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Diaspora: Roles and
Responsibilities*

E. ZEV SUFOTT

Oxford Centre for
Hebrew and Jewish Studies

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DR E. ZEV SUFOTT

is a former Israel Ambassador to The Hague and Beijing.



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Roles and Responsibilities*



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THE Yishuv¹ and State of Israel have played the dominant role in establishing the agenda for world Jewry certainly since World War II. At that time, Jewish communities world-wide proved unable to take effective action in rescue efforts, to admit refugees, or to influence their governments to do so. This situation created the impetus to Yishuv primacy, leadership role and responsibility. The Yishuv leadership in the Jewish Agency and the Rescue Committee based in Jerusalem assumed the active role, initiating and directing the work of the various emissaries, including those of the Diaspora organizations. At the same time, the Yishuv leadership set forth the programme for the future, utilizing events in order to mobilize Jewry and political support behind the banner of Biltmore,² in the struggle for statehood.

This paper reviews Israel's role and responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the Diaspora, and the perceptions underlying these as they have developed over the past decades, from the period of the pre-State Yishuv assumption of primacy. It seeks to assess them in the light of the changed circumstances and problems of today, in the creation of which they have participated. Its concluding question is whether the era of Israel's primacy in determining and dominating the agenda for world Jewry is beginning to fade, each Diaspora community or grouping now being increasingly preoccupied with its own problems of continuity and assimilation, while Israeli leadership, institutions and society may appear to have less to contribute to Jewish peoplehood, unity or identity; or whether a renewed world-wide Jewish coalition, endeavour or agency can and will be mobilized to confront identified and recognized mutual contemporary problems and tasks, in which Israel would play the major role.

¹ The Jewish community of Palestine in the pre-State period. The reference in this context is to its representative bodies.

² The Biltmore Program, calling for the establishment of Palestine 'as a Jewish Commonwealth' was adopted at an emergency Zionist Conference at the Hotel Biltmore, New York, in May 1942.

Basic Perception

Palestinocentrism and negation, or subsidiarity of the Diaspora, emerge as basic attitudes guiding the Yishuv and shaping Israel's role. Klatzkin's rejoinder to Ahad Ha'am that 'the Jewish State must be built on the destruction of the Diaspora', the only *raison d'être* of which could be to serve as a 'means and transition to statehood', and that Ahad Ha'am's spiritual centre must inevitably draw its resources from the Diaspora and 'exploit it in such a way as will hasten its decline and demise',³ were reflected at the outset of the Yishuv's assumption of the leadership role, when the central issue on the agenda could be viewed as rescue.

Apart from its emotional and operational centrality in Yishuv attention and activities, rescue was held to be 'for Palestine's sake. *This* rescue takes priority over all else.'⁴ In December 1942 Ben-Gurion told the Jewish Agency Executive that 'the extermination of European Jewry is a catastrophe for Zionism . . . there will not be anyone to build the country with.'⁵ In effect, all Ben-Gurion's 'political schemes' in the struggle for statehood were, from his perspective, 'rescue projects'.⁶ During the post-war *bricha*⁷ and 'illegal immigration' period, selection criteria were debated and, at times, applied, other considerations being of necessity subordinated to the exigencies of the struggle in Palestine and the War of Independence. In the careful language of one senior emissary: 'Our attitude towards the survivors was determined not by humanitarian motives alone, but above all in accordance with an evaluation of the role they were to play in our struggle.'⁸

This Palestinocentric perception of what had to be done for Israel's establishment, and subsequently for her demographic consolidation, has consistently underlain Israel's role in fulfilling her responsibilities on behalf of Jewish communities in distress and their freedom of emigration. Selection criteria have been periodically on the agenda, most

³ Avinoam Barshai (ed.) *Yehezkel Kaufmann: Selection of Nationalist Writings* (Jerusalem: WZO Zionist Library, 1994) 70.

⁴ Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 855.

⁵ Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust* (New York: OUP, 1990) 30.

⁶ Teveth (see n. 4) 861.

⁷ Lit. 'flight', evacuation of Jews from Europe to Palestine during and after World War II.

⁸ Haim Yahil, 'Actions of the Palestine Mission to the Survivors', *Yalkut Moreshet*, 31 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Hapoalim, April 1981) 175.

recently in proposals regarding immigration from the republics of the former USSR raised by Ora Namir, Labour and Social Welfare Minister in late 1994. On the other hand, the 'drop-out' phenomenon, with high proportions of Soviet Jewish emigrants opting to remain in transit camps in Austria and Italy in the mid-1980s, awaiting visas to enter Western countries rather than proceeding to Israel, was viewed by Israel as 'an historical tragedy' (thus Prime Minister Shamir to The Netherlands Prime Minister Lubbers in June 1988). The tragedy was that tens of thousands of Jews liberated from the USSR would be lost to Israel in the assimilationist environment of the free world, instead of making a decisive contribution to Israel's economic consolidation and demographic balance.

