

## ***In Search of Hegemony: Nationalism and Religion in the Middle East***

---

IAN S. LUSTICK

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

**ABSTRACT:** *Belief systems help states sustain authority by legitimizing the commands of rulers. Once authority is legitimized in the minds of those over whom it is exercised, those who obey do so in part out of a willingness to sacrifice other interests to do what they regard as right. States able to establish their commands as legitimate can extract resources efficiently, but not as efficiently as when their authority to do so is established hegemonically. Hegemonic authority is construed by the ruled population as a natural part of life, prompting habitual compliance rather than obedience based on contingent judgments of right and wrong. This essay summarizes a theory of hegemony developed from Antonio Gramsci to reduce the confusion that usually attends studies of nationalism. The usefulness of the theory is illustrated by applying it to the changing role of nationalism and religion in Middle Eastern politics*

### **The Noble Lies of Nationalism and Religion**

The last decades of the twentieth century were marked by conflict within and across state boundaries that combined religious with ethnic or ethno-national themes. Buddhist activism was the locomotive that plunged Sri Lanka into the abyss of civil war, triggering a furious and extreme response among Hindu Tamils. Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism were prominent in the formulas for mobilization and aggression that marked Serbo-Croatian relations in the 1990s. Even more important were the Orthodox Christian appeals issued from Belgrade to mobilize Serbs against Muslims in Bosnia and Albania, prompting mobilization within the Islamic world on behalf of beleaguered Muslims in the Balkans. In Israel, Jewish fundamentalism and the tens of thousands of dedicated settlers it produced in the West Bank and Gaza Strip served as the crucial vanguard and ideological framework for successive right-wing nationalist governments to pursue the dream of imposing Jewish sovereignty

over 'the Whole Land of Israel'. A follower of this movement assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin out of fear that he was leading Israel toward a peace with the Palestinians based on compromise of fundamentalist imperatives. The triumphalism and grandiosity in Israeli policy associated with the influence of Jewish fundamentalism, combined with Maronite Christian aggressiveness in the early 1980s, gave rise to the 1982 Lebanon War. In India the rise of Hindutva sentiment – a kind of Hindu fundamentalism, including the ascendancy of the BJP (Baharatiya Janata Party) in Indian politics – displaced the nationalist Congress Party. Its success led to the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, produced a severe clash with Sikhs in the Punjab over the disposition of their Temple, and has contributed to widespread rioting with heavy death tolls in many areas of India, especially among Muslims. Although the United States has maintained its mostly secular and civic nationalist political posture, few would deny the strong influence of Christian fundamentalism on foreign policies of the Reagan and second Bush administrations, especially toward Central America (Reagan) and the Middle East (Bush).

Muslim political movements making strong religious appeals have been particularly prominent. Even before Khomeini's Shi'i Muslim revolution against the "imperial" nationalism of the Pahlavi Shah, the Sunni organization of the Muslim Brothers had risen to prominence in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, and elsewhere. Offshoots of this organization and others in South Asia produced, among other things, the 1979 takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the assassination of Anwar Sadat, and international terrorist groups that struck twice against the World Trade Center in New York. Militant Islam replaced secular style autocracy for most of the 1980s in Pakistan. In alliance with elements within the Pakistani military, it transformed that country into a hot house for jihadist movements such as the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Jaish-e-Muhammad. Pakistan became the base for an American-led and Saudi-financed "jihad" against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and an escalated struggle on behalf of Kashmiri Muslims. Further illustrations of the potency of religion as a force in the politics that determined the fate of many countries and peoples in the late 20th century could be drawn from Algeria, South Africa, Sudan, Chechnya, Central Asia, Nigeria, Palestine, Russia and China.

Because of the prominence and power of contemporary 'Islamism' it is worth acknowledging the profound challenge which leaders of this movement are posing, or at least claim they are posing, to the twin organizing principles of the modern world – state and nation. In Iran, Sudan, the Afghanistan of the Taliban, and elsewhere, we have seen at work the principles of displacing state authority with that of the Sharia and its interpreters, and replacing formulas of nation, ethnicity or citizenship with that of the 'community of believers' as the

social basis for political identification and the guide to appropriate boundaries for political jurisdictions and participation. While the experiences of these three countries offer much encouragement to Islamist activists, they remind us of how the message of contemporary Muslim fundamentalism is directly at odds with the dominant scholarly view. That view, to be elaborated here, treats religion and nationalism as functionally equivalent frameworks for the mobilization of collective sentiment, the legitimization of authority, and the replacement of parochial, feudal or ethnic ties with broader categories of attachment capable of supporting 'entropic' processes of trade, economic modernization, technological diffusion, and cultural integration.<sup>1</sup>

Marx called religion the "opiate of the masses." Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke – indeed most of the pillars of the Western philosophical tradition – treated religion as a set of useful stories to which homage needed to be paid in the pages of their treatises. Publicly endorsed "lies" regarding religion were "noble," to use Plato's terminology in *The Republic*, because they were useful to states seeking legitimacy for their authority and compliance from their subjects.

Machiavelli perhaps said it best, and if not most explicitly, certainly most cynically: "Of all men who have been eulogized, those deserve it most who have been the authors and founders of religions..."<sup>2</sup> Why? Certainly not because of their help in making God's truth accessible to humankind. For Machiavelli, the genuineness of revelatory claims was irrelevant. Rather, it was precisely the inaccessibility of disconfirming proof for them that was most useful to the Prince, *i.e.* the state. "Nothing is more necessary than to seem to [be religious], for men in general judge more by the eyes than by the hands, for

- 
- 1 "Entropic" in this context refers to Ernest Gellner's argument about the homogenizing, culturally "entropizing" effects of nationalism that provide an arena for the fluid economic and cultural interaction necessary to build an industrial society (Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). For examples of the basic functional equivalency idea, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, *God Land: Reflections on Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Anthony D. Smith, "The 'Sacred' Dimension of Nationalism," *Millennium*, Vol. 29, no. 3.
  - 2 Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*. In *The Prince and the Discourses* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1950) translated from the Italian by Christian E. Detmold, Book I, Chapter 10, p. 141.

every one can see, but very few have to feel. Everybody sees what you appear to be, few feel what you are, and those few will not dare to oppose themselves to the many..."<sup>3</sup> Although substantively his enemy, Machiavelli praised the fierce counter-reformation leader, Savonarola, who was finally burned at the stake in Machiavelli's Florence. Savonarola offered an object lesson in the ability of an effective leader to make amazing but useful claims (such as Savonarola's claim that he spoke with God) believable to the mass of the people. "I will not pretend," says Machiavelli, "to judge whether it was true or not."<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli is thus only interested in the usefulness of religion. "Everything that tends to favor religion (even though it were believed to be false) should be received and availed of to strengthen it; and this should be done the more, the wiser the rulers are, and the better they understand the natural course of things."<sup>5</sup>

For Antonio Gramsci, writing in the early twentieth century, religion was not the readily available source of political fantasy. That is one key difference between the particular ideation resources available to Gramsci versus those available in Machiavelli's day. But Gramsci differed from Machiavelli in another respect as well. Machiavelli believed in the potential of the political virtuoso to spin a religious fantasy that could work for generations and even centuries to undergird state authority. By contrast, in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, Gramsci emphasized that certain stubborn material realities could not be ignored by those who would arrange mass beliefs so as to legitimate authority and strengthen the state. He thus argued for building a national state by fostering an idea of the nation and its unity that could enshrine the leadership position of Piedmont and the workers of the north while offering the bourgeoisie and the masses of what would be "Italy," and in particular the peasants of the south, a livable bargain. He was fully aware that in his neo-Machiavellian struggle to "liberate" (actually "create") Italy, he faced powerful adversaries – not only Fascism, but the Catholic Church as well.

