

POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

IRE215

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Session 5



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On The Agenda

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■ **First Years of Statehood**

- The Histadrut, the Hagana
- The Yishuv as a democratic society

■ **Nation building 1948-1967**

- The Kibbutz
- The 'new Jew'
- The Revival of the Hebrew language
- The Suez Crisis (1956)

First Years of Statehood

The Yishuv

- The **Jewish community** in mandatory Palestine **1922-1948**
- Grew from about **80k** to **650k**
- Labor/Revisionist/General **Zionism**
- Who were they? Where did they come from and why?
- What challenges did they have to face?
- **What made the Yishuv viable? => institutions**



The 'Histadrut' (1920)

- The General Federation of Jewish [Hebrew] Laborers in Palestine
- A trade and labor union aimed at organizing the economic activities of Jewish workers
- Fulfilled a wide range of functions
 - Operated as a **trade union** and as an **employer**
 - Ran a **job placement** agency
 - Involved in **settlement** activity
 - Had its own **economic institutions** (bank, insurance company, pension fund) + provided **health care**
 - Had its own **education system**, a daily **newspaper**, a **publishing house** and a **theatre group**

The 'Histadrut' (1920)



- **Founding members** were influenced by the Russian-Jewish **socialist tradition** characteristic; As strict **socialists**, they firmly believed that the **representatives of the workers should not earn more than the workers themselves**
- 1920: 4,400 members, 1922: 8,394, 1927: 25k members: 75% of the entire Jewish Palestine labor force
- **"A state within the state in the making"**
- Maintained a **powerful position in Israeli society** since its inception

The 'Histadrut' (1920)

The Histadrut was responsible for the absorption of Jewish immigrants =>
Labor Zionism



The 'Histadrut' (1920)

- For many years, the **Histadrut was in charge of the military arm** – the Hagana (defense)
- Played a **central role** in organizing **illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine** in defiance of Mandatory laws
- The **Histadrut leadership** also became the **dominant political force** in the Yishuv, and in the **Zionist organization** (1930s onwards) => the Histadrut's activity **complemented** the the Yishuv's



The 'Hagana' (Hebrew- 'defense')

- A **militia** (defense force) attached to the 'Histadrut'
- Emerged from the reality of **rural self-help**, formed against **Arab violence**
- Founded by **Ben Gurion** and **Ben Tzvi** in 1907; by 1914 had four squads', by 1936 had 3k men and women at arms



The Yishuv as a Democratic Society

- The Yishuv featured almost **all the attributes of a democratic state except sovereignty**
- **Organized and functioned along the lines of a parliamentary democracy** (even its underground paramilitary arm, the **Hagana**, was subject to the control and authority of the democratically elected civil leadership)
- This **impressed** the various **committees** that **investigated** the situation in Palestine (Peel Commission:1937, UN Special Committee on Palestine:1947)
- The **strong institutional structure** established by the Yishuv was later manifested in the **smooth transfer** from foreign rule to becoming an independent state

The Yishuv as a Democratic Society

What were the sources of inspiration for the Yishuv's democratic practices?

- The **self-governing tradition** of the **Jewish communities** in the **Diaspora**
 - The **Zionist Organization** had functioned in a democratic manner since its inception in 1897
- The **Mandatory power** => Britain!! (parliamentary democratic)
 - The heads of the Yishuv + leaders of the Zionist movement were **exposed to the conduct of a democratic regime** that encouraged them to use methods acceptable by London decision makers
- The **need** of the **Zionist movement** to gain the **support of public opinion** in **democratic states**: it was attuned to the values of such states and to the views of the Jewish communities that supported the Yishuv (politically + financially)

The Yishuv as a Democratic Society

What were the sources of inspiration for the Yishuv's democratic practices?