Efforts were made to persuade The Netherlands government to instruct its embassy in Moscow (which in the absence of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel represented Israel's interests) to issue exit visas restricting bearers to transit via Bucharest. In accordance with arrangements between Israel and the Ceauşescu government, transit from Bucharest exclusively to Israel was assured. Proposals to place such limits on the free choice of Soviet Jews, after all that had been done on behalf of their freedom to emigrate, were rejected by The Netherlands authorities. Endeavours to activate Dutch Jewish organizations and individuals on Israel's behalf in this case met with less than enthusiasm. In any case, Dutch Jewry would have been powerless to influence decision makers in parliament and government, whose views of the individual human rights of 'liberated' Soviet Jews were not, in this situation, consonant with Israeli policy, with Palestinocentrism or negation. One historian of Israel has commented that Israel and her 'loyal diaspora constituencies' had from the outset campaigned for the right of their kinsmen to emigrate to Israel, 'rather than for the right to enjoy cultural and religious freedom within the USSR itself—a boon that would have been of no particular value to Israel'.⁹ While this comment can be challenged in terms of complete accuracy, for a campaign on behalf of cultural and religious freedom inside the USSR would have been unrealistic, it does not misrepresent Israel's policies and view of Diaspora, as well as of her own, responsibilities.

⁹ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel II* (New York: OUP, 1987) 253.

Requirements from the Diaspora

With the establishment of the State, and previously in the efforts to procure arms and other supplies essential for the struggle, Jewish communities were called on—reflecting perceptions of the Diaspora and its place in the scheme of things—to meet urgent supply and manpower needs, regardless of their own status, of formal allegiances and legalities, and at times even of the close scrutiny and opposition of local intelligence authorities. The Proclamation of Independence called on the Diaspora communities to rally to Israel's side. Ben-Gurion added that they should provide economic aid and 'help explain Israel's foreign policy in the countries in which they dwell'.¹⁰ Because the Jews are a world people, 'Israel is a State of and for a world people . . . beyond citizenship and sovereignty'.¹¹

An early Israel Foreign Ministry exposé of the role of the Diaspora in the development of Israel's diplomatic network abroad points to the westward direction of Israel's first foreign-policy steps, 'into those countries where the potential reserves of support are to be found, namely, Jewish communities'. Israel saw in these communities and 'in their influence upon their countries of residence powerful allies in ensuring the survival of the state and its consolidation'. She had, therefore, posted her diplomatic envoys in lands in which the Jewish presence was considerable, 'regardless of the principle of mutuality and geopolitical interests'.¹² In a subsequent detailed directive to Israel's Minister to Australia, Foreign Minister Sharett ruled that Israel's overseas missions must give precedence to the unity of the entire Jewish people in support of the State and to her bonds with all parts of the Jewish people, over against the limited framework of the Zionist Organization. However, there must continue to be close cooperation with Zionist groups, in view of 'their tradition of absolute loyalty to the needs of Zionism, which today means to the exigencies of the growth and consolidation of Israel, and to the requirements of the ongoing ingathering of the exiles'.¹³

¹⁰ David Ben-Gurion, *Hazon ve-Derekh I* (Tel Aviv: Mapai, 1951–7) 119ff.

¹¹ David Ben-Gurion, 'Achievements and Tasks of our Generation', *Israel Government Yearbook 1961–1962*, p. LV.

¹² 'Israel and the Lands of Asia', *National Archives*, Jerusalem, MFA file 2415/31 (undated, c. 1952).

¹³ M. Sharett to Israel Minister, Sydney, *National Archives*, Jerusalem, MFA file no. 2388/26, September 30, 1953.

Israel's foreign-relations activity followed on from the work of the Jewish Agency Political Department and its emissaries. For Israel's missions in foreign capitals, as for the Yishuv and its emissaries, Israel's 'only natural ally' (thus Ben-Gurion) was to be viewed as the source of aliya, and of material and political support. Their developing role on behalf of Jews in distress, in lands where Jewish rights were restricted and persons and property threatened, raised open dilemmas, concerning representation of Jewry and the Diaspora, on the world stage. Official protests lodged by Israel's embassies with various governments at the plague of swastika-smearing in 1959-60, mainly in Western countries, were felt to diverge from the acceptable bounds of Israel's role of responsibility for Jews in distress and drew vocal Jewish protests at Israel's interventions, in what communities considered to be internal matters involving themselves and their own governments, police and public opinion. Israel, on the other hand, perceived herself as performing a (high-profile) international role as representative of the Jewish people in a situation of anti-Semitism, highlighting Diaspora vulnerability and Israel as refuge and guardian.

A notable occasion on which Israel assumed the major role of representative of Holocaust survivors was that of the negotiations over reparations with the government of Federal West Germany. When Ben-Gurion had argued a decade previously that reparations should be made to the Jewish people, not to individuals, there can be no doubt that even then he had in mind that sovereign embodiment of the Jewish people which later decided on and initiated the formal demand for reparations, in notes presented to the four occupying powers early in 1951, six years after the earlier memorandum of the Jewish Agency to the Allied Powers.

