized the tenor of the Messianist, Utopian criticism. Arrayed against Ben-Gurion optimism was a sense of *Untergang*, submergence, *Kulturpessimismus*.[4] Ben Gurion himself was portrayed as a narrow politician, shrewd, inflexible; not a leader who emphasized the importance of 'ethical values', but rather a predatory leader, insensitive, pretentious, strutting around in the guise of a spiritual man, a creature of the Israeli state-of-might detached from its immediate surroundings ('the Middle East' or 'the Semitic space'), and living therefore in alienation

and estrangement from them. He was described as a creature of a party state, encouraging ideological conformism and political opportunism. Insofar as Ben-Gurion was the state's founder, he was thus responsible, in the eyes of his critics, for all its blemishes.

The critique of the so-called Ben-Gurion State was a combination of pessimistic, Utopian and Messianic trends from earlier periods on the one hand, and a post-1948 social-political evaluation on the other. From this standpoint, it seems that one may not regard the critique solely as an amalgamation of responses during the time under consideration; one must also view it as a continuation of patterns from a previous era, an expression of ongoing duality in the Zionist temperament – a duality of pessimism and optimism, hailing from a shared Messianic impulse.

An evaluation of critical trends reveals that the decade noted for pragmatism and conformism, an opportunistic decade of elites who lost their ideological fervor, was also a decade of intense ideological ferment – and not just on the ideological margins. It was a decade of experimentation in concocting alternatives, some of which flourished after the close of the Ben-Gurion era in 1963, when the bands of the state he had created began to loosen. In the hothouse of the Eshkol era, it was discovered that the forces then transforming the state had begun to ripen in the days of Ben-Gurion. It is not my intention to detail the critique and its authors or render an anthology of pessimism. It will suffice to discuss several central claims and to classify elements of the critique systematically.

I

Usually, tendencies of cultural pessimism surface in a society during crisis or transition. In such circumstances, a sense of decline or world-sorrow (*Weltschmerz*) becomes salient, and longings for a collective, blissful youth stir. Sometimes, a feeling of crisis and deterioration can predominate despite an 'objective reality' presenting no clear symptoms of unravelling in the political, social and cultural fabric. In any event, a consciousness of despair imbibed from European civilization at the end of the nineteenth century, was one of the forces that impelled the Jewish intelligentsia toward nationalism,[5] and a pessimistic-critical consciousness accompanied the Zionist settlement from the start. It is thus no wonder that already in the nascent days of the state, the winds of pessimism blew, manifest in various forms and formulations, evolving into a conspicuous and stable trend or sub-

trend of consciousness and of culture. Pessimism, consolidated and ready-formulated, cropped up in sundry circles of the Israeli elite, expressive of an introverted infrastructure in Israeli society which it inherited from this previous epoch. We therefore have before us a familiar pattern, with the same content in each era and every society and culture, albeit articulated differently.

In the context of Israeli society, one must differentiate between a Zionist critique on the one hand, and an anti-Zionist or non-Zionist critique – certainly an anti-Israeli critique – on the other.[6] An anti-Zionist critique negates in advance the underlying Zionist assumptions on which Israeli society is built, and sometimes negates in advance the very legitimacy of the state of Israel. It undertakes to prove that Zionism in its essence and foundations is both a misled and misleading ideology, which had to date failed to alleviate the travails of the Jews and was forever incapable of such. Moreover, it never even intended to alleviate them and, in point of fact, aggravated them. It is superfluous to add that, according to this critique, the state of Israel was born in original sin, with the principal casualties of this sin being the Arabs of the country. From this Jewish anti-Zionist critique – built upon the premises of communism, liberal emancipationism, Orthodoxy, and so on – Zionist ideology and the reality it spawned are historical fantasies, a false Utopia, heresy, and even historical crime.

In contrast, the internal Zionist critique accepts the foundational aims of Zionism, namely a state of Jews in the Land of Israel; it takes Zionism to task for incorporating misguided ancillary ideologies of one type or another, and finds fault in the particular political, social and cultural formations that Zionism created, and in which, in turn, it is realized. At the other end of the pessimistic continuum, one encounters critics who utterly despair of the prospects for the state's self-reform into the incarnation of 'the Zionist ideal' or the 'Zionist dream' as they see it, and the despair delivers them to over to an assortment of political and cultural pessimisms.[7] The critique of Israeli reality came from various directions: from a nationalist eschatology that set national-historic goals so lofty as to be unachievable, yet expected that the mytho-allegory of its imagination would sprout skin and sinew; from a social Utopianism setting similar goals but focusing on group relations; from a cultural idealism proffering binding cultural norms and a compulsory normative identity for the public, and so on.[8] A consciousness of despair can, therefore, derive from radical Utopianism as well as revolutionary conservatism, that is, from

the two diammetric poles of Utopia:[9] a Utopia envisioning a brave new future, and a Utopia that magically resurrects an historical past in its entirety. From the viewpoint of revolutionary conservatism, processes of modernization and abstract ideals damaged former wholeness.

Both types of Utopianism use diverse means of expression: visionary and mythic-allegorical writing that presents a past or Messianic fantasies as if they were an erstwhile reality; caustic satirical writing,[10] nostalgia for 'the lost Land of Israel' and for 'the Mandate Garden of Eden' (that is the pre-state era), a pining for cultural roots of one's country of origin, and so forth. The critique can be directed against the state as a ruling institutional framework, and against its authorities, in which case it derives from *a priori* suspicion of every statist framework, given its foundation in coercion and a blunting of spontaneity. Since the state is interpreted as the product of society, culture and ideology, this sort of critique usually extends beyond the state and denounces its seminal ideology, as well as the society and culture bound up with it. Is such expression anchored in pandemic mental structures?[11] Is this an authentic reaction to development, crisis or socio-cultural change, a reaction to shifts in the system of norms and ruling elites, or is this simply a 'mental fashion' making the rounds, or perhaps even a manifestation of cultural pathology? I will review these issues by concisely surveying expressions of political and cultural pessimism in the early 1950s (1949–56), the first years of the state of Israel.

II

Israel's formative years, 1949–56, were regarded as a continuation of the construction, layer upon layer, in an overall plan whose goals were defined before statehood. The founding of the state was perceived more as a point of departure and less as a miraculous Messianic event upending reality by force of a giant leap. It simply forged a necessary mechanism, the state, in the ongoing Messianic process. This stage toward actualization, like any other, was considered in the larger context of its contribution to the creation of a new national existence. Ben-Gurion Messianism was thus a concept of a process and not of a single miraculous event, in which the state was thought of as the principal tool for generating the chain of events leading to wholeness. If the 1950s were ordinary days for certain of the critics, however, that was because some considered those years as a missed opportunity for

building momentum or leaping toward a totally new reality; they considered the works of construction in this early period as layers erected upon a faulty foundation, erecting a society and culture defective in design. Such a warp was beyond repair, requiring fundamental reconstruction; in other words, the critics, too, believed that the era could and must be one of comprehensive new creation.

