Chapter one

Introduction

The substance of nationalism as such is always morally, politically, humanly ambiguous. This is why moralizing perspectives on the phenomenon always fail, whether they praise or berate it.

Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," in his *The Break-Up of Britain*, 1977

Historical research . . . can . . . extract from the vast storehouse of the past . . . sets of intelligent questions that may be addressed to current materials. The importance of this contribution should not be exaggerated. But it should not be underrated either. For the quality of our understanding of current problems depends largely on the broadness of our frame of reference . . . The answers themselves, however, are a different matter. No past experience, however rich, and no historical research, however thorough, can save the living generation the creative task of finding their own answers and shaping their own future.

Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, 1962

The sociology of Israeli society

A small stratum of organized Eastern European Jewish agricultural workers who reached Palestine in the Second *Aliya* (wave of immigration) between 1904 and 1914 shouldered the major burden of Israel's creation. Their leaders, David Ben-Gurion, Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Joseph Shprintzak, Berl Katznelson, Itzhak Tabenkin, etc., and their political heirs from the Third *Aliya* of 1918–23, Golda Meir, and others, gave determinate shape to emerging Israeli society and simultaneously fashioned its labor movement into the dominant political force until 1977. While Israeli sociologists and historians agree that this stratum played a pivotal historical role, they disagree over what its members actually did and, more generally, over what the tasks of state and nation formation involved. In this study I will seek to provide answers to these two questions. In turn, these answers will allow me to address a third, and integrally related, question: what were the social origins of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict?

So far, two major sociological perspectives have predominated in interpreting the shaping of the Israeli state and nation: functionalism and elitism. S. N. Eisenstadt, and his disciples Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, looking through the prism of the value-consensus approach, derived from the more general functionalist perspective, have claimed that "the history of the *Yishuv*'s [the modern Jewish community, literally "settlement," in Palestine] development shows that the Second *Aliya* . . . was that period in which social, political, and organizational activities were most dominated by the creation and interpretation of values." These core values of asceticism, emphasis on manual and especially agricultural work, self-defense and self-reliance, Hebrew culture, and future orientation – in short, the pioneering ethos formed in the process of modernization – served as the basis of voluntary solidarity between successive Jewish immigrants and alone made possible a consistent institution-building effort.[1]

Yonathan Shapiro, from the vantage point of Michels' and Mosca's elite theories, has asserted that "the priority given by the founding fathers . . . to the conscious action of political organization, enabled them to turn the Jewish community into a stable and modern political state." Shapiro demonstrated that the functionalists had refused to recognize the existence, among the groups constituting emerging Israeli society, of grave internal conflicts, in which the labor movement won out because of its superior organizational skills. He concluded that only the agricultural workers' party apparatus provided an instrument for the cooptation and manipulation of other interest groups and the laying of a foundation for unified action. This political leadership and bureaucracy already served, in his analysis, as a substitute state with a modicum of coercive power, and, aided by the formative generational experience of its leaders and cadre, actually concentrated the resources and man- and womanpower required for the workings of a central authority.[2]

My aim in this study is to pose an *alternative theoretical perspective* to both functionalism and the elitist approach, though I hardly hold them in equal esteem. This study rejects *in toto* the extreme voluntarism of the functionalist perspective, while it complements the elitist approach, with which it shares certain basic assumptions about the importance of power and organization and their uses. While the elite approach is superior in many ways to functionalism, the two theories do share three limitations.

(1) According to Eisenstadt, the experiments undertaken by the agricultural workers of the Second *Aliya* "to find organizational solutions to practical problems were made in conjunction with their ideological orientations, and not as a consequence of the daily, concrete problems of

adaptation to the existing environment." An ideological attitude supposedly shaped even the most menial of tasks, and the practical activities of this early era were but "symbolic expressions" of solutions to the problems of future society.[3] When examining political or organizational processes Eisenstadt inquires whether "ideology was . . . equipped to handle" them, thus reducing politics to a problem of legitimacy.[4] And his analysis of economic development is restricted to the gradual and partial displacement of the Second *Aliya*'s ideological intents by market forces after independence. This approach never views the agricultural workers of the Second *Aliya*, therefore, as having had to labor under economic constraints or in pursuit of economic interests of their own.