The point of returning to Machiavelli and Gramsci is to remind ourselves that from a political point of view it is not the particular character of a religion's claims, its authenticity, or its internal logic that matter. What matters is how well those claims can be used to establish a network of authority relations that fosters the stable and profitable operation of a political system – profitable, that

---

3 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter XVIII, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

4 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, *op. cit.*, Book I, Chapter 11, p. 149.

5 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, *op. cit.*, Book I, Chapter 12, p. 150.

is, for the groups who control the apparatus of its legislative, judicial and taxing powers.

We can locate this argument within a broader theory of political authority – a theory that will lead, in turn, to an understanding of both religion and nationalism as competing formulae for institutionalizing political power. Following the demise of the socialist bloc, amid the volatility of forces at play in the globalizing, post-modern world, and despite celebrations by some of institutional arrangements and solidarities that by-pass the state altogether – states survive. Accompanied by the national or religious formulae that support their authority, they still appear as the only plausible vehicles for the advancement of the world's underclasses.<sup>6</sup> A theory of hegemony can help explain why neither nationalism nor religion is prevailing and why that is perhaps worse than the victory of either.

### A Working Theory of Hegemony

To build the necessary conceptual apparatus, let us begin with simple definitions of two basic but commonly confused terms: state and nation. A state is an *institution that enforces property rights*. Where there are no property rights, no stable expectations about what is mine and what is not, there is no state. Where there are vague or uncertain property rights, the presence of a state is vague or uncertain. Where systems of property rights conflict, there is a battle over which institution, if any, will be able to assert itself as the state in a particular area or over a particular group of people.<sup>7</sup> For my purpose here the important thing to note about the concept of “state”, so defined, is that it is an organized apparatus, an entity which to one extent or another is bureaucratic and hierarchical.

A nation is a *large community whose members are full members simply by virtue of their mutual recognition of one another as sharing ascriptive cultural bonds more important than any other*. By “large” I mean that no one member can personally know all the other members of the nation. By “ascriptive” I mean

---

6 Citizenship is a promising alternative to nationalism and religion as a candidate for hegemonic status, and has achieved this status in the United States. But its potential outside the developed world is unproven.

7 For an explication and defense of this definition see Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank/Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 3-4 and 37.

characteristics that are impossible or extremely difficult to change, there being no *a priori* reason to exclude religion, language, territory, ethnicity or race as *identity* features which may emerge as the markers of national membership in any particular case. This definition emphasizes the democratic aspect distinguishing national and ethnic solidarities from other kinds (such as many religious, tribal or kinship, or corporate identities), since membership in the community designates equal status within it and does not entail a position within a hierarchy of personal valuation. But it excludes citizenship – a matter of membership in the formal organization of the state, as “non-ascriptive.”

With these two basic terms defined we can move toward a theory of compliance and institutionalized political authority. In 1961 Amitai Etzioni suggested a list of what we may think of as three mechanisms capable of producing compliance with the decisions of organizations (including states): *coercive*, *utilitarian* and *normative*.<sup>8</sup> While I will here go well beyond and in some ways contradict the theoretical propositions Etzioni advanced in connection with this typology, his list is still a valuable starting point.

The crudest of these mechanisms is simple coercion or the direct threat of coercion. For states this means that taxes and soldiers (the two most fundamental needs of any state) are elicited from target populations by force or the direct threat of force – grain taken from recalcitrant peasants at bayonet point, sailors impressed into the navy, conscripts drawn from a population by threat of incarceration, and so forth. A more efficient means of eliciting compliance is utilitarian – bribes, trades of services (including the enhanced protection of property rights or the grant of more property rights), for higher or more dependable flows of taxes and recruits. In Etzioni’s classic formulation the most efficient means of eliciting compliance is via normative mechanisms – beliefs among the target populations that it is right to comply, that it is one’s duty to do so, regardless of whether fear of punishment for refusal to comply is present, and regardless of calculations that may be made about the balance of costs and benefits entailed in compliance. This kind of belief, a normative basis for compliance, is what is almost always meant by, but seldom specified to be, the meaning of ‘legitimacy’. In other words, what separates a legitimate from an illegitimate state is the presence of beliefs in the minds of those within the

---

8 Amitai Etzioni, *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations: On Power, Involvement, and Their Correlates* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp. 4-22.

purview of that state that they should, for reasons of right and duty, comply with its orders.<sup>9</sup>

In Etzioni's formulation a major source of strain in an organization (such as a state) is 'incongruence' between the type of mechanism actually used (e.g. coercion) and the type formally appealed to (e.g. normative). In my formulation, however, a Guttman scale relationship exists among the different compliance mechanisms, such that 1) utilitarian techniques of rule can only work efficiently if coercive control is believed to be available should utilitarian mechanisms fail, and 2) normative appeals cannot work in the long run to stabilize political rule unless those from whom compliance is elicited can reckon it to be in their interest to comply. In other words, just as latent coercion undergirds effective rule via utilitarian mechanisms, so do positive utilitarian calculations enable emphasis to be shifted to normative appeals.

It is here, however, that I must make an even more important departure from Etzioni's model. Etzioni argued that his was an exhaustive list of types of power or types of compliance mechanisms. There are three, he claimed, and only three. I add a fourth – *ideological hegemony*. I consider presumptively true beliefs about contingent socio-economic arrangements or about the absolute truth, value, or relevance of different kinds of interventions in the public domain, as fundamentally important sources of power to some, and of disempowerment to others. When they can be constructed and when they are maintained, ideologically hegemonic beliefs provide states with an even more efficient mechanism for eliciting compliance than normative appeals to the legitimacy of state laws and decrees.

This is not a new idea, as we have already seen in our brief consideration of the idea of the "noble lie" in the political tradition of the West. Machiavelli was particularly pessimistic about states trying to survive on coercion alone – a method of rule he considered a temporary expedient at best. Whether of republics or other states, he wrote, "[w]here the fear of God is wanting, there the country will come to ruin, unless it be sustained by the fear of the prince, which may temporarily supply the want of religion."<sup>10</sup> In the twentieth century this view was given its most important and generalized theoretical expression

---

9 For an apt characterization of political legitimacy as the premium placed on compliance by individuals who would otherwise prefer not to obey, see Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), p. 11.

10 Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, *op. cit.*, Book 1, Chapter 11, p 148.

by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's concept of *egemonia* is fundamentally a claim that beliefs can be held by masses of people who do not experience them as beliefs. That is to say these beliefs are not entertained as contingent on the presence or availability of supporting evidence. Nor can such beliefs be discarded when presented with evidence in contradiction of them. Ideologically hegemonic beliefs, as I use the term, are beliefs which have no corollary attached to them, implicitly or explicitly, stipulating the conditions under which they could be abandoned. Such beliefs constitute a part of the framework within which, and the lens through which, events are perceived and judgments made. Hegemonic beliefs serve as the "givens" of a political community, even if they are not, and especially if they are not, understood as such. While normative appeals work to elicit compliance from individuals who judge that demands by the state are consistent with the formula of legitimacy that they accept as linking them to the state, ideological hegemony elicits compliance by burying it beneath the surface of calculated decision. Habits, culture and treatment of dissent as evidence of insanity or criminality rather than contrary opinion – these are the stuff of hegemonic politics. Hegemonic beliefs, as Gramsci put it, appear not as claims about the world but as 'common sense'. Hegemony is politics naturalized to be experienced as culture. It is, in the famous metaphor of Plato, a kind of practically indelible dye.

The city will be courageous in virtue of a portion of herself which preserves under all circumstances that opinion about the nature of things to be feared and not to be feared in which our legislator educated them...and I mean by the words "under all circumstances" to intimate that in pleasure or in pain, or under the influence of desire or fear, a man preserves, and does not lose this opinion.