Young Israeli society of the early 1950s thus acquired a double valence: on the one hand, these years were engraved in memory as the years of creation and construction in the wake of the War of Independence, years of transition from the Yishuv to statehood, the years of absorbing the mass Jewish immigration (aliyah) and of the military-security struggle, depicted as the Messianic dawn of redemption and a heroic time of initiative and invention. On the other hand, with the same degree of intensity, those years were represented as a botched historical opportunity, an era in which the state's essential errors and deficiencies found their way into its structure. These mistakes were, for the most part, connected to and symbolized by the Mapai regime and the leadership of Ben-Gurion. Far from hailing Ben-Gurion as father of the nation warranting adulation, the critique represented him as the man responsible for the faulty direction of Israeli society and for imprinting his negative stamp on it for generations to come. The 1950s were not acclaimed as years of infancy and growth, but rather branded as years of decay and failure, not as an heroic youth, but as an age of decadence.

In the 1970s, the early 1950s were considered anew. The critical trend did not diminish and even mustered further arguments, deepening and sharpening its denunciations, but glimmerings of a yearning for the Ben-Gurion era also emerged. In the typical radical leftist critique of the Labor movement of the 1950s, Ben-Gurion was stigmatized as the man responsible for the deterioration of the volunteering society and for the ascent of the state and rule by bureaucracy or Apparat, the man who bartered spontaneous pioneering for statist red-tape and party autocracy. Circumstances had changed by the 1970s; the primary, internal tension between 'society' and 'state' which characterized the 1950s had become a tension between 'nation' and 'state', between 'the Land of Israel' and 'the people Israel' on the one hand, and 'the State of Israel' on the other: two distinct arrays of values and symbols strained in their relations if not entirely split.

Indeed, Ben-Gurion's past detractors had compiled a considerable register of complaints, but in light of the new conditions, it was

granted that he placed the rule of law and state sovereignty over metaphysical notions that served the political ideology, over notions like 'the will of history' or 'destiny of the nation' and others like them. The statist Messianism of Ben-Gurion now seemed to past critics as a reserved and positivism Messianism, in contrast to the nationalist Messianism on the rise. The legal framework of the state was appreciated for its capacity to block the ascent of certain norms above the sovereignty of the state.[12] The deep pessimism that appeared immediately in some circles with the rise of the Likud to government in 1977 was, to a great extent, a continuation of the earlier critique. The critique had softened in the span between the close of the Ben-Gurion era and the political turnabout (ma'apah) of 1977, but afterwards it erupted violently, verging on expressions of despair. The pessimistic response was partly a consequence of intellectual fashion and partly shock over what then looked like a radical break not only from the familiar political structure, but from the familiar set of values and ideology. This response gave birth to gushing rhetoric, which treated, among other things, the alienation of the old elite from the new government and even a sense of 'the exile of the intellectual in the Land of Israel'. Some of the critics located the root of the evil not in the Likud's election victory, but in the Six Day War and its ramifications, for they considered the war responsible for the Likud's elevation. Thus interwoven in the Utopian critique was a conservative thread of nostalgia for better days in the past, and the Israel of Ben-Gurion (and even more the Israel of Eshkol, primarily before the Six Day War) was increasingly styled as a 'golden epoch' of realism.[13] They revised the image of the past as a total blight, repenting their imputation of the onset of the disease to 1949 (or earlier). Ben-Gurion was rehabilitated insofar as he was represented as an antithesis to the leadership taking charge in 1977, especially since he had been its uncompromising foe in his day. He was portrayed as a realistic leader who, despite occasional excesses, was sober enough to set things right afterwards, and who confined his more reckless salvoes to his journal or internal party debates.

An investigation into the inner consistency and development of political and cultural pessimism in Israeli society is a study in the state's anti-history. In addition, the nationalist movement in the pre-state era was accompanied, from its inception, with forebodings of debility and atrophy. Various critics – and not just Ahad Ha'Am who was the best-known – had been itemizing the Yishuv's shortcomings since the 1880s. Some became pessimistic critics upon adopting

attitudes and patterns of description found in European literature at the time.[14] Others did so upon adopting the critique of modern European civilization itself.[15] The atmosphere of crisis had bred reaction and eschatology, wrote Jacob Rabinovitz in a typical essay published in 1926 on the parallels in the Land of Israel to the mystic-conservative philosophy of Nikolai Berdaiev.[16] Some critics peppered their descriptions of the progress of the Yishuv and culture in the Land of Israel with bitter reprimands. One well-known example is the farewell address of the national poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik in Tel Aviv, June 1933, prior to his departure for an operation in Europe.[17] As outlined in the critique, the Yishuv was an idealist society in which every deviation from compulsory Utopian norms tripped off alarms. As said above, this tradition of critique continued into the state era, and the appearance of the state actually magnified it, although it was re-outfitted.

The relevant question, then, is whether this critique was a direct extension of that of the Mandatory period, or whether, at least in part, it was an empirical critique engendered in response to a novel situation, the appearance of the sovereign Jewish state, and the phenomena created in its wake. Are we speaking of a persistent mentality of pessimism, that is, of an authentic *Weltschmertz*, as claimed by Max Nordau,[18] or even of an attitude rooted in the intellectual-critic's self-pity and haughtiness, as Joseph Vitkin argued in his essay responding to Brenner's 24 November 1910 remarks? Vitkin there maintains that the critique derives from comparing reality with an ideal rather than with humanity as it is; because the critics perceive themselves to be superior beings, they venerate themselves and devalue others, that is, they regard reality from within their own private biographies.[19] Do we therefore have before us an Israeli version of the sense of decline and social pessimism that had exercised various European thinkers before the First World War and which reappeared after the Second World War? In other words, to what extent were the critique and pessimism an expression of an 'objective' critical glance, and to what extent were they the fruit of an inherited critique that automatically assigned its strict value judgment on 'facts', and then contrasted the results of the value judgement with some alternative version of reality?

I do not intend to assess the validity of the critique regarding aspects of Israeli reality in the 1950s, but rather to probe its main forms and motives. The critique was divided into two main categories: (a) a critique of the nature of the political regime and its policies in

sundry matters; (b) a critique revealing essential antinomies within the structure of the state deriving from the imperious ideology guiding it. According to this latter critique, the state incarnates ideology, and therefore any ideological transformation would constitute a structural transformation in the state itself. The former critique, labelled pragmatist-constructivist, mainly evaluated the functioning of the systems of governance, and concluded that rectification of matters could be carried out simply by instituting rudimentary change in the regime or by substituting one policy for another. This was a critique of 'system' or 'regime'.