In fact, hardly has another period in Zionist history seen such a hiatus between "ideology" and "reality," the contrary poles of interpretation employed by Israel Kolatt and Yosef Gorny, the two major historians of the Second *Aliya*.[5] Kolatt and Gorny recognize only too well that "reality" – the character of which they fail to explicate clearly and which it will be my task to explore in these pages – unmade the "ideologies" imported from the Pale of Settlement (a segregated area of the Russian Empire, to which Jews were restricted) and imposed a veritable cultural crisis on the Second *Aliya*. Nevertheless, they, like Eisenstadt, Lissak, and Horowitz, are reluctant to accept the obvious conclusion – namely that to survive, let alone to thrive, the immigrants of the Second *Aliya* had to become eminently practical-minded – and wish instead to uphold their uninterruptedly ideological character. In fact, when Second *Aliya* members and leaders had to make choices, adopt or reject models, and change strategies of action, they constructed these not so much from the grand cloth of general ideologies as from the simpler materials of concrete methods of settlement.

Shapiro's elite perspective is more multi-dimensional. His account of the ascendance of the leadership of the workers' parties emphasizes its determination to "fight for jobs and decent salaries" for the new immigrants. Thus he presents the party as an instrument for the domination of the economy in the undeveloped conditions of Palestine.[6] Nevertheless, elite theory inherently entails a perspective on politics which gives precedence to the interests of leaders and the organizations they control to amass power, over a view of the party as a tool for the articulation of the followers' economic interests. Furthermore, its approach to politics as the struggle for control of scarce resources frequently embraces a narrow notion of economics as a mechanism of distribution.

Jonathan Frankel, in the most trenchant and thorough history of the Second *Aliya*, also observes the uniqueness of the Second *Aliya*'s hard

core in their "exceptional degree . . . [of] political energy" derived, in his view, in equal measure from the Russian revolutionary experience and Jewish messianism.[7] But in his focus on politics Frankel views it essentially in terms of voluntary factors such as individual motivation, ideology, and party ethos, while the economic side in the life of the Second *Aliya* immigrants is relegated to the background.

Thus both perspectives neglect the impact of economic interests and the structure of production as phenomena in their own right. They see the participants in the process of state and nation formation as possessing greater freedom in the pursuit of their intrinsic designs than the study of the economic conditions under which they operated would lead us to believe.

(2) Both schools take as the beginning of Israeli society's formative period the British Mandate following the First World War. Shapiro's study focuses on the first decade, 1919–30, in the life of the Achdut Haavoda Party of the workers; Lissak and Horowitz examine the entire Mandate period until 1948; and Eisenstadt analyzes both the Mandate and independent Israel till the mid 1960s. Lissak and Horowitz pay only passing attention to the pre-Mandate period, while Shapiro and Eisenstadt preface their analyses with short historical summaries in which the First and Second *Aliyot* comprise only a few pages. Only Eisenstadt keeps referring back to the ideological influences emanating from the era of the Second *Aliya*, but even he has not studied it directly.

This point of departure stems from a teleological reading of Israeli history which considers the Second *Aliya* only in terms of its impact on later waves of immigrants. Before exerting authority over later *aliyot*, and opposing their contending strategies, the agricultural workers of the Second *Aliya*, however, had to crystallize their own method of state and nation formation. Had they not found solutions to their own problems, there would have been no reason for later immigrants to follow in their footsteps, nor would the Second *Aliya* have had the wherewithal to extract such compliance from them.