Israel perceived herself as fulfilling a similar responsibility in the case of Eichmann's apprehension and trial. Ben-Gurion wrote to the Argentinian President that the survivors of the Holocaust believed that such a man must stand trial before the Jewish people, and that 'such a trial can only take place in Israel'. Israel perceived her role as that of the natural representative of the Holocaust survivors, and clearly the only Jewish court was to be found in Israel. Rejecting a proposal from Nahum Goldmann that non-Israeli judges be invited to join the panel, Ben-Gurion insisted that the honour of the Jewish people required that the trial be conducted 'only by an Israeli court in the sovereign Jewish State'.

Attachments and Allegiances

The exchanges between Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein, President of the American Jewish Committee, resulted from the growing demand of US Jewry for a clear statement of attachments and allegiances, in view of Israel's public declarations on the nature of her ties with world Jewry, and its subordination to Zionist and national goals. In the much-publicized letter to Blaustein, dated 23 August 1950, Ben-Gurion wrote: 'The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel . . . The State of Israel speaks only on behalf of its own citizens and in no way presumes to represent or speak in the name of Jews who are citizens of any other country.' Blaustein's reply was equally clear: '[Israel] must recognize that the matter of goodwill between its citizens and those of other countries is a two-way street: that Israel also has a responsibility in this situation—a responsibility . . . of not affecting adversely the sensibilities of Jews who are citizens of other states by what it says or does. American Jews vigorously repudiate any suggestion or implication that they are in exile. American Jews—young and old alike, Zionists and non-Zionists alike—are profoundly attached to America . . . To American Jews, America is home.'

It was found necessary to have public confirmation and reiteration of this exchange and understanding in 1956, 1961 and again in 1963 from Levi Eshkol on his accession to the premiership of Israel. This exchange has been understood to represent an acknowledgement of the special status of American Jews, rather than being valid for the entire Diaspora.¹⁴ This was, perhaps, the reason Ben-Gurion accepted the deletion of 'which represents only its own inhabitants' from the preamble to the World Zionist Organization Status Law of November 1952, an omission formally protested by Blaustein.

Despite these public declarations, the twin basic perceptions—Palestinocentrism carried over into statehood, and Diaspora as means or resources to be drawn on—continued to actuate the role performance of official Israel in the Diaspora. In a recent examination of the Diaspora and the peace process, Professor Beloff has commented on questions of allegiance and their effect on the status of 'diaspora communities

¹⁴ David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: OUP, 1993) 64.

(which) have brought pressure to bear on their own governments in favour of Israel's positions'.¹⁵ He does not mention the additional factor of the guiding hand of official Israel in these activities, through her overseas missions. Pressures on behalf of persecuted fellow-Jews in other countries had appeared not incompatible with allegiance to their countries of citizenship. But in other cases, such as the UK, the hazards of 'double allegiance' and potential damage to the Jewish community had arisen earlier, in the difficult years leading up to 1948. Matters inevitably sharpened when Jewish and Yishuv/Israeli concerns ran counter to the host government's view of its national interests, with the Bevin period and Suez as obvious examples, a decade apart. Former Under Secretary of State George Ball's remark that 'practically every congressman and senator says his prayers to the AIPAC lobby . . . Oh, they've done an enormous job of corrupting the American democratic process',¹⁶ and De Gaulle's notorious remarks in 1967 (as those of Pompidou a few years later) are acute illustrations of the exposure of Jewish communities acting on behalf of Israel. 'Look upon yourselves as a Middle Eastern state', Henry Byroade (later Assistant Secretary of State) had urged the Israelis at the World Affairs Council at Dayton, Ohio, in April 1954, 'rather than as the headquarters . . . of a worldwide grouping . . . who must have special rights and obligations within the State of Israel'. Questions of dual loyalty could be freely discussed in Western countries. It was argued that man has multiple loyalties, not necessarily inconsistent, and that Zionism requires not political allegiance to Israel but support of kinds afforded in free societies to a variety of causes and groups abroad. In totalitarian societies, however, Jewish communities were far more exposed. Support for Israel or thoughts about immigration to Israel were viewed in terms of disloyalty (as emigration is, in Israel). Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism intermingled in the Prague of Slansky, as in Poland following the Six-Day War. For Israel, there could be only one solution for such Jewish communities and their predicament, and the role of her envoys and missions was to act for its promotion, openly and clandestinely, within and without the countries concerned.

Ben-Gurion wrote that 'when the Jew in America or South Africa speaks of "our government" to his fellow Jews, he usually means the

¹⁵ Max Beloff, 'The Diaspora and the Peace Process', *Israel Affairs* I: 1 (Autumn 1994) 34-5.