By the terms of the second critique, labelled Idealist, the domineering ideology would have to be replaced by another ideology, which would re-invent society and state. This critical stance integrated national Messianism and social Utopia on the one hand, with pessimism and disappointment on the other; a quite popular mix.[20] That is to say: it derives from a high level of expectation or another model of state, society or culture. *Prima facie*, the critique targeted the state's alleged totalitarian nature, as if speaking in the name of liberal values. In actuality, it, too, derived partly from a totalistic world-view. Intellectuals who denounced the authoritarian nature of the Ben-Gurion State and who professed 'voluntarism' or 'creative spontaneity' in contradistinction to the 'coercive' or 'centralizing' nature of the state were themselves posing one form of totality in opposition to another.

The critique of the state in the 1950s was idea-political. It was not an expression of a sense-of-life (*Lebensgefühl*) of escape from reality into the *Ichposie* of a private, closed world. The critics' disappointment was not meta-cultural from civilization or society; it was not an expression of reaction against the state's urban-industrial nature, although this sentimental element was not entirely absent, found primarily in 'indigenous' literature describing changes in the native landscape. Most importantly, it did not derive from a response to demographic permutations in the Jewish society, though there were those who considered these changes the source of the negative processes – the 'Canaanite' groups, for example, which thought these changes liquidated the 'authentic Hebrew identity' which had materialized in the Mandate period. While in certain instances one can find motifs which are also present in the cultural pessimism current in other societies, the critique was, *au fond*, a response to a specific historical situation and expressed awareness both of its singularity as well as of the significance of this historical phenomenon for the future.

The critique derived from an assumption inherent deep in the Zionist world-view: that it is possible to found and shape a society and culture on some desired model, via comprehensive socio-cultural engineering. From this standpoint, the defects identified in society and culture were not interpreted as the result of over-planning or an exaggerated experiment in sculpting a perfect society, but rather as a result of deficient planning, of a misguided set of priorities, and of having chosen the wrong model.

In this context, it is important to stress as well that the critique against Ben-Gurion did not decry the real or apparent authoritarianism of his government, as many claim, but instead inveighed against the nature, trends, and contents of the putative authoritarianism. Of course, at first glance, in the rhetorical dimension, it does not seem that way. Rather, it appears that most of Ben-Gurion's harshest critics spoke in the name of cultural pluralism, voluntarism, populism and spontaneity, and that they saw in the bureaucratic, centralized state an instrument which sterilized, desiccated and asphyxiated the vitality of the Land-of-Israel way of life; but in fact, behind the critique of Ben-Gurion's attempt to plan the state according to his vision lurked an alternate authoritarian approach, which also assumed the necessity of socio-cultural planning. Critics on both the left and on the right (the Herut Movement) averred that one must plan and shape society and culture in accord with a preconceived agenda. In the regnant political context of the time, the left advocated that the state's character be determined not by the governmental mechanism, but by voluntary bodies, whereas the right opposed the employment of the mechanism, since it saw in it an overt arm of the party, but did not oppose the principle of socio-cultural programming. Simply put, all claimed that the elite had the right and the authority to decide the nation's cultural values and instil them via education in the general public.

The opposition to the Ben-Gurion Messianic view which itself espoused the need to design a new society, was not, therefore, opposition to Messianism *per se* (and the Messianism of Ben-Gurion, one recalls, was not national-territorial Messianism, but patently social-Utopian Messianism). Ben-Gurion's adversaries did not protest his Messianism because of its ineluctable authoritarianism, as if they were avatars of pluralism and liberalism; the opposition arose from a surrogate authoritarian Messianism.

The ambivalent relation to the state manifested itself in the way that those suspicious of excessive involvement of state mechanisms in society and culture clamored simultaneously for the state to be instru-

mental in molding an ideal society and normative culture. Very few rejected timeworn Enlightenment and nationalist notions regarding the need and the ability of the elite to edify and condition the 'new man' and the 'new culture'. The majority accepted the claim that only government institutions had the power and the tools for the task, but at the same time, as a semi-oppositional gesture, many expressed reservations over a surfeit of coercion and authority applied in certain sectors. Their reservations emanated mainly from their rivalry with the particular agents who controlled those mechanisms.

Well-established groups with their own traditions within the Labor Movement, which aspired to preserve their cultural autonomy, shared the assumption that in regard to other social groups, especially within the new *aliyah*, it was crucial to mount something of a campaign of 're-education'. In these established groups reigned an attitude of negation of the cultural heritage of members of the 1950s *aliyah*, and therefore an opinion that it was desirable to school and raise them to a higher, modern cultural level.[21] The state system of education and army education were regarded as the primary and most efficient means toward reshaping members of the mass *aliyah* of the 1950s. In discussions held with the prime minister, intellectuals and writers repeatedly stressed their fear of cultural deterioration and the need for 'education in values', which meant institutional education and patterning informed by those norms and values which seemed to the interlocutors as advanced and Zionist. In all these discussions, there were no defenders of cultural-ethnic pluralism or cultural heterogeneity.[22]

The ideological polemic of the 1950s, mainly between Ben-Gurion and the intellectuals who supported him on the one hand, and those who did not on the other, stemmed from a conceptual system based in idealist philosophy, characterized by prodigious elitism. The central developments in Israeli society were not placed in the center of the debate. The intellectual critics were not immune to that conceptual system, and thus their attention was diverted from what actually transpired in segments of primary importance in Israeli society and culture. It is permissible to say that many of them fought with Ben-Gurion the war of the past, and not the war of the future, and therefore did not discern in the events of their immediate surroundings those phenomena which would later be considered the formative processes of Israeli society.

Both they and Ben-Gurion shared, as mentioned, the assumption that it is possible to design the state according to some projected

model; moreover, both sides in the controversy agreed on the need for such formatting, since the historical mission of the political and cultural elite was to navigate society for the new Jewish immigrants and determine its path. There were no dissenters among them regarding the necessity to mold the new *aliyah* according to the catechism of European Zionist ideology. Both Ben-Gurion and his rivals believed in the power of spiritual-cultural regulations, and state education seemed most suitable for the task. Both he and they aspired to create an integral national society, with maximum normative cultural unity, which they saw in clearly elitist terms. Both he and they advocated, openly or covertly, an accelerated assimilation and acculturation of the immigrants into the existing cultural array. There was hardly a mention of any right the immigrants might have to preserve their particular cultures, except for an occasional defense of the immigrants' religious customs.

The ideologies of the melting pot and 'ingathering of the Exiles' (*kibbutz galuyot*) predetermined the supremacy of one normative system to the exclusion of others. They were intended to forge an integral cultural system, with mandatory cultural norms, which would in turn create an integral and perhaps even homogeneous society. Elitism was regarded positively. All sides to the debate believed that the founding of the state called for a sort of new covenant between the different pillars of the Israeli way of life, organized by the officious normative system. Although having this assumption in common, critics claimed that Ben-Gurion and his party were not shaping the state in accordance with the proper system model.