... dyers, when they want to dye wool for making the true sea-purple, begin by selecting their white colour first; this they prepare and dress with much care and pains, in order that the white ground may take the purple hue in full perfection. The dyeing then proceeds; and whatever is dyed in this manner becomes a fast colour, and no washing either with lyes or without them can take away the bloom.<sup>11</sup>

---

11 Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, Chapter 16, 429c-429d; Jowett Translation, <http://plato.evansville.edu/texts/jowett/republic.htm>

To recapitulate by way of two illustrations: Coercive compliance produces tax revenue by pointing bayonets at citizens who do not wish to pay. Utilitarian compliance produces tax revenue by trading services appreciated as valuable by taxpayers for the payment of their taxes. Normative compliance produces tax revenue by eliciting judgments that, despite the possibility and even attraction of doing otherwise, paying taxes is one's duty, the right thing to do. Ideological hegemony produces tax revenue by transforming payment into a natural part of life, a habitual, routine activity which tax-payers cannot imagine avoiding and which they do not experience as the result of a choice or decision on their part. In a very different sphere, one might ask why did Germans slaughter Jewish children during the Holocaust? An explanation based on coercive compliance would contend that *einsatzgruppen* soldiers and concentration camp guards acted out of fear of punishment if they did not. An explanation based on utilitarian compliance would attribute murderous behavior to acceptance of rewards and privileges for doing so that more than compensated for the effort involved. An explanation based on normative compliance would stress the strong commitment to Nazi ideology of those personnel recruited for performance of their duty to kill Jews. An explanation based on ideological hegemony, similar to that advanced by Daniel Goldhagen, would be that those involved in the mass slaughter were operating within an 'eliminationist' frame of reference with respect to Jews, within which it could not occur to them that Jews could be human beings or that the systematic eradication of Jewish children could be considered anything but the natural behavior of responsible members of the German *Volk*.<sup>12</sup>

One more adjustment is needed in Etzioni's compliance theory. Instead of simply observing the results of different choices by states to employ different compliance mechanisms, analysis can be based on the expectation that states or those who control states, whether out of competition with rival states or competition with rival elites within a state, will try to develop increasingly efficient compliance mechanisms. This will entail shifting the compliance mechanisms they rely on from coercive, to utilitarian, to normative, toward hegemonic. On the basis of this theoretical expectation we may proceed to consider nationalism as a formula for legitimacy. It is a particular kind of appeal designed to elicit compliance. Nationalist appeals arise and succeed under particular conditions. Within some communities, regions or periods, nationalism

---

12 Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

has such spectacular success as a political formula that it becomes ideologically hegemonic, *i.e.*, is rendered invisible as a political resource and transformed instead into a sentiment and mode of political association experienced as natural and permanent.

Questions that then become crucial pertain to the conditions under which beliefs attain hegemonic status, can be maintained and defended as hegemonic, or lose that status once it has been attained. Ideologically hegemonic conceptions provide stabilizing distortions and rationalizations of complex realities, inconsistent desires, and arbitrary distributions of valued resources. They are presumptions that exclude outcomes, options, or questions, from public consideration. Thus they advantage those elites well positioned to profit from prevailing cleavage patterns and issue definitions. That hegemonic beliefs do not shift fluidly with changing realities and marginal interests is what makes them important. That they require *some* correspondence to “objective” realities and interests is what limits their life and the conditions under which they may be established and maintained.

Hegemonic beliefs achieve and lose their status as such as a result of struggles over discursive formations – “wars of position” in Gramscian terms. This kind of struggle entails political competition over what ideas and values will be accepted by leading strata as the givens, the commonsense categories, identities, exclusions, and irrelevancies that can naturalize otherwise parochial and ultimately contingent beliefs. Though subtle, non-violent, and conducted as much in the press and in educational and religious institutions as in the political arena, these struggles are of far-reaching political importance. For whatever particular interpretation of reality is contained in the set of conceptions enshrined as hegemonic, will decisively advantage certain groups by privileging their particular preferences and attitudes as unassailable assumptions of community life. By linking particular conceptions and preferences to commonsensically established myths, symbols and categories, hegemonic ideas camouflage particular distributions of power.

In *The Modern Prince* Gramsci discussed the patterns such struggles display, and the factors that determine the outcome of competition among hegemonic projects. The result of his effort, though limited, is suggestive of a partial theory explaining the conditions under which beliefs are more or less likely to gain, retain, or lose their status as hegemonic. The first of three elements in this theory is the effect of what Gramsci called “incurable contradictions” and what I have called “gross discrepancies” between prevailing conceptions and “stubborn realities”. Although the central tenet of Gramscian thinking is the susceptibility of people to accept contingent, or even false and counterproductive beliefs as commonsensically valid, Gramsci also emphasized

the difficulty of sustaining beliefs which are too explicitly, directly and systematically contradicted by immediate perceptions. This may be thought of as a hypothesis about the impossibility of “absolute distortion” in the achievement and maintenance of hegemonic status for particular beliefs. Implicit here is the notion that only by arranging at least a modicum of satisfaction for the groups from whom consent is required and a minimum correspondence between objective conditions and ideological pictures, can hegemonic conceptions fulfill their primary function, *viz.* the containment and political neutralization of latent tensions which, if unleashed, would threaten the power of those whose interests the conceptions serve.<sup>13</sup>

In this regard, Gramsci suggests that counter-hegemonic ideas offering a more comforting and “parsimonious” mystification of both “stubborn reality” and elements of irreducible self-interest will be a necessary component in the overthrow of an existing hegemonic conception, or an important factor in the failure of some other contender for that status.<sup>14</sup> The point is that no politician, confronted with beliefs honored or advanced as hegemonic, is likely to treat them as problematic unless some other schema has been made available in terms of which the belief can be understood or articulated as *an interpretation* of reality and the imperatives of national life, rather than as the direct and unavoidable expression of immutable facts and ultimate values. It is thus reasonable to expect that change in the status of hegemonic beliefs, and the outcome of struggles to establish beliefs as hegemonic, will be linked to the availability and mobilization of new ways of thinking, and not simply to the accumulation of evidence.

The third factor in this theory of hegemonic construction and deconstruction is political and ideological entrepreneurship, seen as the transmission belt carrying ideas with hegemonic potential forward into the political arena,

---

13 Antonio Gramsci, “The Modern Prince”, in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, ed. Louis Marks (New York: International Publishers, 1957), pp. 154-5. For a fascinating attempt to establish the extent of “exploitation” which can or cannot be contained by hegemonic conceptions, see Adam Przeworski, “Material Bases of Consent: Economics and Politics in a Hegemonic System”, in *Political Power and Social Theory: A Research Annual*, Maurice Zeitlin (ed.) Vol. I (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1980), pp. 21-65.

14 For a similar characterization of Gramsci on this point, applied to the development of an Irish nationalist counter-hegemonic project, see David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), especially pp. 13-21.

challenging other rivals or established hegemonic beliefs, superseding them, replacing them, or failing to do so. This kind of politics is practiced by imaginative leaders who are not risk averse, by intellectuals, and by the organizations they build or control. Of course most people who challenge basic assumptions of their community's political life, fail. Whether because of their own shortcomings, the solidity of prevailing beliefs, or the ineffectiveness of their ideas, their likely fate is to be dismissed as either cranks or criminals. Still, the inventors and promoters of hegemonic projects are people who understand the decisive importance of "reclothing political questions in cultural forms".<sup>15</sup> By shaping the cognitions and values of elites and masses, these entrepreneurs seek to (re)define, for their own purposes, the allowable boundaries and the appropriate stakes of political competition.<sup>16</sup>

Following on Gramsci, then, I suggest a preliminary and partial theory of the establishment or breakdown of hegemonic constructions based on a combination of three elements. To overthrow an established ideologically hegemonic conception or explain its breakdown requires the presence of all three of the following:

- A severe contradiction between the conception advanced as hegemonic and the stubborn realities it purports to describe;
- An appropriately fashioned alternative interpretation of political reality capable of reorganizing competition to the advantage of particular groups;
- Dedicated political-ideological entrepreneurs who can operate successfully where fundamental assumptions of political life have been thrown open to question, and who see better opportunities in competition over basic "rules of the game" than in competition for marginal advantage according to existing rules.