These solutions responded to economic constraints, though significantly they were not market solutions. Indeed, the methodical bypassing of the market, which started during the last years of the Second *Aliya*, required an ever-expanding political and cultural mobilization, which culminated in the labor movement's *hegemony*. In one of the Gramscian senses of the word, hegemony refers to the political and cultural leadership of a rising social group,[8] but the latter's role is not as idealistic as Eisenstadt's nor as voluntaristic as Shapiro's theories imply. The labor movement's hegemonic position in the *Yishuv* derived not from values or

organizational capacity alone but from the effective combination of its ideal of state building with an ability to address the interests – particularly in obtaining employment – of those "building the state." Indeed, the labor movement's hegemony was grounded in and preceded by the growth of a sectoral economy and, in the 1920s, as Shapiro so persuasively demonstrates, by the construction of a paid apparatus, which augmented its political control. Dan Giladi's observation that the labor movement's preeminence in the *Yishuv* was consolidated only in the period between 1936 and Israel's establishment confirms the late arrival of its hegemonic stage.[9]

(3) Functionalist and elite perspectives view the evolution of the Israeli state and nation as resulting from interaction among Jewish groups exclusively and thus render invisible the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on the formation of Israel. Eisenstadt, who surveys eighty years of the *Yishuv*, only analyzes Palestinian Arab society in a concerted way at the end of his book under the chapter heading: "Non-Jewish Minority Groups in Israel." But the Arab population of Palestine did not constitute a minority at the beginning of Zionist settlement, and even today Arabs living in Israel constitute only part of the Palestinian people which plays an active role, or on whose behalf other Arabs play a role, in shaping Israeli society. Lissak, Horowitz, and Shapiro also pay only passing attention to Arabs in relation to Jews in their respective studies. Finally, the pervasive but never clearly delineated "reality," that so seriously constrained "ideology" in Kolatt's and Gorny's historical studies of the Second *Aliya*, is nothing but this Palestinian presence, i.e., a euphemism for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

It was essentially in the context of this national conflict that both the Jewish and Arab sides assumed their modern identities. It transformed the Jewish immigrants into Israelis, and the inchoate Zionism of Eastern Europe into the concrete practices of Israeli state and nation formation. The Arab residents of Palestine developed their own distinct nationalism and became Palestinians in the same context.

It would not be fair to single out Eisenstadt, Lissak, Horowitz, and Shapiro for an omission that is shared by virtually all Israeli sociologists. In introducing a recent anthology of Israeli political sociology, Karl Deutsch pointed to the paucity of research on Arabs and by Arabs as the blind spot of Israeli sociology.[10] Not only is the study of Arabs in Israeli society limited, but, as Avishai Ehrlich indicates in an essay remarkable for its acuity:

> even fewer are researches which deal with consequences of the [Israeli–Arab] conflict on Israeli structure from a macro-societal point of view using a

historical–comparative method or trying to establish connections between the dynamics of the conflict and processes of social change in Israel. There does not exist yet in Israeli sociology, and not due to its underdevelopment, a trend or school which takes the conflict and its multiple aspects as a starting point for the specificity of Israeli society.[11]

As Ehrlich cogently observes, the reason for this hiatus is that "the mental conception of separatism [between Jews and Arabs in Israeli society] was also carried into research . . . In this context research itself was divided."[12] The one notable exception to this fundamental perspective is found in the work of Baruch Kimmerling, who has probably done more than anybody else to fill the gap described by Ehrlich. Kimmerling lists many spheres in which the conflict had an impact on Israeli society, but has done so in a sparing and piecemeal fashion and has not presented a credible theoretical alternative to either functionalism or elite theory.[13]

In this study, I will seek to convince the reader that, if Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century had been an expanse of land empty of population, the shape assumed by Israeli society would have been much different. In fact, I will argue that what is unique about Israeli society emerged precisely in response to the conflict between the Jewish immigrant-settlers and the Palestinian Arab inhabitants of the land. Among these features I list the precocious political organization of the labor movement, the tight bond between settler and soldier, the evolution of cooperative forms of life, the amalgamation of the organized expressions of these phenomena – the political party, the paramilitary organization, the kibbutz (and later the moshav) – under the aegis of the General Federation of Hebrew Workers in Eretz Israel (the Histadrut), the latter's disproportionate influence in comparison with unions elsewhere, and, finally, the ever-widening division of Israeli society into Jewish and Arab sectors.