¹⁶ Interview on *Sixty Minutes*, CBS, 23 October 1988.

government of Israel, while the Jewish public in various countries views the Israeli Ambassadors as their representatives', and 'the only loyal ally we have is the Jewish people'.¹⁷ A quarter of a century later, an Israeli Prime Minister is reported to have told Rabbi Schindler, 'you must decide whether you are a Jew or an American. To be a Jew means to give full support to the government of Israel.'¹⁸ For another loyal, institutional Zionist, as for Begin, there are no inhibitions: 'A true Zionist hastens to help Israel without hesitation, without stopping to consider official political policies or general public opinion. He stands unwaveringly and unconditionally beside Israel in its fight for its existence.'¹⁹ All activity on Israel's behalf could well fall within the category of the fight for existence, even as late as the 1980s when those words were written. An extreme instance of diverse perceptions of the loyalty problem and political damage to the status of Diaspora communities has been the Pollard affair, and the continuing campaign to secure pardon or release. In articles in *The Jerusalem Post* written by Pollard's wife and sister,²⁰ it is claimed that Pollard remains in prison in large part because many Jewish leaders have remained silent, and that the affair 'produced an outpouring of Jewish bloodletting in the government agencies'. Higher clearances have been withheld from Jews, and some have been told that the US 'did not need more Jew-boys like Pollard'. One published response regretted the description of Pollard as 'a patriot', lending substance to 'the lie that American Jews must be loyal to Israel first'. It concludes with apprehensions that the Pollard campaign can only lend plausibility to the canard of dual loyalty, and that, 'at a time of the ascension to power of far-right groups in Washington'.

Effects on Diaspora Communities

To summarize, these Israeli perceptions propelling Israel's pursuit of her policy goals have drawn on the resources and vigour and at times have prejudiced the very status of Diaspora communities in their countries of citizenship. They have contributed to a substitution of political and

¹⁷ David Ben-Gurion, 'Israel and the Diaspora', *Government Yearbook 1957*, pp. 32–5.

¹⁸ Don Peretz, *The Government and Politics of Israel* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983) 255.

¹⁹ Yitshak Korn, *Jews at the Crossroads* (New Jersey: Cornwall Books, 1983) 5.

²⁰ 'This Patriot Must Come Home', *Jerusalem Post*, 31 March 1995, p. 5, and 'Parole for Pollard', 30 April 1995, p. 6.

national concerns for communal and spiritual activities, and thereby to the wider and more powerful secularization process undermining Diaspora cultural infrastructure and identity. Diaspora Jews have felt able to express their Jewish identity in the form of support for Israel, which has substituted for spiritual and cultural commitment and learning. This is what Lord Jakobovits has called 'living as Jews by proxy',²¹ Israel having become the religion of the Diaspora. The tendency in Western Jewish communities has been for the activists in the secular fields of Israel's manifold causes and support groups and for the big givers to replace more traditional community leadership. In the UK it is the leadership of the Board of Deputies and United Synagogue which is overshadowed by the JIA leadership, as Chief Rabbi Sacks points out.²² He adds bluntly, 'we have given to Israel at the expense of our own viability'. He cites the example of the Hebrew University, which in 1991 alone raised more funds than were contributed to the leading Anglo-Jewish educational charities combined. In that year, nearly £40 million were raised for Israel, and £1.68 million for local education in the UK. In response to such effects of Zionist and Israeli causes and activities on the Diaspora, and to predictions of the fulfilment of Klatzkin's theses, it could well be argued that activity on behalf of Israel and Zionism not only gave new life and purpose to a withering and waning Diaspora, but resulted in fund-raising on unprecedented levels, leaving at the disposal of the communities financial resources which would never otherwise have been raised. The establishment of Israel brought new pride and confidence to Jewish life and invigorated communities which might well have succumbed to despair and assimilation after the Holocaust. Israel also ensured international concern and action on behalf of Jews in distress who might otherwise have remained helplessly at the mercy of their oppressors. In the words of Chief Rabbi Sacks, Israel made the *golah* less like *galut*, the diaspora less like exile.²³

Yet corrosive effects on the Diaspora and Jewish life in its communities have run parallel with not dissimilar developments in Israel. A common problem area of Jewish identity confronting Israel and the

²¹ Immanuel Jakobovits, 'A Reassessment of Israel's Role', in Moshe Davis (ed.) *World Jewry and the State of Israel* (New York: Arno Press, 1977) 289.

²² Jonathan Sacks, *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* (Ilford: Vallentine Mitchell, 1994) 68.

²³ *Ibid.*, 92.