Obversely, to establish a belief as hegemonic, or successfully defend its status as such, requires *at least* substantial correspondence between the claims of the

---

15 Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, pp. 147, 183.

16 In this they show their understanding of Gramsci's primary dictum: "Whatever one does, one always plays somebody's game, the important thing is to seek in every way to play one's own game, i.e. to win completely". Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, p. 152.

belief and the political realities it purports to describe; the absence of a widely accepted basis for an alternative interpretation; *or* the absence of political entrepreneurs capable of profiting from its overthrow or breakdown.

### **The Hegemonic Authority of Nationalism in Middle Eastern Studies and its Breakdown**

Hegemony operates in scholarly circles as it does in political systems. In the first two-thirds of the twentieth century historians and social scientists concerned with nationalism tended overwhelmingly to frame their research as investigations of a force or sentiment that seemed to be so pervasive and natural a feature of modern life as to be interesting only as an *explanans*, not as an *explanandum*.<sup>17</sup> Born at Valmy, nationalism appears in these interlocking literatures as both the solvent that would eliminate old and inefficient “ascriptive” affinities, and the glue that would produce or help peoples discover a more satisfying and/or more efficient basis for political solidarity. As a feature of the Enlightenment, it is depicted, along with state expansion and industrialization, as an integral part of the overarching transformation of life from tradition to modernity. The interlocking consequences of these processes served as the master narrative for what was happening and would happen to humankind in this epoch.

Among scholars of the post-Ottoman Middle East, this disposition carried over, and lasted somewhat longer than elsewhere. Even those, such as Elie Kedourie, who disdained nationalism and bore certain nostalgia or reverence for the *ancien regime*, considered that Islam had faded or would soon vanish as a political basis for organizing Middle Eastern peoples. Whether for better or worse, American, European, and Middle Eastern scholars believed, and often took it for granted, that nationalism would prevail in the region. Social scientists, and especially and most explicitly political scientists, asked *not*

---

17 Gale Stokes, “The Undeveloped Theory of Nationalism”, *World Politics*, vol. 31, no. 1 (October 1978), pp. 150-60.

whether nationalism would prevail as a dominant normative basis for eliciting compliance and establishing political stability in the Middle East, but rather what *form* of nationalism would prevail, when and how.<sup>18</sup> How early, could one say, did 'real' nationalism emerge in the Middle East?<sup>19</sup> Would the future belong to the nationalism of the Turanist movement in Turkey, the extravagant, racist versions of Persian nationalism associated with the Pahlavis, and the *quamiyeh* pan-Arabism of Baathists and Nasserists; or would the Middle East produce its own territorially based nationalist movements, organized around communities fitting within large but not continental size states – Anatolian centered nationalism in Turkey and *wataniyeh* nationalisms in the Arab world?<sup>20</sup> Would these national states, regardless of their geographic scope, be Islamic, liberal or socialist in tone and coloration?<sup>21</sup> Questions were asked about how and when “national independence” and then “national integration” would be accomplished and under whose auspices, not about whether nationalism was the only available framework for advancing the Middle East toward effective government.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran, however, and the rise of powerful, impossible-to-ignore Islamist movements in almost every Middle Eastern country, helped trigger a dramatic shift in scholarly frames of reference. Nationalism in the Middle East, or at least in Middle East oriented scholarship, was transformed. From an unproblematic background assumption about the type of political formula that would legitimize political authority in the region, nationalism became a highly problematic type of appeal whose future was in

---

18 See Majid Khadduri, *Political Trends in the Arab World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 255-56; Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 196-213; Leonard Binder, *The Ideological Revolution in the Middle East* (New York: John Wiley, 1964), pp. 14-17; and Elie Chalala, “Arab Nationalism: A Bibliographic Essay,” in *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate*, Tawfic E. Farah, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 18-56.

19 For this genre see George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1946) and Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

20 Tibi, Bassam, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961, Second Edition).

21 Khadduri, Majid, *Political Trends in the Arab World*, *op. cit.*; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), pp. 159-69.

doubt – a political formula of dubious strength and of decreasing interest to ambitious elites. Research agendas changed accordingly, albeit years or even decades behind events on the ground. Instead of investigations of the prognosis for different versions of nationalism, scholars evaluated the viability of any secular or nationalist basis for political authority against Islamic or (taking Israel and Lebanon into account) religious solidarities. In the cultural context of most of the Middle East, Islam was transfigured from one element determining the tone and substantive content of nationalism in different countries, periods or regions, or among different groups, to an alternative which itself could rival or even supplant nationalism as a basis for political community and as a formula for the stabilization of state power.<sup>22</sup>

Using the conceptual and theoretical apparatus presented above, the currently dominant account of the interplay between nationalism and religion in the Middle East – an account that I find more satisfying than any other – can be expressed as follows. In the centuries following the Islamic conquests, the political formula of the Islamic empire became hegemonic in Southwest Asia, Egypt and the Maghreb. Islam surrounded and afforded a legitimizing resource to a series of imperial states, the last of which was the Ottoman Empire. Over a long period of decline, however, the hegemonic status of Islam as a political formula was undermined. Losing Islam as a hegemonic resource, Imperial rulers and reformers shifted to various normative formulas (Ottomanism, pan-Islamism, pan-Turanism), utilitarian devices (the Dual Kingdom, new patron-client ties with rural and urban notables), and coercive techniques. But no strategies for saving the Empire enabled an efficient enough extraction of resources to survive in a world of competitive powers on the scale of Britain, France, the United States, Germany and Russia. The demise of the Ottoman project as an ideologically hegemonic order, and then as a real state, can be attributed to its gross inability to respond to the external challenge of European imperialism, the ambitious efforts by intellectual, military, professional and other (secularly oriented) entrepreneurial elites to fashion alternative visions of the Ottoman/Turkish political community, the struggles by these elites to build and command their own state projects, and the intrusion of new ‘nationalist’ ideas that these elites in the Arab lands, the Balkans and in Anatolia itself, could use to achieve state power on the ruins of, or with the disappearance of, the Ottoman Empire.

---

22 For an excellent example of this kind of analysis see Jamil Hilal, “Secularism in Palestinian Political Culture: A Tentative Discourse,” *Hagar* (2002) Vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 103-122.

Though their own hegemonic theories of nationalism and modernization encouraged Western observers to believe that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire signaled the very end of Islam as a serious political force and its replacement by nationalism, these judgments were false. Beliefs about Islam as the framework of the polity had lost their hegemonic status, but they survived nonetheless, along with elites who could, under changed circumstances, present one version of Islam or another as an attractive alternative to socialist, nationalist, or liberal formulas. Nor did nationalism, however popular it became as an idiom of anti-imperialist mobilization and as an internationally sanctioned and attractive formula for intellectuals, military men and political leaders, become established throughout the area as hegemonic – naturalized as the basis of political community in the way that Islam had been for centuries. To be sure, within certain groups and for certain periods, nationalism can be said to have achieved ideologically hegemonic status. Within Republican and especially military circles in Turkey, among dedicated Nasserists and Baathists, within the mid- to upper echelons of the FLN and the neo-Destour, within the Jewish state created by Zionism, and even among the rank-and-file of some of the Palestinian organizations, no politically ambitious person could speak publicly as if he thought his audience had any doubts about the authentic and permanent national character of the political community.<sup>23</sup>

The analytic cost of these misjudgments is well reflected in one of the most effective schemas developed for the organization and comparison of national movements in the Middle East. I refer to Clement Henry Moore's theory of nationalist consciousness, presented in his *Politics in North Africa*.<sup>24</sup> Moore focuses on the dialectical relationship between European colonial control and mobilization within each colony by Middle Eastern elites opposed to that control. This relationship shapes the character of post-independence national regimes and determines their capacity to meet the multiple challenges associated with modernization. In this "colonial dialectic" Moore identifies three stages, or "moments," of "nationalist consciousness", each typified by a particular kind of elite. The first "liberal assimilationist" moment is expressed by scions of the upper class whose access to European education leads to nationalism as an emblem of modernity and civilizational equality. While planting the nationalist seed, these elites reject their own uneducated masses,

---

23 This latter formula can be treated as an operational definition of ideological hegemony, applied to discrete beliefs within a particular political community.