- It's **voluntary character** => Unlike a sovereign government with **coercion** authority, voluntary organizations are based on free will and persuasion

Countervailing sources of influence

- Most of the Yishuv members + leaders **lived under totalitarian regimes**
- Certain circles in the Yishuv **admired the Soviet Revolution** and accepted the notion of "**the dictatorship of the proletariat**"
- The **Jewish religion itself contains non-democratic elements** (unequivocal reliance on the Halacha: Jewish religious law)

The Yishuv as a Democratic Society

- **Democratic sources of influence toned down the opposing factors** and the Yishuv acted as a formal **democracy** (majority rule)
- The Yishuv was **spared dilemmas faced by liberal democracies** (individual/minority rights of the individual and of the minority) since such issues were **outside its authority**
- The **lack of sovereignty** had a **positive effect** on sustaining the democratic character of the Yishuv => Mandatory gov. in charge
 - Yishuv didn't need to build and maintain infrastructure (roads, health system, army, police)
 - The Mandatory regime provided a protective umbrella that enabled Yishuv + its institutions to gradually expand and strengthen
 - the Mandate increased internal cohesiveness, strengthened by the conflict with the Arabs.

The Kibbutz

- Cooperative form of settlement, unique to Zionism and the State of Israel
- Based on the **Zionist** aspiration to re-establish **Jewish presence** in the **Land of Israel** under **socialist values** => **equality** between people alongside economic and ideological cooperation
- Established as a **social** and **economic** unit, in which property and means of production are **communally** owned and decisions are made by the general assembly of its members.



Features of a Kibbutz

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- A relatively **gated community**
- **Small** (usually 300-1000 people)
- Historically **based on agriculture**
- The kibbutzim began as **utopian communities** that advocated the full **cooperation of property and equality**, both in **production & consumption**
- The slogan of the classic kibbutz was the **communist slogan**: "*From each one according to his ability and to each according to his needs*"



Features of a Kibbutz

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- **Sharing property and responsibility** => the kibbutz society was based on the "common fund" that meets the needs of its members
 - While **demanding** from its members **responsibility** and **commitment to the community**, the kibbutz **provides** them with their **needs** from **infancy to old age**
 - Based on the premise of **equality of human value** => the right of a person to satisfy his needs stems from the fact that he is a **human being** and **should not depend on his physical ability/technical/managerial skills** or the wealth of his family

Features of a Kibbutz

- Members had **no individual property**
- The kibbutz **enabled territorial extension**
- Created **Jewish peasants**
- The kibbutzim served as a **central tool for the realization of Zionism** and were considered the **social elite of the Yishuv** in the first years of statehood
- Provided the **image of a heroic Zionist pioneer**
- Provided **manpower** for the nucleus of an **army**





Women Kibbutzniks

The "New Jew"

An attempt to create a **dichotomy** between the 'new Jew' and the **Exile Jew**

The New Jew =>

- Strong and brave
- Farmer/worker
- Socialist
- Village dweller
- Into Sports/hiking
- Rooted in the land
- Normalized

Adaptation of "Non-Jewish" image

The Exile Jew =>

- Nervous and afraid
- Merchant/banker
- Capitalist
- Urban
- Talmud learning (religious studies)
- Easily wandering
- Different, not-normal, foreign

Adaptation of anti-Semite image

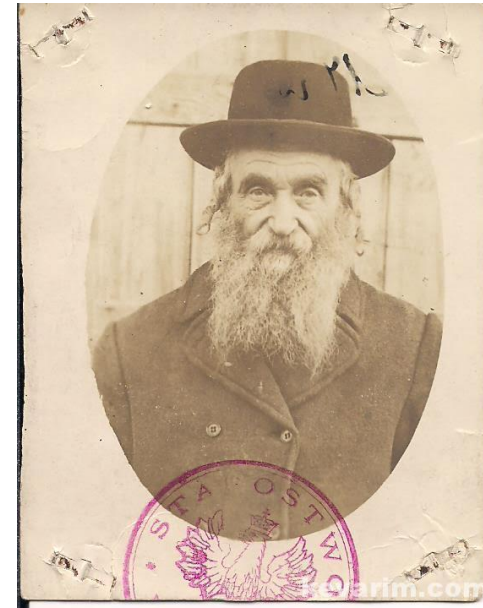
The "New Jew"