Of course, the character of the conflict changed as it evolved from an intra-state conflict between two national movements before the establishment of Israel in 1948, to an inter-state conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors that were backed by foreign allies and, after 1967, into a fully internationalized conflict. But in Ehrlich's words: "the extension of the conflict and the change of phases did not [lead to] the disappearance of features characteristic of previous phases."[14] Consequently many of the features shaped by the earliest phase remain at the core of the conflict and are easily recognized in the social structure of Israel. The Ottoman period, stretching from the beginning of Zionist immigration in 1882 until the British military conquest during the First World War, is therefore the chronological focus of this study.

The most important methods of Israeli state and nation formation had already evolved by 1914. Fundamentally, I will contend, they were connected with alternative views as to how conditions in the land and labor markets might best be exploited to enable Jewish immigration and settlement and the development of a Jewish economic infrastructure. Concretely, I wish to explain how the agricultural workers of the Second *Aliya*, under the guidance and with the financial assistance of the World Zionist Organization, selected the method of state and nation formation which became dominant after the First World War, and to this end I will examine the social experiments they undertook.

Though the method chosen during the Second *Aliya* was unique, the elements from which it was assembled were not, nor was the experience of the Second *Aliya* unique. To understand not only what its members actually did, but, more generally, what the tasks of state and nation formation involved under the conditions they faced, we must invoke an appropriate comparative perspective.

Settlement and nationalism

Hugh Seton-Watson characterized Jews in the diaspora, anachronistically I believe, as a community "already united by ancient religious culture and a profound solidarity for which the modern phrase 'national consciousness' is perhaps appropriate."[15] He failed to note that nations, unlike ethnic groups, require a territory, and ethnic communities can "become nations only through the movement toward political independence." Nationalism serves then, in Katherine O'Sullivan See's terms, a "dual purpose" for an ethnic group: the transformation of ethnicity into national identity through the development of a territorial community, i.e., *nation formation*, and the setting up of an autonomous political community, i.e., *state formation*.[16]

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the undermining of the traditional Jewish middleman role in the manorial economy of the Pale of Settlement and Central Europe called into question Jewish ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. In a remarkable outburst of creativity Jews experimented with a variety of potential identities in the modern era: in the few areas of Central Europe where the benefits of modernity were extended to Jews, large numbers chose assimilation;[17] in the Pale of Settlement, many elected universal or Jewish socialism, "cultural nationalism,"[18] or orthodoxy, which was in part also a novel response; while multitudes emigrated to the New World. The step toward Zionism was neither self-evident nor widespread.[19] Before 1933, only a small minority chose Zionism – the Jewish national movement aiming at the

acquisition of territorial rights and political sovereignty in parts of Palestine. Territorial nationalism – so different from and alien to the ethnic Jewish way of life[20] – was, as it were, imposed on Jews as a last resort, in response to Nazi persecutions and genocide, and forced migration from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Zionism was founded, like other types of nationalism, on a "theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cross political ones."[21] The conditions under which nation-states come into existence do, however, call for strikingly different methods of mobilization, which accordingly generate distinct societies. To which of these configurations does Zionism belong?