24 Clement Henry Moore, *Politics in North Africa* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970).

ape European ways, and suffer isolation and disillusionment when both the masses and the Europeans reject them. Second moment elites are nationalists whose consciousness is shaped by their resentment of the colonial presence and of European culture, and their embrace of the traditional symbols and forms of authority of the masses. But their relationship to tradition (to Islam in most of the Middle East) is instrumental – exploiting old solidarities to achieve cultural and political independence from Europe, but without reorganizing power to include the masses in an egalitarian nationalist movement. The third (and final) moment of nationalist consciousness is achieved by the intellectuals, army officers and professionals of lower middle class origin. They reject the presence of colonial power as the second moment did but as the first moment did not. They reject the traditional symbols, identities and prejudices of the masses as the first moment did and the second moment did not, but unlike the first and the second moments, they also accept modern (European) organizational forms and fundamentally egalitarian principles of nationalism to achieve a broad-based mobilization of the nation and genuine participation in politics for the masses.

Although few cases display each moment in discrete and regular sequence, and although independence often comes before the completion of the dialectic, Moore suggests a kind of ideal typical process leading from the failure of pre-nationalist “primary resistance” (Emir Abd-el-Kader in Algeria, Umar Mukhtar in Libya) to the consolidation of a nation-state under the leadership of a third moment mass nationalist party benefiting from the legitimacy of having freed the nation from colonial domination and founded its independent state. Variation in outcomes (*e.g.* coherent Tunisian and Turkish national states vs. a patron-client based Islamic monarchy in Morocco vs. a brittle and unstable Algerian republic) are explained by the character of pre-existing social structures, the amount of political space permitted by colonialism for organized political opposition and the timing of decolonization.

In Moore’s account, all outcomes are considered as breakdowns on the path to, or forms of, a genuine (third moment) “nationalist” consciousness taken as the only sort of political identity open to Middle Easterners over the long run. In this sense, the national aspect of the region’s future was (without Moore having specified or acknowledged it as such) hegemonic for him as a researcher. The hegemonic status of his belief in nationalism as natural and inevitable, while giving his work clarity and elegance, also places a stringent limitation upon it. His model of the colonial dialectic and three moments of nationalist consciousness, presented as an explanation of the most likely historical path from European colony to national state, takes the national state form as the terminal condition of Middle Eastern political life. Such an approach rules out

the possibility of a continuing dialectic involving Islamic, or otherwise non-nationalist moments of political consciousness.

It is of course true that in most of these states nationalist appeals did predominate, and that in each case appeals to national identities and values provided some measure of normative assistance to coercive and utilitarian techniques of governance. Yet in the region as a whole, nationalism was not embedded in the culture and discourse of public life so deeply as to make alternative appeals seem absurd to the masses or irrelevant to potential counter-elites. In any event, asking about the status of specific nationalist projects in specific countries is to be distinguished from asking about the relative success or prospects for success of different versions of nationalism – the questions Moore's theory is designed to answer.

But if one is to use the theory to focus on the variable political success of different formulas for stabilizing states and for making their rule more efficient, then what is needed is a category of political technique beyond the ability of elites to explicitly elicit sacrifices and compliance using national appeals. One needs, indeed, a concept and theory of hegemony. As I have noted, among certain ruling groups and wider strata in Middle Eastern states, nationalist ideas did achieve hegemonic status – in Turkey, for example, under Attaturk, Tunisia under Bourguiba, arguably Egypt under Nasser, and Israel under Ben-Gurion. In these systems, discourses of nationalism were so well institutionalized that culture as well as ideology protected these regimes from the consequences of their policy failures and from rising levels of dissatisfaction – maintaining the political ostracism of elites representing potential counter-hegemonic projects, who might otherwise have been able, more quickly, to mount effective challenges.

Yet even in those countries, and within those circles, where nationalism was hegemonic, its status as such could not be maintained. The triple conjunction of gross disparities between what the nationalists (of all stripes) promised and what they delivered, the availability of widely understood religious notions of political identity and the presence of ambitious and talented Islamist (and Jewish fundamentalist) elites able to use those ideas to explain nationalist failures and advance their own solutions, opened "wars of position" over the meaning of political identity in polities throughout the Middle East. Among the results were revolution in Iran, a culture war and assassination of the Prime Minister in Israel, civil war in Algeria, harsh repression in Tunisia, an Islamist Prime Minister in (Kemalist) Turkey, and assassination, violence and an anti-Islamist slowdown in democratization in Egypt. Thus only a theory pertaining to the conditions under which a formula for political legitimacy is more or less likely to become hegemonic or to be maintained in that status, can explain some

of the most interesting patterns of Middle Eastern political life in the last two decades.

For Moore, nationalism as the Middle East's future was a hegemonic belief. In part for that reason his account lacked a concept of hegemony. Accordingly, *despite* a dialectical aspect that could straightforwardly have been extended to explain subsequent, non-nationalist moments of political consciousness, Moore's work failed to anticipate Islamist and Jewish religious mobilization based on a non-nationalist or anti-nationalist consciousness and a rather sudden and rapid decline of nationalist projects throughout the region. Indeed, the full value of Moore's schema can be appreciated only if his terminology is recast to incorporate distinctions among:

1. Conditions for the hegemony of a type of political formula, of which nationalist and religious fundamentalist are both examples, which can support and be supported by what Gellner called the "entropizing" aspects of social mobilization, industrialization and mass political participation;
2. Conditions for the hegemony of the *national* type of political consciousness within a particular epoch or under very general economic, international and political circumstances;
3. Conditions for the hegemony of a type of nationalist consciousness within a particular political system.

Distinguishing between questions concerning (1) and (2) is crucial for scholars such as Gellner, Anderson, Hobsbawm and Greenfeld, in their investigations of the logic, timing or prerequisites of nationalism from a long-term historical perspective.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, distinguishing between questions (2) and (3) is what preoccupies most contemporary analysts of Middle Eastern affairs. Their task has been to map and explain competing strains of nationalist mobilization within particular political communities and religion-based rivals to nationalist

---

25 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

mobilization.<sup>26</sup> The usefulness, indeed the necessity, of hegemonic analysis for accomplishing this kind of task, is nicely illustrated by patterns of political conflict and change within Israel.<sup>27</sup> It is precisely because this story is familiar to readers of this journal, that re-telling it in the language of the theoretical position set out here can reveal the advantages of hegemonic analysis.

### **Wars of Position in the Contemporary Middle East: The Israeli Case**

In 1949 the State of Israel could lay a convincing claim to having achieved the central objectives of classical Zionism. Jewish independence in the Land of Israel had been attained and enjoyed wide recognition in the international community. Distinctive social, scientific, cultural and economic achievements were a source of both pride and reassurance. Zionism had created, or revived, a new Jewish personality and, perhaps, a model society. Enough of "Jerusalem" lay under the state's control for the Israeli government proudly to declare the city as the capital of the country. All Jews, anywhere in the world, enjoyed rights to citizenship upon arrival within the borders of the Jewish state. Nor did any power enforce limits on Jewish immigration.

In the first two decades of independent statehood, Israeli politics was dominated by competition among rival leaders and factions within the Labor Zionist movement (Mapai) – the political force that had been largely responsible for Zionist achievements. In order to share opportunities with Mapai to govern the country, the 'activist', or militantly irredentist wing of Labor Zionism abandoned its espousal of territorial maximalism. The religious parties, preferring political spoils to political messianism, became Labor's junior partner. Herut and other 'Land of Israel' oriented groups were marginalized within a 'State of Israel' whose politics revolved around issues of security, economic progress, immigrant absorption and attendant processes of social adjustment. The liberation or redemption of biblically promised territories, or religious commitments to advance the coming of the Messiah through political action, were ideas that virtually no one discussed as politically significant.