An attempt to create a **dichotomy** between the 'new Jew' and the **Exile Jew**

The New Jew =>



The Exile Jew =>



The Decline of the Kibbutz

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- **Political issues =>**
 - The internal political strife among & between political aspects of Kibbutzim
 - The fragmentation of Labor Party and the economic crisis
- **Economical issues =>**
 - Capitalization after the 1970s, liberalism, neo-liberalism and massive urbanization
 - Agriculture => industry => hi-tech
- **Social issues =>**
 - The decline of the Kibbutz as an Elite
 - The Settler, Halutz/ Pioneer myth has changed- from Labor to Occupation.

The Decline of the Kibbutz

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- Nowadays kibbutzim are diversifying their production branches, expanding into various kinds of industry and services
- Although the kibbutzim constitute 1.7% of Israel's population (267 settlements), their share of the country's production far exceeds this proportion:
 - Grow 16% farm produce
 - Manufacture about 4% industrial output (excluding diamonds)



The Decline of the Kibbutz

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- Tourist facilities, catering and factory outlet stores have recently become an important part of the **kibbutz economy**
- The Kibbutz is currently seeking ways to meet the challenges of modern life in the technological age while maintaining its original egalitarian framework
- While such adjustments necessitated far-reaching changes, it is believed that the ability to adapt is the key to its survival.

The Hebrew Language

- **Yiddish** was the **common language** of European Jews
- Hebrew was a **biblical** language used in the bible and prayer (not spoken) → Biblical Hebrew had to be made **vernacular**
- The **revival** of the **Hebrew language**, an outstanding socio-linguistic events of modern times, is attributed to **Eliezer Ben-Yehuda**
- **(Modern) Hebrew** created a **common culture** and 'a cut' from the past

י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
Yod (Y)	Tet (T)	Chet (Ch)	Zayin (Z)	Vav (V)	He (H)	Dalet (D)	Gimel (G)	Bet (B/V)	Alef (silent)
ע	ס	נ	נ	מ	מ	ל	ך	כ	
Ayin (silent)	Samech (S)	Nun (N)	Nun (N)	Mem (M)	Mem (M)	Lamed (L)	Khaf (Kh)	Kaf (K/Kh)	
ת	ש	ר	ק	ץ	צ	ף	פ		
Tav (T)	Shin (Sh/S)	Resh (R)	Qof (Q)	Tsadeh (Ts)	Tsadeh (Ts)	Feh (F)	Peh (P/F)		

Vernacular- the language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region

The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, born in Lithuania in 1858
- Began learning Hebrew from a very tender age as part of a religious upbringing, excelled and was sent to a talmudic academy (*yeshiva*) to become a rabbi
- Became interested in the secular world and ultimately exchanged the *yeshiva* for a Russian gymnasium
- Deeply **influenced by revival of European nations in the 19th century** (Greeks: 1829, Italians:1849, Bulgarians:1877), **captivated** by the idea of **restoring national rights** and **reviving a nation on its national soil**



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- Conclusion => the European concept of national fulfilment should also be applied to his people, the Jews
- Published articles in Hebrew periodicals on the triple question of the renaissance of the Jewish people, their land, and their language (Zionism)
- 1881 => arrived in Palestine with his **revival plans for the Hebrew language**, settled in Jerusalem (where most Jews lived)- base for spreading his revivalist ideas throughout **Palestine** and the **Diaspora**
- Plan of action => “Hebrew at Home,” “Hebrew at School” “Words, Words, Words”



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- “Hebrew at Home” => spoke Hebrew with every Jew he met (even in Europe), Jews could speak Hebrew (not perfect), lacked words on certain topics, wasn't their main language
- Wanted the Jews in Palestine to speak **Hebrew exclusively**



“If a language which has stopped being spoken ... can return and be the spoken tongue of an individual for all necessities of his life, there is no room for doubt that it can become the spoken language of a community.”