Diaspora today is the disappearance of the patterns of traditional life, except within Orthodox groups. Zionism has been a conscious revolution against the traditional Jewish past and culture. It has successfully established a largely secularized and Westernized society in Israel, which has contributed to Diaspora secularization with the substitution of Israel for traditional Jewish practices and preoccupations. Israel and the Diaspora have not yet recognized a shared priority and need for the revival, transmission and future preservation of a common Jewish identity, in Israel as in the Diaspora. Official Israel has shown little sign of being prepared for such a role and responsibility—nor of changing its perceptions of the Diaspora and itself. The shared symbol of Jewish identity in recent decades has been defined by Chief Rabbi Sacks as survivalism²⁴—largely, if not chiefly, an Israeli contribution. This received major impetus with the threat to Israel in the Six-Day War, releasing and reviving earlier memories and emotions from Jewish experience in Europe, and in Israel's struggles in 1948 and later in the Yom Kippur War. In recent decades it has informed and been strengthened by the world-wide campaigns on behalf of Soviet, Ethiopian and Syrian Jewry, placed by Israel and its missions abroad at the top of the Jewish agenda, since Israel's perceived role and responsibility are rescue 'for Palestine's sake' and to strengthen herself demographically. But the growing statistics of assimilation and secularization indicate that 'Jewish commitment to survival has not proved strong enough to ensure that Jews survive'. If the challenge confronted by Israel during the period of survivalism was of rallying the Diaspora and ensuring that a Jew can live, 'now the challenge is to show that a Jew can live as a Jew',²⁵ in Israel and the Diaspora alike. The world-wide Diaspora statistics on Jewish population-decline, intermarriage and synagogue marriages need no repetition. As the wider secular community attracts and absorbs, what remains of Jewish community life outside the Orthodox fringes becomes increasingly marginal, its centre and hub being in another country and continent, and requiring extra-territorial loyalty and commitment.

Meanwhile, have official and popular Israeli perceptions of her role,

²⁴ Ibid, 66f

²⁵ Jonathan Sacks, 'From Integration to Survival to Continuity', in Jonathan Webber (ed.) *Jewish Identities in the New Europe* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994) 115.

responsibilities, priorities and policies towards the Diaspora evolved or been recast, as Israel and the Diaspora communities contend, separately or together, with an historically critical period for Jewish identity, culture and peoplehood?

Evolving Role and Changing Circumstances

Here again, Ben-Gurion has been the most authoritative preceptor of Israel's evolving role. By the mid-1950s his priorities were changing, in tune with the changing realities and developments in Israel and the Diaspora. His Palestinocentrism was concerned with what was happening in Israel's society and culture, and world Jewry and its future were beginning to appear more precarious than expendable. The fate of Israel, he wrote, is involved in the fate of world Jewry. Their mutual bonds are essential to Israel's survival and for the non-disappearance of the Diaspora; they are 'the key to the strengthening of the state and the preservation of Diaspora Jewry'. To this it must be added that 'only the moral, cultural and political inspiration and magnetism radiating from Israel to all parts of the Diaspora can attract the best of the Jewish youth to join in the work of redemption and revival . . . in Israel'.²⁶ But it would not be too much to read into this period of Ben-Gurion's evolving views and priorities an Israeli role and responsibility for the survival of the Diaspora for its own sake. This is the period of his 'I am first of all a Jew and second an Israeli'.²⁷ Admitting that the State's previous requirements of the Western Diaspora had been almost exclusively limited to quality manpower, material and political aid, he was now stressing Israel's responsibility ('it must also give') for the spread of Hebrew education and the sources of Judaism, for contact with Jewish intellectuals in the Diaspora and joint cultural undertakings for the study of Jewish history, literature, art and thought.²⁸ 'Above all, we must mould our own people into a pattern that can be a model and a magnet . . .' This concern and aim was not only to attract immigration, but it was 'for the survival of the Jewish soul in the Diaspora' that he was summoning the contribution of 'men who can communicate the essence of Israel's work'. The task had to become 'to intensify the Jewish consciousness of

²⁶ Ben-Gurion, 'Israel and the Diaspora' (see n. 17) 33-41.

²⁷ In an address to the World Zionist Congress in 1956.

²⁸ Ben-Gurion, 'Achievements and Tasks of our Generation' (see n. 11) XLVIII.

Israeli youth and disseminate the spiritual treasures . . . amongst the Jews in the Diaspora'. The youth of Israel needs to have deeper roots in its spiritual heritage, in order to intensify the attachment to world Jewry, and to show them the common destiny and the unity of Jewry's historical continuity, Ben-Gurion averred. Furthermore, Israel could offer challenge, hardship and personal and collective achievement. But it could not compete with the West in material rewards and individual opportunity, or not without altering its very nature and essence. Only the attractions of a Jewish society based on high moral values and universalistic ideals, in which societal interests and achievements take precedence over individual profit and satisfaction, could compete with the materialism of the West, maintain the pride and devotion of the Jewish people and bring the best of its youth to join in such a Jewish national enterprise. This was 'the very condition for Israel's survival',²⁹ Israel's evolving central role and responsibility towards the Diaspora (as also a crucial responsibility of the Diaspora); and by the late 1950s these themes represented his 'increasing intellectual preoccupations and an ideological point rapidly assuming centrality in his thinking'—as observed by one of his biographers, who was in a position to follow him closely at that period.³⁰ These views of Israel's evolving responsibilities have been presented by another prominent Labour Zionist figure as the new 'great mission' of the State, 'to become the cultural and spiritual centre of Jewry', and to serve as 'a mould for Jewish national and traditional life'. The fight against the spiritual decline threatening the Jewish people and massive assimilation constitutes 'the role of the State of Israel in our day'.³¹

What of Israel's potential capacity to fulfil such a role? Even the teaching of Bible in Israel today, central as it was in Ben-Gurion's view of Jewish culture, 'is done in a way of imparting information', but information less important than English, computers, mathematics and whatever is needed for success in the economic system and society. Far from Bible being studied as central to students' personal and collective lives, 'it is not only boring, but also unimportant. Today's youth in Israel is interested in success in the market-place. The schools no longer view it as

²⁹ Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion. A Biography* (New York: Adama Books, 1986) 323–5.