---

26 In the European and general comparative context, a good recent example of this kind of analysis, focusing on liberalism and nationalism, is Ernst B. Haas, *Nationalism, Liberalism, and Progress: The Rise and Decline of Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

27 The following section is distilled from my presentation of the Israeli case in *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 352-395.

A crucial feature of this political landscape was the hegemonic status achieved by the Armistice Lines of 1949 – the ‘Green Line’. Not only the vast majority of Israeli citizens (both Jewish and Arab), but virtually the entire non-Arab world accepted Israel’s 1949 boundaries – bigger than the United Nations’ Partition Plan borders, but considerably smaller than any historically based description of the Land of Israel – as the Israeli state’s permanent and legitimate frontiers. Although the anthems and the official documents of Menachem Begin’s Herut Party (forerunner to the Likud) proclaimed loyalty to the Revisionist dream of a Jewish state throughout the entire Land of Israel (including both banks of the Jordan River), by 1965 the party responded to the disinterest and skepticism of Israeli voters by paying only lip service to its traditional program.<sup>28</sup>

The crucial point here is that the hegemonic status of the 1949 Armistice Lines as Israel’s legitimate and permanent borders was a key structural support for the Ben-Gurionist state-centered, secularly oriented, Israeli-Jewish national project – a project epitomized by Ben-Gurion’s concept of *mamlachtiut* (Jewish [or Hebrew] etatism). However, it is only by taking into account both passionate ideological attachments to the idea of the Whole Land of Israel present within every major segment of the pre-1948 Zionist movement, as well as the military superiority enjoyed by Israel over both Jordan (in the West Bank) and Egypt (in the Gaza Strip), and the ideological transformation of Israeli politics after 1967, that can one truly appreciate how great a political achievement was the pre-1967 exclusion of the territorial issue from the Israeli national agenda. As exaltation and amazement after the June 1967 victory replaced the fear and depression that preceded the Six Day War, the limits Ben-Gurion and his allies had placed on the state’s geographic shape (and on the state’s metaphysical significance) lost their hegemonic status. The dramatic expansion of Jewish control over the very heart of Biblical Israel brought the question of Israel’s rightful size and shape, and its potential world-historic or cosmic significance, back to the center of its political life. Mythologies of the Land of Israel and the emotions, appeals and symbols associated with *geulat haaretz* (“redemption of the Land”), *Eretz Yisrael haShlema* (“the completed Land of Israel”), and *atchalta d’geula* (“dawn of redemption”) were once again mobilizable on behalf of expansionist political programs.

---

28 Ofira Seliktar, *New Zionism and the Foreign Policy System of Israel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 92; and Rael Jean Isaac, *Israel Divided: Ideological Politics in the Jewish State* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 41.

These myths and beliefs (alternative interpretations of political reality) afforded unprecedented opportunities for Revisionist and Religious Zionist elites to deprive the Labor Party of its forty-year domination of Zionist and Israeli politics. Nor did it take very long for these politicians to realize how fundamentally the Six Day War had changed the contours of the political terrain. By emphasizing instead of suppressing irredentist sentiments, they could launch a war of position over the proper conception of the State of Israel – a struggle whose outcome promised opportunities to remove the chiefs of the Labor Party from the commanding heights of the polity and replace them with revisionist, religious and activist candidates for leadership.

Revisionists were extremely well positioned to launch such a struggle. They had always celebrated a Jewish state whose territorial expanse would correspond to the world-historic destiny and regional if not global power potential they ascribed to the Jewish people. The results of the 1967 war seemed to confirm that the path to national greatness lay in territorial expansion and the elevation of those who had been most faithful to this principle (*i.e.* the Revisionists) to national leadership. With the expansion of the territory controlled by the Jewish state an accomplished fact, Menachem Begin's record of espousing this expansion could no longer be used as convincing evidence that he was too reckless to be trusted with the Premiership. Using his impeccable credentials as a Whole-Land-of-Israel loyalist and his substantial oratorical talents, Begin donned a *yarmulka* (orthodox Jewish head covering) and made religiously traditionalist, populist and hard-line anti-Arab appeals to Israel's emergent Oriental Jewish majority.

Leaders of the militant 'young guard' faction of the National Religious Party also found in the territories issue a road to national prominence. They envisioned a geographically 'completed' State of Israel acting as the instrument and sign of a culminating Messianic-Redemptive process. The results of the war were interpreted as a giant step forward in the process, a process which could be facilitated by political leaders sensitive to the cosmic implications of policies to be implemented in and toward the territories. Exploiting their intimate links to Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook and their instrumental role in establishing and supporting Gush Emunim ("Bloc of the Faithful"), these men tapped a painful sense of inferiority and unfulfilled mission experienced by a generation of religious Zionist youth. They represented young orthodox Israelis who were proud to have served in the army for the first time in substantial numbers during the 1973 war and who were anxious to prove their worthiness by winning the whole Land of Israel for the Jewish people, just as the previous secular-*sabra* generation had won Jewish statehood.

The third group of political entrepreneurs to raise the banner of the whole Land of Israel were hundreds of second echelon personalities within the Labor Zionist apparatus – ‘Activists’ who had been forced to lay aside their territorial maximalism in order to participate in governing the country and who had, even so, never achieved positions of supreme leadership in the military or civilian branches of the State. They saw in the post-1967 resumption of settlement and pioneering activities in the West Bank and Gaza an opportunity to revive the slumbering national genius of the Jewish people and trigger new waves of immigration, making Zionist ideology and ‘pioneering’ commitment once again respectable, instead of a favorite subject for satire. They explained the powerful emotional response of Israeli Jews visiting East Jerusalem and other portions of the territories as an expression of the normalness of the Jewish people’s existential attachment to its patrimony and as a mystical but organic bond that would build and redeem the Jewish people while the people itself built and redeemed the land.<sup>29</sup> This group was the animating force behind the “Movement for the Whole Land of Israel” (established in August 1967). After its demise, the ascendancy of the Likud, and the latter’s alliance with the National Religious Party, they either joined Gush Emunim as non-religious fellow-travelers, supported Moshe Dayān in his alliance with the Likud, or formed small ultra-nationalist parties such as Tehiya (1979), Tzomet (1983), and Moledet (1988). These latter parties have seen themselves as candidates for national leadership and hoped to achieve it by an uncompromising commitment to the whole Land of Israel, a sharpening conflict with the Arab world (including the ‘transfer’ of large numbers of Palestinians out of the country) and the need, eventually, to establish a *pur et dur* regime capable of protecting Israel’s sovereignty and security within its enlarged borders.

The Six Day War thus set the stage for a war of position over the shape of the state, the fundamental meaning to be attached to the state’s existence, and the normative basis for the Israeli-Jewish political community. From 1967 to 1977 ideological and political entrepreneurs from each of the various streams of Zionist political life refashioned available ideational resources to develop hegemonic projects centered on the substantial expansion of the boundaries of the state. Then, following the May 1977 elections, an annexationist alliance among these groups, led by the Likud, took power and embarked upon a wide-ranging effort to hegemonically institutionalize beliefs that the size and shape of the State of Israel corresponded to a conception of the whole Land of Israel that

---

29 *Livnot ulehivanot ba* (“to build it and to be built by it”) was a pre-state Labor Zionist slogan.

included as its irreducible core all the territory of Palestine between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Begin's objective was nothing less than the hegemonic establishment of a new Zionist paradigm, supported by a new history of the independence struggle, a new relationship between religion and politics, and a new emphasis on the Land, People, and Bible of Israel, rather than on the boundaries, citizens, and laws of the State of Israel. If in the first decade following the 1967 war a set of hegemonic conceptions which had protected the power of the Labor establishment for two decades was displaced, after 1977, those whose ideas had been trivialized by formerly hegemonic notions sought to do the same to their anti-annexationist opponents. The heroes and honored myths of one Zionist subculture represented the villains, falsehoods, jealousies and bombast of the other.<sup>30</sup>