The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- 1882 => Ben Yehuda fathered a son: **Ittamar**. Made his wife promise to raise the boy as the first all-Hebrew speaking child in modern history: **Important symbolic event for the future of the revival**
- **Drastic precautions** taken by Ben-Yehuda so that **Ittamar** will only hear and thus, speak Hebrew => when visitors came to the house who did not know Hebrew, Ben-Yehuda would send Ittamar to bed so that he would not hear their foreign languages
- **Ittamar** started **speaking late**
- A child in the house accentuated the need to find appropriate **Hebrew words** for the **mundane** things of everyday life => doll, ice-cream, jelly, towel, bicycle ...



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- Ben-Yehuda and his Hebrew-speaking family became a **living legend**, an **embodiment** of the **revival** for others to emulate
- “Hebrew at School” => most important
- Ben-Yehuda preached that rabbis + teachers should use **Hebrew as the language of instruction** in Jewish schools in Palestine for all subjects (religious + secular)
- Argued that **the revival could succeed only if the younger generation would begin to speak Hebrew freely** (taught in a Jewish school in Jerusalem)
- **Necessity** of using **Hebrew** at school => children from several **different Jewish communities** studied together, **no common language**



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- Method of teaching **Hebrew through Hebrew**, a direct system, no translation into other tongues
- Ben-Yehuda only taught for a brief period but his **Hebrew teaching was successful** => After just a few months, **the children were able to chatter fluently in Hebrew on daily topics**
- Ben-Yehuda's **personal example** and his **teaching success** made a great impression on other teachers
- **Problems** => lack of trained teachers, lack of textbooks, lack of materials (games/songs), solved with time => a young **all-Hebrew speaking generation emerged** => **successful revival**



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- 1884 => started publishing his own newspaper 'Hatzvi' to serve as an **instrument for teaching modern Hebrew to adults** (all topics)
- Believed that if he will publish the newspaper at a **low price**, people would read it & become **convinced** of their **ability to fully express** themselves in **Hebrew**
- Used the **newspaper to introduce new words** to the public (newspaper, editor, telegramme, subscriber, soldier, fashion)
- **Jews being avid readers**, Ben-Yehuda's **newspaper did much to spread his linguistic coinages** (both in Palestine and in the Diaspora)



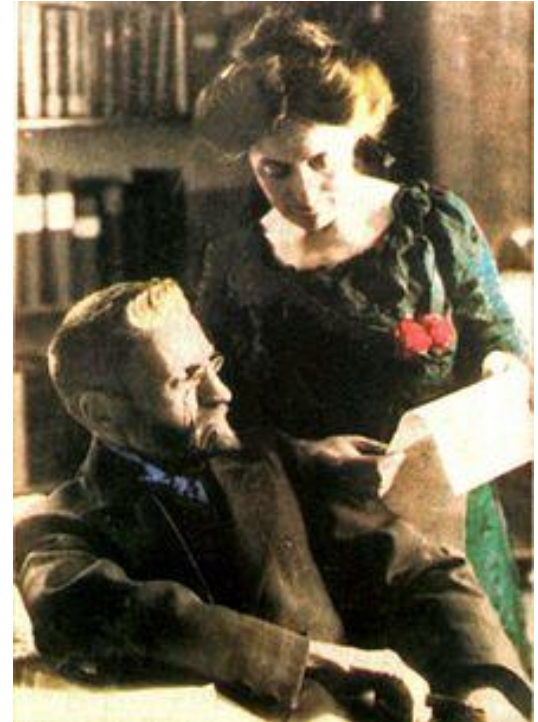
The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- As long as Ben-Yehuda spoke Hebrew at home/with his friends, he was able to use the language more or less **as he wished**, but he wanted the **entire society to use Hebrew** => words must be precise and accurate, according to **strict philological rules**
- Ben-Yehuda became a **scientific lexicographer** => compiled a **dictionary**
 - 17 volume: **“A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew”**, completed by his second wife and son after his death
- **A funny fact**: many words that Ben Yehuda invented were based on the sound object make (“BAKBUK”- bottle, “Zvuv”-fly)