Obviously, Zionism cannot be classed with the English or French cases. Western European state formation did not require a nationalist movement since it was carried out from above, by emerging Absolutism. Its method called for the *integration* of outlying areas into its core region, and the homogenization of the population through bureaucratic measures.[22] Faced with the multi-ethnic Habsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman Empires, which impeded modern state formation, the Eastern European method[23] did require nationalist ideological mobilization for *secession*. This model is applicable to Israeli state and nation formation, but only in part. At the outset, Zionism was a variety of Eastern European nationalism, that is, an ethnic movement in search of a state. But at the other end of the journey it may be seen more fruitfully as a late instance of European overseas expansion, which had been taking place from the sixteenth through the early twentieth centuries. How can these two methods be linked? To understand that we have to look briefly at the forms of European expansion.

D.K. Fieldhouse and, following him, George Fredrickson offer a four-way typology: the *occupation* and *mixed* models worked out by Spain, the *plantation* model of Portugal, and the *pure settlement* of England.[24] The occupation colony – the typical colonial state – aimed at military and administrative control of a potentially strategic region, and consequently its European administrators attempted to exploit and intensify the existing economic order rather than seeking direct control of local land or labor. The other three models were based on settlement by Europeans. Plantation colonies, due to the presence of a dense agricultural population as well as geographic obstacles, attracted only few settlers. In the plantation (and the mining) colony, in want of "a docile indigenous labor force," the settlers acquired land directly and imported an unfree or indentured labor force to work their monocultural plantations. By contrast, mixed and pure settlement colonies were based on substantial European settlement involving direct control of land. The

former required labor coercively elicited from the native population, though the distance between the two groups was cushioned through miscegenation. The latter had "an economy based on white labor," which together with the forcible removal or the destruction of the native population allowed the settlers "to regain the sense of cultural or ethnic homogeneity identified with a European concept of nationality."[25]

The opening up of mixed and pure overseas settlement colonies was justified by the "surplus" populations created by the capitalist transformation of the metropolitan societies. England, which invented the pure settlement colony (later to be imitated by France), experienced two such periods. In Elizabethan and early Stuart times, with the spread of capitalist relations of production, Sir Francis Bacon, one of the principal architects of the Ulster plantation, argued for the colonization of Ireland as a way of relieving England of overpopulation. Others pointed to the social dangers of vagabondage to support emigration to the American colonies. Starting in the nineteenth century, under the full impact of capitalized agriculture, the Malthusian theory of population, and Wakefield's detailed colonization plans, Australia and New Zealand came to be viewed as safety valves to alleviate poverty among rural English workers and allay the agitation of the Chartists.[26] This stage also saw British settlers in such places as Rhodesia, and French and Italian settlers in Algeria, steering these occupation colonies toward a fifth, hybrid, form that I will call an *ethnic plantation settlement*. The new type was based, like both the mixed and the plantation colony, on European control of land. Unlike the plantation colony, it employed local rather than imported labor; but, in distinction to the miscegenation prevalent in the mixed colony, it possessed a full-blown European national identity and opposed ethnic mixture. Finally, inconsistently and ultimately unsuccessfully, the ethnic plantation colony, in spite of its preference for local labor, toyed with the idea of massive European immigration and settlement.

At the same time, the successful settlement of the target territory, the *frontier* where the "interpenetration between [the] two previously distinct societies" took place,[27] was contingent on the low density of its population. "The victims of despoilation were a potential threat," hence only in sparsely inhabited regions was the security risk posed by the native population containable. Furthermore, dense populations usually exhibited more advanced levels of economic life and posed the danger of economic competition to the settlers with low-status occupations.[28]

The transfer not only of capital but also of members of all strata of the population and ultimately of financial decision-making centers, in de Silva's and Arghiri Emmanuel's view, generated the rapid development

of pure settlement colonies. As their economies were internally oriented, their profits became reinvested, agriculture intensified, technological innovation encouraged, and secondary industries developed. Conversely, plantation colonies (and mixed colonies in lesser degree) suffered either from the extraterritoriality of investors who repatriated profits or from having being fitted into an imperial division of labor that demanded mostly primary products and, in consequence, they were rendered a complementary and dependent sector of the metropolitan economy. Plantation colonies, in short, were colonized by exploitative colonial investment, while pure settlement colonies were colonized by nation-forming investment with ethic plantation colonies being somewhere in the middle of the continuum. Hence, pure settlements have reproduced, in varying degrees, the complex economies and social structures of the metropolitan societies, competing and often clashing sharply with them, and ultimately breaking away to claim their independence and leave behind their colonial phase, though not necessarily its legacy.[29]