³⁰ Avraham Avi-Hai, *Ben-Gurion State-Builder* (New York: John Wiley, 1974) 244.

³¹ Korn (see n. 19) 52–3.

their obligation to build a link between the student and his culture.³² In the same vein, Professor Nini laments the erosion of Jewish culture in Israel and the Diaspora. While their very survival as a people depends on the Jewish heritage and culture, his own college students cannot always read Hebrew literature unaided. He, like Schweid, attributes this to assimilation in Israel, no less than in the Diaspora,³³ by which they mean the loss of the traditional culture and the adoption of the symbols and behaviour patterns of cultures of consumerism and materialism.

Identity in Israel

Instead of fulfilling the role of transmitter of Jewish culture and identity, Israel has imported from former places of exile a new secular culture and its values. In the words of Lord Jakobovits, she has taken pride in what she has in common with others, legislatures and universities, rather than in what has distinguished Israel, in Jewish law and learning.³⁴ Diaspora spiritual and cultural commitment, on the other hand, has been weakened with the substitution of identification with Israel for Jewish identity and practices. What is being lost in the process are the common ties and common destinies of one people, in Israel and the Diaspora, with incipient tendencies of rejection and of growing apart, in separate processes of assimilation and secularization. Most Israeli emigrants have no more Jewish identity than their most assimilated fellow Jews, but they do retain an Israeli identity. Jewish identity, if not Israeli identity, would appear to be as problematical in Israel as in the Diaspora, beyond the fringes of the Orthodox communities. Professor Gerson Cohen lamented 'a whole generation of Jews . . . reared in Israel not only to look down on Jewish history and the creativity of fifteen centuries but also to be ignorant of it'.³⁵ What Professor Cohen urged twenty years ago—'a reorientation of Israeli education in favour of Jewishness, in which the Diaspora is treated not only with respect but with pride of fraternity, common vision and common history'—is essentially consistent

³² Herb Keinon, 'Interview with Eliezer Schweid', *The Jerusalem Post Pessach 5755 Supplement*, 14 April 1995, pp. 14–15.

³³ Nili Mandler, 'Look Around at Disappearing Jewry' (Interview with Professor Yehuda Nini), *Ha'aretz Supplement*, 21 October 1994, pp. 19–20.

³⁴ Jakobovits (see n. 21) 289.

³⁵ Gerson D. Cohen, 'Israel Within World Jewry', in Moshe Davis (ed.) *World Jewry and the State of Israel* (see n. 21) 249.

with the recommendations of the Shinhar Commission's report on Jewish education in the state school system, delivered to Israel's Minister of Education in 1994, which failed to arouse more than the merest modicum of public interest or attention.³⁶ However, a unit of that Ministry is now engaged in a multi-year task of compiling for the state school system a Jewish studies curriculum and study programme, based on the Commission's recommendations. The objective of the programme is to foster and bolster Jewish identity, placing stress on Jewish culture as the heritage of the Jewish people in its entirety. The necessity to train special teaching staff, at present dreadfully scarce, is acknowledged, as is also the need to invigorate Jewish studies at university level and to prepare educational programmes for mass-media transmission.³⁷

But in the meantime, popular and official perceptions embedded in both Palestinocentrism and negation continue to reinforce each other. Israelis tend to beg the question of Jewish identity and its erosion, with the simplistic claim to be Jews by virtue of living in Israel—'how Jewish life will be lived in Israel—whether it's the way we deal with the welfare question, economics, law, road accidents. Here you can always determine these things in the Jewish way . . . So, in the Diaspora, you are marginal Jews.'³⁸ It is no wonder that the former Acting Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive (Yehiel Leket) was recently shocked to learn from a survey that young Israelis feel closer to Druze youth, with whom they share the same land (and its defence) than to US Jewish youth. He expressed anxiety at prospects of a Middle East peace absorbing the Israelis and converting the Jewish State into a state of Canaanites, not excluding intermarriages. More in the A. B. Yehoshua genre were comments by Israel's President at the 1995 'Dialogue with the President'. To a suggestion that schools in Israel should teach about the Diaspora: 'I really don't think we need to put in our school curriculum about how you live in Miami'; and on proposals for a learning programme based on mutual exchanges of visits: 'You are saying that I should send my children to Houston? Why, to see how Jews live there like goyim?' The President repeated the views that there is neither future nor value in the Diaspora, and that aliya is the exclusive option. He announced that there

³⁶ See Avi Bekker, 'The Decline of the Zionist Ethos', *Ha'aretz*, 21 May 1995, p. B2.