Likud leaders were nonetheless aware that the hegemonic project of their main ally – the religious/Messianists grouped within Gush Emunim – was enormously more ambitious than their own. The Gush's ambition was to eliminate nationalist, secular Zionism (including Revisionism) as a candidate for hegemonic status in Israel, and to replace it with their own militantly religious conception of Zionism's nature and purpose. In the meantime, Gush Emunim shared with Revisionist Zionism, and with the Activist school of Labor Zionism, a primary commitment to the expansion of the geographical contours of the state. For Gush Emunim territorial expansion was crucial as the decisive stage in a world-historic and divinely ordained *tahalich hageula* ("process of redemption").<sup>31</sup> But although the Likud understood the divergence between its

---

30 In a 1963 letter to the Israeli author Haim Guri, David Ben-Gurion called Begin "a thoroughly Hitlerite type" who, if raised to power, would "put his thugs into the army and police headquarters and will rule just like Hitler ruled Germany..." See the Hebrew version of Michael Bar-Zohar's biography *Ben-Gurion* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1975-77), Volume 3, p. 1547. See also Myron J. Aronoff, "Establishing Authority: The Memorialization of Jabotinsky and the Burial of the Bar-Kochba Bones in Israel under the Likud," in *The Frailty of Authority, Political Anthropology* Vol. 5, Myron J. Aronoff, ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1986), pp. 105-130.

31 Both the Likud and Gush Emunim have considered themselves to be in the position of exploiting the other for the sake of different long-term objectives. What allowed them to work together had been the fact that on the decisive political question of the geographical shape of the state, Gush Emunim and the dominant Herut core of Likud have shared a fundamentally similar "state idea." On the ideology of Gush Emunim and its complex relationship with the Likud see Ian S. Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish*

integral nationalist vision and the religious fundamentalism of Gush Emunim, it needed the latter to implement its annexationist policies, the cornerstone of which was the massive settlement of Jews in the occupied territories.

From 1977 to the end of the second Likud government in 1984, and during the third Likud government (1990-1992), the beginning and end of government policy was to create conditions that would incapacitate any future government's effort to disengage from these territories. Abandoning the relatively small scale policies of settlement implemented by previous Labor-led governments, Begin's governments undertook a wide-ranging, multi-faceted campaign to encourage Jews to settle in all parts of the territories, encourage Arabs to emigrate from them, and strip as many legal, administrative and psychological meanings as possible from the pre-1967 Green Line.<sup>32</sup> Although economic and military rationales were commonly invoked for settlement construction, its ultimate purpose was to set in motion more fundamental demographic, ideological, cultural and psychological processes. Accordingly, drastic increases in expenditures on settlements were accompanied by policies in the educational, broadcasting, judicial and administrative spheres designed to accelerate the disappearance of the Green Line from the practical life and ordinary language of all Israelis.<sup>33</sup> After coming to power, the Likud changed the government's

---

*Fundamentalism in Israel*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), especially pp. 37-52. For the notion of the Likud/Gush Emunim hegemonic project as a "competing state idea" see Saul Cohen, *The Geopolitics of Israel's Border Question*, Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, Tel-Aviv University, Study No. 7 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), p. 46; Baruch Kimmerling, "Between the Primordial and the Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: Eretz Israel or the State of Israel," in *Comparative Social Dynamics*, Erik Cohen, Moshe Lissak, and Uri Almagor (eds.) (Boulder: Westview, 1983), pp. 262-283.

- 32 On the objectives and mechanics of the Likud's annexationist program see Ann Mosely Lesch and Mark Tessler, *Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinians: From Camp David to Intifada* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 194-222; Ian Lustick, "Israel and the West Bank after Elon Moreh: The Mechanics of De Facto Annexation," *The Middle East Journal* 35 (Autumn 1981), pp. 557-577; Meron Benvenisti, *The West Bank Data Project: A Survey of Israel's Policies* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1984), pp. 19-63; Geoffrey Aronson, *Creating Facts: Israel, Palestinians and the West Bank* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), pp. 59-116; Ilan Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 95-142; Bernard Avishai, *The Tragedy of Zionism: Revolution and Democracy in the Land of Israel* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1985), pp. 311-13.

- 33 Concerning the energetic efforts of Likud governments to promote the larger "map image"

terminology for settlement in the occupied territories, substituting the term *hitnachalut* (evoking Biblical injunctions and promises to 'inherit' the land through settlement) for *hityashvut*, an emotionally neutral term.<sup>34</sup> The terms "occupied territories" or "West Bank" were forbidden in news reports. Television and radio journalists were banned from initiating interviews with Arabs who recognized the PLO as their representative.<sup>35</sup> Early in 1983 the Television Board ruled that settling the West Bank and Gaza strip no longer constituted a "subject of public controversy," thereby permitting advertisements for settlements to be broadcast as "public service announcements". It also began enforcing a ban on generic terms (such as *ishim* ["personalities"]) to refer to PLO members unless the terms employed clearly labeled them as terrorists.<sup>36</sup> In 1980 and 1986 laws were passed outlawing any non-scholarly meetings between Israelis and PLO affiliated Palestinians, whether in Israel or abroad, forbidding expressions of support for the PLO, including representations of the Palestinian flag, and declaring as ineligible for participation in parliamentary elections any political party not recognizing Israel's character as "the state of the Jewish people".

This effort to establish its own ideological position as bounding what would be considered legitimate was reflected in the rhetoric of Likud politicians and in the party's tactics in the 1984 election campaign. During the 1984 and subsequent campaigns the Likud and its allies began promoting themselves as comprising *hamachane haleumi* ("the national camp"). By so doing they reversed Ben-Gurion's campaign of hegemonic ostracism against the right by suggesting that those who questioned the principle of *Eretz Yisrael hashlema*,

---

of the state in Israeli schools and atlases, see "David Levy's geography lesson," *The Jerusalem Post* editorial, August 20, 1986; David Arnow, "Maps Matter," *The Forum*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1990), pp. 17-18; *Davar*, May 31, 1988. For the concept of "map image" and its role in the construction of a hegemonic image of the shape of a state see John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster Question 1917-1973* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 11-25.

34 Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1983), Research Series no. 51, p. 174.

35 "Witch Hunt," editorial, *The Jerusalem Post*, April 5, 1982, and *The Jerusalem Post*, April 20, 1982. Report by Agence France Presse, Oct. 27 1981, JPRS, 79364, November 3, 1981, p. 37.

36 *The Jerusalem Post*, January 18, 1983 and March 7, 1983.

including the Labor Party, were no longer fit to be considered members of the national community.<sup>37</sup>

The long run purpose of these policies was to transform Israeli beliefs, allegiances and interests – to re-shape the cognitive map of Israelis to conform with an image of the country which included the territories as no different from other regions of the state. If this were accomplished, all future governments would be prevented from publicly entertaining any ‘land for peace’ options with respect to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

As I have shown elsewhere, and as is readily apparent from the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish fundamentalist and the subsequent failure of the Oslo peace process, the state expansion project advanced by the Likud-religious-Labor Activist alliance has institutionalized Israeli rule of those areas so deeply that Israeli democracy is put at risk by government policies designed to achieve territorial compromise.<sup>38</sup> But the annexationist project, and the radical version of Jewish nationalism associated with it, did *not* succeed in establishing themselves as hegemonic within Israel itself. *Presumptions* about the greater significance of the ‘Land of Israel’ as opposed to the ‘State of Israel’, about the future of the territories as integral parts of the State of Israel, and about the divinely or historically chosen destiny of the Jewish people to stand against the world in its struggle for the whole Land of Israel, have not replaced *arguments* about these topics within the discourse of either leading politicians or most ordinary Israeli Jews. It is the absence of a hegemonic conception of the shape of the State of Israel that explains the Israeli public’s reaction to Palestinian terror in 2002 – a lurch to the right on tactical questions, coupled with a lurch to the left on attitudes toward the future of the West Bank and Gaza.