The critics did not want merely to expose faults and communicate displeasure; their heady phillipics against the contemporary way of life (*Zeitkritik*) oftentimes turned them into self-styled prophets. Between Israeli reality and the Ben-Gurion vision, they purposed to establish an alternative imaginary reality of their own. Most of the critics of Israeli reality of the 1950s were not outsiders (*Ausseiter*), but rather came from the center of the cultural-intellectual system, from groups possessing a crystallized consciousness and an unequivocal sense of identity. Men of letters and academics who met with Ben-Gurion were unquestionably critic-admirers, and their critique was sincere. They did not hold Ben-Gurion responsible for the failures and defects which they located – such as the dehumanization of the society or a disconnection from the roots of the socialist culture – but in the rhetorical dimension there was little disparity between them and the shrill critics from the ideological and political margins such as

Israel Eldad or Yonatan Ratosh. Both sorts believed in the power of vanguard ideology to configure the new reality. This critical convergence teaches that the political culture of the 1950s was not at all a 'culture of agreement.'

III

It is possible to sort the critique of the Ben-Gurion State into three main groups:

1. Critics who were in one way or another centrally located in the political and cultural system, but who distanced themselves or were pushed away from it and belonged to the radical left, identified at the onset of the period with Mapam. From the standpoint of this group of critics, the founding of the state was but another chapter in the leftist crisis in Zionism. Instead of the socialist state for which they had hoped, arose a bourgeois, bureaucratic state, lacking in life-spirit. Instead of 'the new man', the 'old Jew' made a comeback, and a Ben-Gurion model state had been supplanted by a state serving as a capitalist tool. From the historical perspective of 1977, the Ben-Gurion era seemed to have prepared the ground for terminating the workers' hegemony. Although Ben-Gurion engaged in all-out warfare against the right, critics claimed that he none the less facilitated the right's way to power. It was alleged that since Ben-Gurion exchanged the socialist vision of the state for blind statism (*mamlachtiut*),[23] means and paths were automatically provided his rivals, who from the start prophesied in the name of etatism. Ben-Gurion dismantled the workers' movement, in the opinion of his critics, creating a giant vacuum that the new powers rushed in to fill. This critique derived in part from the diminished stature of the kibbutz movements in the new society, in contrast to the statist economy, and in contrast to the capitalist economy. It also opposed Ben-Gurion's alignment of Israel with the West.

2. Critics who were part of the customary opposition to Ben-Gurion from the central, liberal groups, mostly the General Zionists and, more significantly, critics from 'the Zionist right', mainly critics identified with the Herut Movement, descendants of the Revisionist Movement and the Irgun, who were the traditional rivals of Ben-Gurion. In their estimation, Ben-Gurion was 'Satan incarnate', with an overflowing closet of skeletons, a tyrant whose rule lacked historical and moral legitimacy. Unlike the critique of the General Zionists, which mostly championed entrepreneurship in the economic sphere, the critique of the Herut Movement and thinkers on the radical right was exhaustive and absolute. Nearly the only point of convergence between the liberal bourgeois critique and that of Herut was their common support of the entrepreneurial ethic and their objection to the rule of the *Apparat* (which Herut regarded as a monstrous cross between the state establishment and the Histadrut establishment).

3. Critics from small, radical circles, including the heirs of *Brit Shalom*, *Lehi*, and the Canaanites, as well as unaffiliated intellectuals, writers and artists. They created active marginal circles like *Sulam*, *Aleph*, *Ha'Olam Ha'Zeh*, and so

forth, offering comprehensive critiques of the leadership of Ben-Gurion, of Mapai rule, of the state and of the overbearing ideology. *Lehi*'s offspring and the Canaanites presented two radical versions of national-territorial Messianism. From their respective vantages, the state of Israel was an exilic state or an institutionalized ghetto.

In contrast to the first two groups, which conducted a direct polemic with Ben-Gurion, 'within the camp' or in the parliamentary arena, most of those belonging to the third category attacked Ben-Gurion and Mapai from outside the establishment and did not convene direct and open dialogue with him. They did not attend meetings with him, nor contact him directly in any fashion whatsoever. As far as they were concerned, Ben-Gurion was a symbol to be smashed, and any form of smashing was kosher.

The three groups differed in most respects, but shared a critique of Ben-Gurion and the Ben-Gurion State. Ben-Gurion was perceived as a charismatic but authoritarian; as 'shaper of the state', he was considered a political titan with traits – or pretensions – of spiritual and intellectual leadership, to which many of his critics related ambivalently. Therefore, the critique against him was a unifying force, or at least a common factor circulating among circles otherwise absolutely different in nature. Groups whose mutual animosity was bitter and deep nevertheless belonged to a united camp of opposition to Ben-Gurion.

Regarding trends at the ideological and political level, it will be recalled that there existed a more general and inchoate longing for some Utopian Golden Age of Yishuv society in the Mandate period: a society that was homogeneous, intimate, value-laden, and boasting an advanced Hebrew culture which disintegrated in the face of 'the flood of immigration', becoming heterogeneous, mob-like and devoid of values. The critique was not directed against the state so much as against the immigrants, who were incapable of assimilation into the old, familiar frameworks, and who were therefore blamed for cultural stratification within the society.

Some of the critics at the time tried to organize political or para-political bodies for themselves ('The New Regime', 'The Semitic Action', 'The Line of Volunteers', etc.). Some participated on an *ad hoc* basis in specific issues, such as the struggle against 'military rule' and the debate over the Kastner Affair. However, only the Lavon Affair united them into a powerful bloc: a coalition was created between powers at the margins and outside the political system with those in the center.[24]

Against the statist ethos of Ben-Gurion, which was accompanied by Messianic ideology, against the image of Ben-Gurion as a personality in command of history, as a Renaissance man who saw beyond details to the *Gestalt* of a total Israeli way of life,[25] a different version of Ben-Gurion loomed: the man in command of history, casting his heavy shadow over all aspects of the Israeli way of life, but the shadow is dark and the commander is a dictator. He was considered the originator of all sin, personally and directly responsible for all mistakes and distortions; a cunning politician, enamored of power, costumed in the guise of an intellectual and man of letters; a man who promoted state power for its own sake, placing state (and party) interests over everything else, who intentionally missed the opportunities to arrive at an agreement with the neighboring countries toward regional integration, who decided to follow a misguided and damaging internationalist orientation, who uprooted the pioneering spirit from the new Israeli society. In short, the critics held that Ben-Gurionist policy prioritized the needs of the State and its institutions above all facets of society and its values.