³⁷ Ofer Brandes, 'Not Afraid of Judaism', *Ha'aretz*, 18 July 1995, p. B2.

³⁸ A.K. Sommer, quoting A.B. Yehoshua (interview), *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 28 April 1995, p. 15.

would be no further such annual dialogues at the President's residence.

Recent proposals were aired by a New Zealand-born WZO emissary to the US, for a new definition of Zionism, eliminating the dichotomous need to choose between Israel and the Diaspora. Each Jew would individually choose a relationship with Israel reflecting his own personal circumstances, allowing for various periods of residence in Israel for larger numbers of Diaspora families and individuals; and through this each side could reinforce its Jewish identity. Her superior, Uri Gordon, Head of the Aliya Department, summoned the emissary to Jerusalem, with the peremptory fiat that there was 'no need for a new definition of Zionism, which would eliminate the dichotomous choice between Israel and the Diaspora . . . it represents the choice between remaining Jewish and assimilation in a non-Jewish environment'.³⁹ These Israeli reactions consistently beg the question of 'What is a Jew', somewhat mordantly posed by the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, in response to Israeli positions of the above-mentioned nature at the Dialogue with the President. Not at variance with his predecessor's expression of anxiety for a Canaanite future, Burg earlier stated that 'Zionism is not technical aliya. Zionism is Jewish education.' This, too, would appear to be a revised, or latter-day Ben-Gurionesque definition of Zionism and of a new role and responsibility.

Identity Erosion and Change

The role and responsibilities of Israel in the Diaspora will continue in the foreseeable future to be structured by one dominant process and two sets of Israeli attitudes. The process is that of the changing and eroding Jewish culture and identity in both Israel and the Diaspora. One set of attitudes is those of Palestinocentric negationists, or rejectionists, who see no future for Jews in the Diaspora and would have Israel continue to draw resources from the Diaspora, with her own active input limited, calculated and adequate for purposes of the ongoing withdrawal of resources. The other set of attitudes may be labelled modified Ahad Ha'am viewpoints. These combine Burg's premises of negating the negation and Zionism as Jewish education with Ben-Gurion's messianism, the creation of a spiritually renewed and re-educated Jewish society

³⁹ A.K. Sommer, 'Dialogue of Equals', *The Jerusalem Post Independence Day Magazine*, 3 May 1995, p. 4.

in Israel, which would complete and fulfil the creation of the State and serve as an inspirational model and teacher for Jewish communities abroad. This set of views holds the link between Israel and the Diaspora to be vital for the survival of a distinctive Jewish identity and culture.

As concerns the process of changing culture and identity, there are the realist/pragmatist and the prescriptionist/visionary perceptions. The realists discern 'a specific national/collective Israeli identity that is in significant respects different and separable from Jewry as a whole'. It stems from an 'integrated alternative to the traditional, religiously based Jewish way of life: Jewish, yet secular'. The elements of history, territory (Eretz Israel), distinctive language and culture constitute a Jewish life and culture 'reformed on fundamentally secular terms'—an alternative not available in the Diaspora. There is now, therefore, a clear and sharp division and differentiation in the Jewish world, between the communities of the Diaspora and that of Israel. Vital carries this yet further: culture, stemming from the place of the Hebrew language in the State and country of Israel, 'tends to draw Israel's inhabitants (Jews and non-Jews, be it noted) together', despite the obvious divisions and stresses to which they are subject. 'By the same token, their culture and circumstances being specific to them, they tend increasingly to differentiate Israelis of all kinds from Jews . . . elsewhere.'⁴⁰ With 'this separate development of the Jews in Israel, and their ever sharper differentiation' from the Diaspora, the only remaining question is how the Jews of the Diaspora are to define themselves, separately or collectively.⁴¹

A broader, more global view of these processes of change, stemming from a socio-economic approach, presents a different picture and conclusions, suggesting that the differences between Israel and Diaspora Jewry, socially, economically and intellectually, are diminishing. Israel is, in fact, coming to resemble the Diaspora. Avineri points out that the Diaspora over-representation of Jews in the middle classes, whether commercial or professional, has been restored in Israel, together with the growing dependence of Israel on non-Jewish labour. The social and professional stratification of Israeli society today is much more reminiscent of a Western Diaspora community than of the Yishuv. He quotes

⁴⁰ David Vital, 'Israel and the Jewish Diaspora: Five Comments on the Political Relationship', *Israel Affairs* 1: 2 (Winter 1994) 182–3.

⁴¹ David Vital, *The Future of the Jews* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990) 114ff.