---

37 Concerning this and related shifts in Israeli political discourse see Hanna Herzog, *Contest of Symbols: The Sociology of Election Campaigns through Israeli Ephemera* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Library, 1987), pp. 84-85; and Kimmerling, “Between the Primordial and the Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: *Eretz Yisrael* or the State of Israel,” *op. cit.*, pp. 262-83.

38 Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*, *op. cit.*, pp. 366-438. Concerning the failure of this project’s most promising avenue of attack – the hegemonic incorporation of al-Quds and surrounding areas into “Yerushalayim,” see Lustick, “The Fetish of Jerusalem: A Hegemonic Analysis,” in *Israel in Comparative Perspective*, Michael N. Barnett, ed. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 143-172; and “Yerushalayim, al-Quds, and The Wizard of Oz: Facing the Problem of Jerusalem after Camp David II and the Al-Aqsa Intifada,” forthcoming in the *Journal of Israeli History* (2003).

This hegemonic project failed for several reasons. One was the vigorous struggle of anti-annexationist Israelis against the political and cultural policies sponsored by successive right-wing governments. Another factor was the role of international forces which, if they did not impose a territorial compromise on recalcitrant Israeli governments, did compel them to explicitly defend and justify every move they made. Finally, of course, its failure was the result of the fierce and prolonged struggle of Palestinians to destroy – via the first and second *intifadas* – the notion that Israelis could feel as comfortable in the West Bank and Gaza as within Israel proper.

The *kulturkampf* among Israelis continues. It will continue until either an anti-annexationist coalition risks democratic breakdown by permanently disengaging Israel from the West Bank, and thereby from the Revisionist/fundamentalist hegemonic project within Zionism, or until time, the settlers' untiring efforts and, probably, the 'transfer' of most Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, eliminate any political compromise with the Palestinians as a discussable option within Israeli politics. In these respects Israel strongly resembles many of its Muslim-Arab neighbors. In Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and elsewhere, Islamist projects, representing an array of pietistic, fundamentalist and chiliastic appeals, have helped unseat nationalisms as potent hegemonic formulas, have made it extremely risky for non-Islamist governments to remove them from the scene, but have not succeeded in supplanting national and secular definitions of the political community as the natural and unchangeable order of things. Instead, no political formulas reign, in Israel and in most of the Middle East, on a hegemonic basis, forcing governments to employ less efficient techniques for eliciting compliance (including widespread coercion and crippling economic policies) and affording significant opportunities to radical political and cultural entrepreneurs who may reasonably seek to turn their dreams and fantasies into political realities.

## Conclusion

There are those who call for a new kind of order, built from complex and overlapping jurisdictions within which loyalties to ethnicity, region, clan, gender, profession and/or supra-state federation happily contradict national or religious demands for allegiance. Indeed it may be that in the part of the world that is post-industrial, the Gellnerian imperatives for entropic national markets and educational systems no longer apply. Perhaps in those wealthy and relatively self-confident portions of the globe there is room for constant contestation over sources of authority and appropriate jurisdictions for different spheres of life. Under such circumstances, governments are blessed with the

leeway to exercise power inefficiently and yet effectively, for example by continually proving their material value to constituents/customers. But as in most of the world, this luxury would not appear to be available in the Middle East. In this region, as in most of Asia and Africa and in parts of Latin America, peoples seem only able to dream of the peace and prosperity that can come when generally persuasive hegemonic beliefs naturalize the state's answers to ultimate questions of politics – questions of identity, boundaries, purposes and rights of participation.

## References

- Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Antonius, G. (1962) *The Arab Awakening*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Arnold, D. (1990) Maps Matter. *The Forum* 3:1:17-18.
- Aronoff, M. J. (1986) Establishing Authority: The Memorialization of Jabotinsky and the Burial of the Bar-Kochba Bones in Israel under the Likud. In Aronoff, M. J. (ed) *The Frailty of Authority, Political Anthropology* Vol. 5. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.
- Aronson, G. (1987) *Creating Facts: Israel, Palestinians and the West Bank*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Avishai, B. (1985) *The Tragedy of Zionism: Revolution and Democracy in the Land of Israel*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Bar-Zohar, M. (1975-1977) *Ben-Gurion*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)
- Benvenisti, M. (1984) *The West Bank Data Project: A Survey of Israel's Policies*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute.
- Binder, B. (1964) *The Ideological Revolution in the Middle East*. New York: John Wiley.
- Bowman, J. (1982) *De Valera and the Ulster Question 1917-1973*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Cairns, D. and Richards, S. (1988) *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Chalala, E. (1987) Arab Nationalism: A Bibliographic Essay. In Farah, T. E. (ed) *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Cohen, S. (1986) *The Geopolitics of Israel's Border Question*. Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Study No. 7. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Emerson, E. (1960) *From Empire to Nation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Etzioni, A. (1961) *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations: On Power, Involvement, and Their Correlates*. New York: The Free Press.
- Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- (1992) *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Goldhagen, D. (1996) *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Gramsci, A. (1957) *The Modern Prince*. In Marks, L. (ed) *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*. New York: International Publishers.
- Greenfeld, L. (1992) *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Haim, S. (1962) *Arab Nationalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Halpern, M. (1963) *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Haas, E. B. (1997) *Nationalism, Liberalism, and Progress: The Rise and Decline of Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Herzog, H. (1987) *Contest of Symbols: The Sociology of Election Campaigns through Israeli Ephemeria*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Library.
- Hilal, J. (2002) Secularism in Palestinian Political Culture: A Tentative Discourse. *Hagar* 3:1:103-122.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1990) *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hourani, A. (1962) *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Isaac, R. J. (1976) *Israel Divided: Ideological Politics in the Jewish State*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (1993) *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Khadduri, M. (1970) *Political Trends in the Arab World*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Kimmerling, B. (1983) *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, Research Series no. 51.
- Kimmerling, B. (1983) Between the Primordial and the Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: Eretz Israel or the State of Israel. In Cohen, E., Lissak, M. and Almagor, U. (eds.) *Comparative Social Dynamics*. Boulder: Westview.
- Lesch, A.M. and Tessler, M. (1989) *Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinians: From Camp David to Intifada*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lewis, B. (1961) *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. London: Oxford University Press, Second Edition.
- Lustick, I. (1981) Israel and the West Bank after Elon Moreh: The Mechanics of De Facto Annexation. *The Middle East Journal* 35:557-577.
- (1988) *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.
- (1993) *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank/Gaza*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- (1996) The Fetish of Jerusalem: A Hegemonic Analysis. In Barnett, M.N. (ed.) *Israel in Comparative Perspective*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- (2003) Yerushalayim, al-Quds, and The Wizard of Oz: Facing the Problem of Jerusalem after Camp David II and the Al-Aqsa Intifada. *Journal of Israeli History* (forthcoming).

- Machiavelli, N. (1532) *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*. In *The Prince and the Discourses*. New York: Modern Library Edition, 1950.
- Moore, C.H. (1970) *Politics in North Africa*. Boston: Little Brown.
- North, D.C. (1981) *Structure and Change in Economic History*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- O'Brien, C.C. (1988) *God Land: Reflections on Religion and Nationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Peleg, I. (1987) *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Przeworski, A. (1980) Material Bases of Consent: Economics and Politics in a Hegemonic System. In Zeitlin, M. (ed) *Political Power and Social Theory: A Research Annual*. Vol. 1. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.
- Seliktar, O. (1986) *New Zionism and the Foreign Policy System of Israel*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Smith, A.D. (2000) The 'Sacred' Dimension of Nationalism. *Millennium* 29:3:791-814.
- Stokes, S. (1978) The Undeveloped Theory of Nationalism. *World Politics* 31:1:150-60.
- Tibi, B. (1981) *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

---

Note: The latter portion of this article appeared previously in "Hegemony and the Riddle of Nationalism: The Dialectics of Political Identity in the Middle East", in *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Middle East*, Leonard Binder, ed. (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1999).