From here, it is only a short step to representing Ben-Gurion's *mamlachtiut* as not only etatism serving positive historical-national imperatives, but also as fascism that turned the state into an ideal and a ritual. One should stress that in Ben-Gurion's attempt to wear several hats at once – to outfit himself not only as prime minister but also as 'the father of the nation', as an intellectual, as a man of ethics and vision – he and his camp of admirers aided his critics. Some of the critics were prepared to accept his self-image as a Messianic-moralistic visionary, but not his image as an intellectual, while those who recognized his intellectual prowess rejected his Messianic pretensions.

Thus, the comprehensiveness of the critique and its multivariety teaches that the 1950s was a period of conceptual ferment. This refutes the received image of the 1950s as an era of ideological conformism, years of assimilation of most of the public and the elite into the establishment, years of vanished youthful spirit and suppressed intellectual autonomy.

During this era, various circles suggested radical ideological and political alternatives. This radicalism often comported with the ideological tradition from which it grew, and was neither revolutionary nor innovative. The failure of the opposition did not derive from the threatening nature of the supposed Ben-Gurion dictatorship, but rather from the fact that the political and ideological alternatives offered by the opposition were anachronistic or Utopian

and did not discern the deep changes underway in Israeli society in the 1950s.

IV

The founding of the state of Israel fundamentally altered life in the Land-of-Israel. Nevertheless, while the state was thought of as an astounding historical achievement, it was not considered the termination of Zionism, nor even as its purpose. Both Ben-Gurion and his critics saw in the state and its systems just a stage in history, though a necessary one which provided the Jewish people with an indispensable framework and vital tools. The internal tension generated within the new state and public framework stemmed from the controversy over the question of what role to give the state in the shaping of the new reality. Idealistic critics of Ben-Gurion had earlier recoiled from the notion of the state, given its coercive basis, and now, in the new historical-political reality, they recoiled aesthetically and morally from the activation of the state. They suffered misgivings about the ramifications of state involvement in socio-cultural affairs, fearing duress by the totalist ruling apparatus. Even more importantly, they feared official investiture of values which they rejected. As said above, some of the critics postulated in theory that 'normalization' of Israeli society meant the creation of a nation-state which mandates a common national culture. Moreover, they maintained that it was preferable for a new national society and culture to be generated spontaneously without direction from watchful government agencies and without state worship. All regarded the state as a historical necessity, but it was not only an abstract concept: the state of Israel was identified with a specific political party – Mapai – which deployed a specific governing apparatus, neither of which won the critics' confidence.

At the root of the critique lay the tension between the center of sovereign authority, which was in the hands of a dominant party, and centers of secondary authority, which pursued their own autonomy. Were one of these alternative centers of authority to supplant the central, prevailing authority, there is no doubt that it, in turn, would try to fabricate the state after its own image. Because the centers of secondary authority remained in the opposition or in the margins, they spoke rhetorically in the name of 'general liberty', although in actuality they meant their own autonomy and their own specific agendas. The Ben-Gurion State thus was the object of critique from a

number of angles. Occasionally, in paradoxical but logical fashion, contrasting critiques would converge on points of principle. For example, right and left both rejected the rule of the *Apparat*, albeit for utterly different reasons – the left in the name of the ancillary culture of voluntarism, and the right in the name of private enterprise and free market forces. The essence of the critique was composed of two constellations of claims.

First, the territorial boundaries of the state created a defective and deficient country. All the basic faults stamped on its character derived from this territorial deformation, which was not just a historical warp, but a meta-historical one as well. From the perspective of the Herut Movement and the radical right, the partition of the western Land of Israel was an expression and symbol of organic deformity, to which was added the contents of the closet full of skeletons connected to Mapai rule. The right, especially the Liberal Party, imputed responsibility to the Mapai government for extirpation of the motive force of entrepreneurship.

The Herut Movement, which championed a free economy, free from the supervision of the Mapai-state establishment, paradoxically professed etatism and the active involvement of the state in shaping the society and culture according to its particular national-cultural ideal. It was simultaneously a party of etatism and a party protesting about the state establishment, since that establishment was identified with a specific party.

Second, the political structure of the Ben-Gurion State – a structure of ideological compromises which managed to grant various groups autonomy while granting them influence on politics and culture – seemed like a retreat foreboding disaster from the Yishuv way of life in the Mandate era. Ben-Gurion's coalition with the General Zionists and the religious parties with the religious *status quo* was, for the left, a stunningly reactionary measure, for it gave significant influence to groups which were previously outside the center of the political system, and Ben-Gurion preferred them for his own reasons over his natural allies in the Land of Israel Workers' Movement.

Parties of the left which, in the 1950s, were enthralled with centralized, Stalinist communism advocated voluntarism and spontaneity. Parties which believed in the power of the elite and its historical destiny criticized the creation of a piloted democracy which foisted politics on the whole web of Israeli life, thereby negating Romanticism and 'human electricity'.[26] Populist critique of this variety

contrasted 'mobilization from below', which was a positive form of public galvanization, with mobilization by the establishment, which the critics claimed was Mapai's style. Those who sung the praises of the historical mission of the centralized Communist Party of the Soviet Union did not shrink from condemning the centralized apparatus of Mapai rule.

The ideological-value and meta-cultural infrastructure of Israeli society was criticized from opposite directions. There were those who located the source of all the essential defects in the apparent weakening of the Zionist-national and pioneering ethics. Others found the problem rooted precisely in the Zionist qualities of the state; Ben-Gurion was blamed both for fulfilling the Zionist vision as well as for straying from its principles. Others, on the radical left, denounced Ben-Gurion for deviating from the socialist ideology of his youth, starting with his appointment as Chairman of the Jewish Agency in the 1930s and his attempt to arrive at a pragmatic concord with the Revisionists; they further censured him for thrusting Israel into the sphere of Western influence and turning the country into a bourgeois-capitalist state.

The critique from the right against state interventionism was ideological camouflage for an *a priori* and dogmatic critique against Mapai rule. The Herut Movement asked the voting public to believe that substituting Mapai rule with Herut rule would heal all ills. In essence, they were claiming that one form of etatism would be preferable over another, since the present form is the rule of a party promoting class interests over state and society, whereas the etatism of the Herut Movement would prioritize the broad weal of the state over the petty interests of a class.

The critique of the left was mostly a fearful response to the processes underway in Israeli society – what seemed to the left as the creation of a mass society of a Western nature, that is to say, 'American'. This critique was veiled beneath claims against the pragmatic nature of the society, which replaced the spirit and vision of the Land-of-Israel youth movements and Labor Movement of the Mandate period. Ben-Gurion was depicted as having castrated the workers' track in education, the General Histadrut and the Pioneering Movement, as having sentenced Israeli society to materialism, careerism and class polarization, to a pale statism, lacking in soul or vigor, and to the 'operationalism' of the establishment.[27] Just when the creative spirit was so essential, Ben-Gurion eliminated it for reasons of state and a dread of competition.