The *pure settlement* of European overseas expansion in a frontier region, based on relatively homogeneous population and on separate markets, is different from both the Western European method of integration or the Eastern European method of secession, but may be seen as *a third method of state and nation formation.* The distinctiveness of this method is obvious from the failure of attempts to expand England and France, states originally created by Western European methods, into Ireland and Algeria respectively, through the settlement method.[30]

The appropriateness of the model of European colonization for the Israeli case is due in part to some structural similarities which I shall introduce in the next two sections of this chapter, but also to attempts, undertaken at various levels of self-consciousness, to emulate its distinctive versions by different groups of Jewish settlers or settlement bodies. We find four alternative models, which will be discussed in later chapters. At this point it is sufficient to list them. Between 1882 and 1900, Baron Edmund de Rothschild followed the model of French agricultural colonization in Algeria and Tunisia, which was based on the development of privately owned monocultural agriculture. When this French model floundered, three others were suggested in its place in the first decade of our century. First, Aharon Eisenberg of the First *Aliya*, who directed Agudat Netaim (The Planters' Society), the largest capitalist company in Palestine before the First World War, recommended a Californian design for enabling urban people to move to the countryside. Secondly, members of Hashomer (The Guard) organization of the Second *Aliya* longed to emulate the Cossacks' military colonization of

parts of south-eastern Russia. Other members of the Second *Aliya* also suggested methods tried in other mixed or pure European settlements though, in general, without evolving these into a complete model. Thirdly, Otto Warburg and Arthur Ruppin, the heads of the World Zionist Organization's Palestine Land Development Company, highly consciously tried to reproduce the "internal colonization" model developed by the Prussian government to create a German majority in some of its eastern, ethnically Polish territories, as well as to utilize the Polish measures developed to counter this policy. Eisenberg's and Hashomer's methods, which were perhaps too whimsical, never got off the ground, but the Rothschild and PLDC plans were serious and sincere, and each had its part in shaping the social character of the First and Second *Aliyot*, though only after adaptation to local conditions.

In fact, fitting together the concepts of the Fieldhouse–Fredrickson typology and the Rothschild, PLDC and the First and Second *Aliya*'s efforts, I will try to demonstrate that the most sensible way of analyzing the major intra-Jewish conflict during the Ottoman period of Jewish settlement in Palestine is as one taking place between the pure settlement strategy of the First *Aliya*, which was diverted *malgré lui* into an ethnic plantation type, and the pure settlement form of the Second *Aliya* which, after a similar period of crisis, gained vitality but, in the longer run, in a limited area of Palestine. The different outcomes of the two waves' efforts largely related to the alternative models of colonization chosen by Rothschild and the WZO.

The emulation of the French and German methods of colonization by Rothschild and the PLDC should alert us to the mistaken attribution of the origins of Zionism, by virtually every historian, exclusively to ideological influences emanating from the Pale of Settlement, whence the settlers came. The formative influences that issued from the West, whence the finances of the Zionist project derived, were just as crucial, and it seems to me necessary, therefore, to round out our understanding of early Zionism by exploring this source of material and cultural influence. Such "imported" ideas and methods were important and consequential in shaping Israeli state and nation formation when they were offered by those who could provide the financial backing required for their realization.

Though I start out by placing Israel within the general phenomenon of settlement societies, and therefore the comparative examples I offer will be from appropriate phases in the histories of Virginia and California, Australia, South Africa, Algeria, Tunisia, Prussia, etc., my methodological approach is based on the recognition that differences between