A.D. Gordon: 'Exile can emerge in the land of Israel . . .'. Building a national society means an overall responsibility, not just caring for oneself and one's own. Emigration from Israel belongs to the latter tradition. Zionism was meant to be a revolution against these patterns in Jewish life, seeking to restore communitarian and social goals at the expense of personal ease and wellbeing. *Laissez-faire* in an Israeli context means restoring the exile to Israel. Israel can remain a normative centre for world Jewry only if she remains different in her social behaviour and goals. It will be the content and quality of life in Israel which must induce the identification of Jews with her. If Israel becomes just another Western consumer society, like those of the Diaspora, she will lose her unique identity for world Jewry. Acknowledging a debt to Ahad Ha'am, Gordon, Rabbi Kook and Ben-Gurion, and echoing the latter, he calls these conclusions 'the unfinished dimension of the Zionist revolution', adding that 'some aspects of it might have even witnessed a retrogression in the last years'.⁴²

On another, supplementary level are to be found those prescriptionists whose plea is for education, which has always been a principal means of transmission of culture and identity, nowhere more than in Jewish life. While it may be accepted that this is 'a task for a generation, one that must undo or redirect programmes and ideologies of almost two centuries', what is problematical is how 'to articulate afresh the meanings of Jewishness in the modern world, and of the educational techniques for the inculcation of those meanings to Jews everywhere', in opposition to the processes of assimilation and secularization. These are processes which are bringing the entire world to the 'brink of moral collapse', and Jewish survival depends on 'our own spiritual wellsprings and drive'.⁴³ Chief Rabbi Sacks would appear to be requiring more of Israel than the Israel of Vital, or of Jakobovits, has to offer. 'The Israel of continuity must become Jewry's classroom, the Diaspora's ongoing seminar in Jewish identity. Once Israel saved Jews. In the future, she will save Judaism.' His faith and hope are that:

Future generations will look back in wonder at the strange ideological wars fought between Israel and the diaspora before they reached a symbiotic, mutually supportive relationship. They will be perplexed by Israel's need to negate the

⁴² Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981) 224ff.

⁴³ Cohen (sec n. 35) 243, 255.

diaspora. They will be yet more amazed at the diaspora's tendency to negate itself by devoting its energies to Israel in a way that weakened rather than strengthened its own resources and thus ultimately endangered its long-term support for Israel. It is to be hoped that such self-destructive policies have come to an end. Israel, surely, is our ultimate destination. But the immediate question is less whether Jews are at home in London or Jerusalem than whether they are *at home in their Jewishness*. That is likely to become the leading concern in Israel and the diaspora alike as both turn their attention to continuity.⁴⁴

Dissolution of Unity—Going Separate Ways?

In the meantime, it appears that UK Jewry is seeking its solutions unilaterally, and not waiting for an active role and responsibility on Israel's part. In fact, Israel herself requires the kind of educational and cultural overhaul that London is planning if she is to fulfil the expectations of these prescriptionists. The reality is that each community appears to be going its separate way. In Israel, new and old identities are in a process of constant flux. The numerical weight of the predominantly secular immigration from the former USSR could well blur identities even more and deepen discord and antagonism between (secular and Orthodox) cultures, leading to internal, segregationist separatisms. An optimistic view is that these might be compelled to develop 'a pluralistic compromise, retaining a level of cultural unity . . . a pluralistic solution of the conflict between religious and non-religious', and with it a 'global national Jewish culture . . . a unifying centre for the whole Jewish people'.⁴⁵ From the Diaspora viewpoint, Israel may appear to become less central in Jewry's struggle to survive and maintain a Jewish cultural identity. Perceptions of the Diaspora as dispensable and disposable, and of aliya as the only Jewish future, run counter to efforts to maintain Diaspora and community continuity. Israel's own Jewish continuity was subjected to incisive questioning some years ago by Hashomer Hatzair's Ya'akov Hazan: 'We came to Eretz Israel to breed *apikorsim* (heretics), but we have only managed to produce *amaratzim* (ignoramuses)'.

In the face of the dominant process—the threat of dissolution of the old Jewish unity and common identity, and of the dismemberment of an ancient people, as its traditional cultural links and bonds shrink to the

⁴⁴ Sacks (see n. 25) 98–100.

⁴⁵ Eliezer Schweid, 'Changing Jewish Identities in the New Europe and the Consequences for Israel', in Jonathan Webber (ed.) *Jewish Identities* (see n. 25) 54.

confines of Orthodoxy—the question is not solely whether Israel has the potential capacity to fulfil a transformed, relevant and constructive role and responsibility, but more so whether Israel and the Diaspora have the common will, spiritual reserves and resources to cooperate in fashioning a renewed, shared Jewish identity, based on a (societally) healthy cultural pluralism, or at least a basic programme of Jewish education, to be transmitted via a global network throughout the Jewish world, as proposed in a study to be placed before the 1997 centennial Jewish Agency Convention.⁴⁶ This would appear to be a crucial dilemma and challenge requiring the united attention and resources of all Jewish communities today.

⁴⁶ Haim Ben-Shahar and Arye Carmon. *'The Jerusalem Plan 1997'*.

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