As indicated earlier, there is a great deal of irony in the fact that those who advocated ideological conformity among themselves and blindly admired the centralized totalitarianism of the Soviet Union as an ideal way to foster a 'new society' also spoke of the 'free, youthful spirit'. Those with a Stalinist orientation accused Ben-Gurion in this manner of 'Israeli Stalinism'! They described any broadening of state involvement in the economy as 'etatism', though not because they opposed state intervention in principle. On the contrary, they supported governmental jurisdiction over the economy. Their gripe stemmed from the particular way the authorities managed the economy, for they subsidized the development of a private sector. They objected to any independently active youth movements, run 'from below', without reliance on the state, preferring that the state organize youth movements for political and cultural indoctrination in order to achieve the appropriate socio-cultural objectives.

This critique was thus motivated by a reaction against the evolution of the new Israeli society, to its urbanization and industrialization, which threatened to swallow up the older, auxiliary societies and their elites. The critics evinced an appalling inability to keep pace with the present, believing that public initiatives like those of the 1930s and 1940s were up to the challenges of the 1950s. Instead of adapting to the new situation, to integrate into the political system and try to exert influence on it from within, they abandoned it to become caustic critics, full of pathos, resurrecting an imaginary Golden Era oozing nostalgia, mourning the 'lost youth'. The Golden Era was portrayed as a time with a clearly-defined cultural and spiritual identity, whereas the generation of the 1950s was described as having lost this, trading it in either for conformity or for the installation of a mosaic of miscellaneous identities.

It would seem that critics of the left and right had much in common: all of them fired broadsides against the growth of the centralized ruling establishment. However, as mentioned, each of the two political orientations criticized this phenomenon for utterly different reasons, and championed completely different interests. They were united only in their disdain for Mapai as the center and Ben-Gurion as its leader, since the center automatically becomes the whipping-boy whenever there arises – as Lisk and Horovitz have aptly called it – 'trouble in Utopia.'[28]

Ben-Gurion's exchanges with intellectuals, who, in their ambivalence, both lauded (sometimes effusively) and animadverted, show that it was not a genuine social critique that animated the intellectuals.

Most of them, as said, were not at all aware of the problems with which the the immigrant society of the 1950s was faced such as their cultural tribulations; rather, they spoke about humanist-moral criteria and conducted a sterile debate over the meaning of Messianism in Jewish history in general, and in the present historical circumstances in particular. In point of fact, Ben-Gurion's involvement in molding the face of Israeli culture was quite marginal. His intellectual awareness and his ongoing dialogue with writers, spiritual leaders, and academicians is likely to mislead one into assuming that he actively participated in creating and shaping the culture. Ironically, it was the spiritual leaders and artists who often petitioned Ben-Gurion that he use his influence and authority to forge Israeli culture.[29]

The critique acquired legitimacy, power and truth because of the deep gap between Ben-Gurion's rhetoric about a model state and his political manipulations of Messianism on the one hand, and social and political reality and the direct involvement of Ben-Gurion in all aspects of its design on the other hand. The satirical genre which developed in that era emphasized the chasm between ideology/rhetoric and reality, exposing numerous examples of institutional corruption, hypocrisy, double-talk, etc. Moreover, these satirical revelations were, in part, the result of a prophetic mentality, that is to say, the satire was not narrowly conceived in terms of remonstrating against certain failings and proposing means of repair; instead, it derived from a will to condemn the current state of affairs in its entirety, in order to make way for a comprehensive alternative. Ben-Gurion had installed a Messianic ideal in his moralistic state, and because the ideal was not realized, it was considered permissible to overlook the state's achievements in absorbing *aliyah*, creating social institutions and cultivating a burgeoning economy, and to claim that Ben-Gurion was not guided by an ideal at all, or, alternatively, to claim that he was guided by one, but that it was deleterious.

In contrast to the political parties, radical groups on the margins had an easier time rendering their critique without dressing it up in diversionary arguments. They did not hide behind formulas like pluralism or voluntaristic spirit, but rather spoke freely in the name of a totalistic idea. For them, the primary shortcoming of the Ben-Gurion state was its inability to forge an integral nation-state, instead producing a counterfeit national personality, detached and hollow. In their opinion, rectification of the situation called for more than changes in the structure of government, its economic policy or the internal array of political forces; the only remedy was thorough

political-cultural revolution – a radical metamorphosis of the state and social infrastructure, a realignment of the present geographic disposition, and a new cultural-spiritual configuration.

Martin Buber could speak in obscure Idealist concepts about the creation of 'a breach between the people and its way of life'[30] but this needs translation into practical terms. The Ben-Gurion State wounded the 'organic personality' of Judaism. Because it was both unnecessary and impossible to rescind the state, there was thus a need to alter the relations between state and 'culture', not necessarily to restrict the state's role and activity in this sphere, but to be the instrument of the organic cultural ideal, to be a device for renewing the organic fabric which unravelled in the era of Emancipation, to create the new, integral Jewish-Israeli personality.

In its essentials, Buber's critique matched the cultural critique of the conservative Idealists. It expressed the Utopian hope for the appearance of mystic Judaism and the mutation of religion into *Kulturreligion*.[31] In theory, the state is supposed to be a neutral framework for realizing this spiritual rebirth, in which agents of the rebirth will act as 'spiritual guides'; in fact, however, given the circumstances of statehood and the instruments of governance, such a stance could easily evolve into a culturally totalistic, centralizing philosopy, assigning the state a managing role, even though Buber naturally did not intend this.

This is precisely what occurred in the cultural stance held by the radical groups. Their Utopia was not necessarily Buberian, but they shared with Buber the credo that the cultural-spiritual *modus vivendi* of the nation must be an organic one. The condition of partial or split identities – the situation of an Israeli who is part Hebrew and part (mentally) of the American Diaspora, cross-bred between Diaspora and state – was considered a tainted life that engendered a torn individual instead of the longed-for integrated personality. This meta-cultural critique mixing pessimism with Messianism, saw fracture as a sign of alienation and unnaturalness. The Messianic Ben-Gurion was portrayed as a Hegelian who viewed the state as the primary objective, and neglected to steer the state toward a *telos* of spiritual renewal.

Thus the critique of many intellectuals was an Idealist critique. It was abstruse, often anachronistic, and it glossed over fundamental problems or was insensitive to them, since the critics were prisoners of their subjective visions. The alternatives offered had no prospect of succeeding and, what is more, suffered from deep internal contradictions. The weakness of the intellectuals derived from their

unwillingness to concentrate on specific problems which could be grappled with; instead, they dealt in Idealist and Utopian critiques which undertook to remake reality. Perhaps this is the reason that the Israeli public was late in spotting trends which operated in the depths of society and behind the scenes.

Israel of the 1950s could not be a socialist society and a decentralized society at once. On the other hand, there is no doubt that without the initiative and authorization of Ben-Gurion and without the government instruments which he activated, the young state of Israel had no chance of realizing its common national goals and succeeding in demographic growth, modernization and integration. Although in Ben-Gurion's period, no integral, national culture crystallized, it is none the less certain that a shared cultural platform emerged, which served as the basis for unifying Israeli society even as its heterogeneity deepened.

These processes budged the old elites from their previous status, provoking an acute reponse. Many of Ben-Gurion's critics, primarily from the pioneering left, failed to reorganize themselves and adapt to an Israeli society which continued to evolve; they continued to judge society by the ideals and interests of the Mandate period. They became guardians of the closed society and the old regime, quixotically warding off the contemporary social and cultural dynamic. Ben-Gurion, contrariwise, tried in various ways to direct this dynamic and control its emanations.

The personal and collective despair was projected onto the kibbutz experience and the collective lifestyle. Various historical crises – the Cold War, the Korean War, 'the Doctor's Plot' and the Prague Trials, the Reparations Agreement, etc. – were catalysts for the critique and foci of polemic. Some of these issues, like the Reparations Agreement, increased the criticism against Mapai, while others, like the Prague Trials, attenuated the leftist critique of Mapai.

In actuality, Israeli society in the Ben-Gurion era was quite layered and pluralistic, contrary to its popular image. One might say that the integralism attained in the Yishuv era was widely publicized only in the Ben-Gurion period, with the results only evident a decade later. The image of a centralized government trying to mold society blurs the fact that beneath it developed a heterogeneous society rather than a uniform or integralist one.

Certainly, Ben-Gurion's participation in various fields of culture and education was a decisive formative influence on all aspects of modernization of society and its blending with Hebrew culture, but

he was incapable of shaping Hebrew culture along the lines of the ideals of which he often spoke. Engineering a framework for government and settlement is one thing; engineering a society and culture is quite another.

When the Ben-Gurion era ended, the critics heaved a sigh of relief, describing the new era as more liberal and open. There is irony in their inauguration of the new period with this blessing, since it lacked any connection to that model of society and culture to which they aspired in the 1950s. With Ben-Gurion's departure from government, the center of political authority saddled with the image of having created the 'totalitarian society' disappeared, and the true character of society as it had been was at long last revealed.

In the 1970s, when the old center of authority crumbled and new forces ascended the stage, threatening to destroy all that the leftist critics embraced as a positive legacy, the yearnings began for the Ben-Gurion Age. Suddenly, it was perceived as an era of political caution and moderation, an era of finality and, paradoxically for many of the critics, an era in which the state and its laws took precedence over Messianic ideologies or Utopias for which the state was merely an instrument or an enemy whose authority is called into question.

The Ben-Gurion era was characterized by a degree of Messianic rhetoric and pathos, but was essentially a time of sobriety, realism and awareness of limits, which generated pragmatism.[32] The deepest layers of the critique were not anchored in opposition to a surplus of Messianism in the Ben-Gurion State, but rather opposition to the realism and 'normalization' which characterized it. Critics of Ben-Gurion were caught in a contradiction: they objected to his realist and normalizing approaches which disrupted the singularity of the venerated peripheral cultures, yet at the same time they protested the blockage of normalizing processes in various avenues.

Ben-Gurion's critics, like his supporters, ignored the workings of forces greater than him which were shaping Israeli society, and also ignored the fact that forces which Ben-Gurion created or helped create produced changes which he did not intend. For example, Ben-Gurion was adroit in stressing the financial importance of the Reparations Agreement for economic modernization, but it is doubtful whether he was aware of the social processes which the Agreement would unleash. The critics also overlooked the circumstance that Ben-Gurion led the state in its infancy, which was a period of a long series of initiatives in all areas. Ben-Gurion was an enterprising prime minister who practised direct involvement,

whereas the successors at his post either lacked initiative or limited it to certain spheres. Since he was a total personality whose stamp was thus engraved in many fields, the critique of Ben-Gurion is nearly as all-encompassing.

NOTES

1. At issue here is the critique levelled at Ben-Gurion from outside the Mapai, though it should not be forgotten that there was a critique of Ben-Gurion's policy and personality circulating within the Mapai as well. Certain aspects of the form and content of these post-1948 critiques had their roots in the pre-state era. The Lavon Affair inspired a combination of these internal and external critiques. For more on this, see M. Avizohar, *National and Social Ideas as Reflected in Mapai – the Israeli Labour Party – 1930–1942* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1990).
2. See M. Keren, *The Pen and the Sword: Israeli Intellectuals and the Making of the Nation-State* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1991), pp. 72–5; see also his detailed description of the relations between Ben-Gurion and intellectuals in his work *Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals: Power, Knowledge and Charisma* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1983).
3. For instance, in April 1950, during a discussion of the educational role of the IDF, Ben-Gurion decided that the army was obligated to turn the immigrant-soldier into 'a Jew and son of Israel, a citizen of the state and citizen of the homeland, a comrade, to uproot from him the Germanness and the Moroccanness, and plant in him the values of the heritage of the Jewish nation as well as the new values which we are creating ... A rabble will not fight in the conditions in which we will be forced to fight for our existence. Smelting down this rabble and recasting it anew in a human, Jewish, Israeli, and finally soldierly mold – that is the foundation of the military.' The goal of this educational mechanism was not simply to produce a soldier; it was intended to create a new man whose traits and values were defined ambiguously as 'Jewish' and 'Israeli'. Lecture at the Council of the High Command, 6 April 1950, in *Education and Morals in the IDF* (Hebrew) (Press of the General Headquarters, Head Educational Officer, n.d.).
4. See F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (University of California Press, 1961); K.D. Bracher, *The Age of Ideologies: A History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* (translated from the German by E. Osers) (New York, 1982).
5. Y. Shavit, 'The Glorious Century or the 'Cursed Century': Fin de Siècle Europe and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Nationalism' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26 (1991), pp. 553–74.
6. I refer here to those writings which *a priori* delegitimize the Zionist idea or that of the state of Israel. For a summary of anti-Zionist trends in the Jewish public, see M. Avitbol *et al.*, eds, *Zionism and Its Opponents Among the Jewish People* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1990). The anti-Zionist literature as well as the general anti-Israeli literature is too vast to be referenced here.
7. A type of fashionable pessimism is noticeable in public consciousness at fixed dates such as those marking historical events – Independence Day, the anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, etc. – which grant newspapers a suitable opportunity, almost ceremonial in character, to mourn the lost Zionist/Israeli dream and to compare the set of expectations with the 'actual' state of affairs. On fashionable pessimism in France, see the essay of Yoram Bronovski, 'If This Is Death, then What Is Life?', *Ha'Aretz* (30 Oct. 1978). For the Israeli version of this on the eve of Independence Day, 1991, see Adam Baruch and Amnon Abromovitz, in *Ma'ariv* (17 April 1991).
8. The distinction between Utopia as relating to social contents and Messianism as relating to national-historic elements (such as territory) is too thin, for it ignores the presence of both in every visionary program, although it is possible to ascertain orders of preference and varying emphases.
9. See the discussion of Andre Walicki on both forms of Utopian thought in nineteenth-century Russia: A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, (ID University of Notre Dame Press, 1989; A.

Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford University Press, 1979).

10. The difference between the satirical writing of Uzi Vasouth and that of Ephraim Kishon is that the writers of Vasouth's material (Benjamin Tamuz and Amos Kinan) subscribed to a well-defined view of Jewish nationalism and its embodiment in the state, whereas Kishon belongs to the tradition of criticizing institutions and other aspects of Israeli reality.
11. See Y. Guthalf, 'Pessimism and Optimism', in *Davar Yearly 1957* (Tel Aviv, 1957), pp. 338–59, as well as the critique of Raphael Zeligman in *Unity of Labor*, 2 (June 1930), pp. 233–4, on Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Vienna, 1930).
12. See D. Miron, 'Mission in Israel', in *Essays on Literature and Society* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1991), pp. 339–82. In the 1950s, the young Miron was a sharp critic of Ben-Gurion and of his glorification of the state.
13. Of course, right-wing circles included those who regarded Ben-Gurion as an ideal leader and lauded the far-reaching settlement initiative of the 1950s as a model for the 1970s and 1980s in 'the country's new lands'. Dr. Israel Eldad, for example, regretted the right's opposition in the distant past to the 'transfer' agreement with Nazi Germany. From the perspective of the 1970s and 1980s, all deeds which enhanced the 'momentum to possess the Land of Israel' were retrospectively legitimized in his eyes.
14. Hamutal Bar-Yosef, 'Brenner's Concept of "Decadence" Against the Background of National Revival', *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel: Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel*, (Hebrew), 1 (1991), pp. 496–552, and Nili Sadan-Lubenstein, *The Literature of the 1920s in the Land of Israel* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1991). One must, of course, add the more concrete critique of the character of the new Jewish Yishuv, by writers during the very genesis of the settlement.
15. See Y. Shavit, 'The Glorious Century'.
16. *Edim*, 4 (1926). Rabinovitz wrote of anti-modernist trends in the Yishuv and the flight to 'old Jerusalem' which mimicked Western culture's longing for the organic Middle Ages.
17. S. Shava, *O Seer, Flee Away* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1990), p. 392. A précis was reprinted in *Ma'ariv* (19 Sept. 1990). For another example, see Arlozorov's critique of 'the Fourth Aliyah'. It contains a well-defined constellation of terms for assessing the Yishuv, and centers around a comparison between the *yishuv* and a negatively portrayed 'Exilic existence'.
18. See M. Nordau, 'Optimism or Pessimism', in P. Lachover, ed., *Writings: Paradoxes* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, 1930), pp. 5–28.
19. See Shulamit Laskov, *A Call From Zion: The Life and Times of Joseph Vitkin* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1986), pp. 109–10.
20. See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*. E. Livne is a good example of a key thinker and political activist who converted from the system critique to the state-ideological, meta-historical critique. See Y. Bernea, 'The Thought of Eliezer Livne: Political and Economic Critique, Activist Security and Policy View', *Kivunim*, 28 (Aug. 1985), pp. 35–50. See also E. Livne, *Israel and the Crisis of Western Civilization* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, 1982).
21. See, for example, Z. Zameret, 'The Religious Workers Movement – History of a Failed Attempt at Bridging Secular and Religious', in *Reshafim: Historical, Philosophical and Social Aspects of Education* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1991), pp. 121–54; Z. Zameret, 'The Melting Pot: The Frumkin Commission on the Education of Immigrant Children, 1950', *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel: Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel* (Hebrew) 1 (1991), pp. 405–39.
22. See M. Keren *The Pen and the Sword*; T. Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 271–9; M. Lissak, 'Some Historical Perspectives on Mass Immigration in the 1950s' (Hebrew), *Zionism*, 14 (1989), pp. 203–18. All the speakers in these conversations believed in the possibility of determining a system of obligatory and comprehensive national values, and were split only regarding its contents and the final product.
23. M. Pa'il, 'Two Revolutions and the Youth Movements', *Iton*, 77, pp. 94–5 (Nov.-Dec. 1987). From a different point of view, Baruch Kurzweil claimed to have discovered that, despite the prevalence of corruption, emptiness and cynicism, most preferred to conform for the sake of convenience rather than add their voices to the radical critique: 'About the Young Hebrews', in *Our New Literature – Continuation or Revolution?* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, 1955), pp. 274–5. On the same topic, see I. Shapira, *Elite Without Successors: Generations of Political Leaders*, (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1984), and before this the critique

already in the 1940s. See D. Veinraub, 'The Second Generation in the Land of Israel and Its Professional Path', in S. Rabidovitz, ed., *Fortress: A Collection of Life Questions, in Science and Literature*, (London, 1954), pp. 245–330. See also Anita Shapira, 'A Generation in the Land', *Alpayim: A Multidisciplinary Publication for Contemporary Thought and Literature*, (Hebrew), 2 (1990), pp. 118–203.

24. N. Yannai, *A Schism Among the Elite* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1969).
25. S. Aharonson, 'Bialik and Ben-Gurion: Between Words and Politics', in P. Ginossar, ed., *Hebrew Literature and the Labor Movement* (Hebrew) (The Ben-Gurion Research Center, 1989), pp. 26–44. According to the author, a gap developed between Ben-Gurion's plans for changing 'the system' and 'the system' itself – he was unable to alter 'the system', but nevertheless come to be identified with it. Overexposure of Ben-Gurion paradoxically amplified his influence, distorting his true intentions.
26. See Anita Shapira, *The Army Controversy 1948: Ben-Gurion's Struggle for Control* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1985), pp. 58–65.
27. Ibid. The literature of the era is rife with assessments such as this.
28. D. Horovitz and M. Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia: Israel: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1990).
29. M. Keren, *The Pen and the Sword*. Of course, Ben-Gurion had an important role in determining the framework for the general educational system and that of the army, but that was the extent of his influence on culture. His image in the literature and art of these years is another matter. See Batia Donner, *To Live With the Dream* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 140–43.
30. M. Buber, 'Judaism and Culture' (1951), *Selected Writings on Judaism and Jewish Affairs* (Hebrew), Vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 226–34.
31. See Abraham Shapira, 'Political Messianism and Its Place in Martin Buber's Philosophy of Redemption', in *Words in Memory of M. Buber on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of His Passing* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem 1987), pp. 51–72.
32. D. Horovitz and M. Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia*, pp. 150–53.