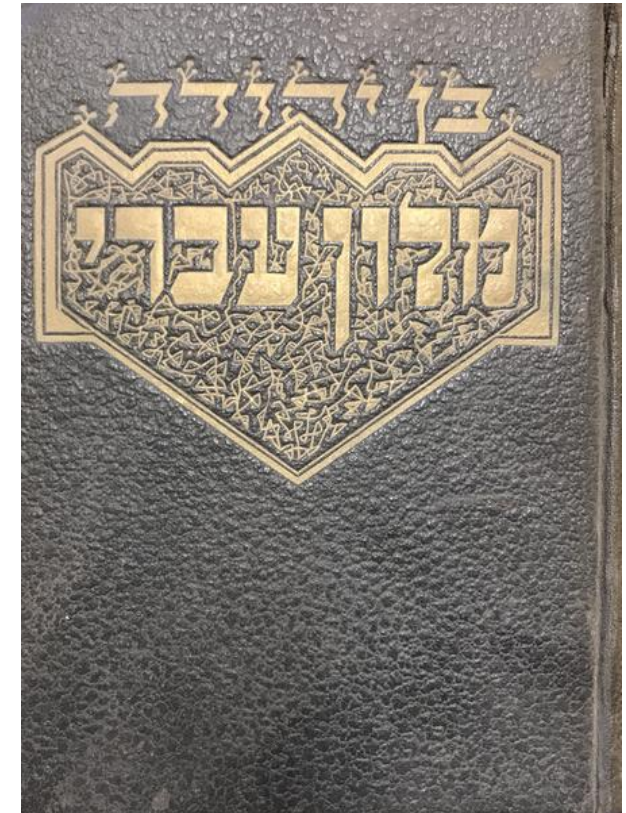
The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- 1890 => Founded the **Hebrew Language Council**, to solve problems pertaining to Hebrew (terminology, pronunciation, spelling and punctuation)
 - Forerunner of today's '**Hebrew Language Academy**'
- Ben-Yehuda did not revive the language **along** => was supported by the society around him
 - **Local population** (limited and at times hostile)
 - 1881 (arrived in Palestine): **beginning** of the **immigration** waves of Jewish settlers => young, educated, idealistic, came from **similar** east European Jewish socio-economic **background** => **receptive to his ideas**, spoke Hebrew to their children, and in the **kindergartens** and **schools** they set up **throughout the country**



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

- In the forty years between 1881-1921, a core of young Hebrew-language speakers was formed, with **Hebrew as the unique symbol of their linguistic nationalism**
- Acknowledged by the **British mandate** authorities, who on 1922, recognized **Hebrew as the official language of the Jews in Palestine**. Ben Yehuda died a month later.



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

*“For everything there is needed **only one wise, clever and active man**, with the initiative to devote all his energies to it, and the matter will progress, all obstacles in the way notwithstanding... In every new event, every step, even the smallest in the path of progress, **it is necessary that there be one pioneer who will lead the way without leaving any possibility of turning back**”*



The Revival of the Hebrew Language

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-revival-of-hebrew/>

Reviving Hebrew Culture in Israel

- Hebrew language as spoken language + secular => opposing Yiddish and other languages
- Hebrew Education and high learning (e.g., the 'Hebrew university', Jerusalem)
- Hebrew secular culture
- Jewish festivals (nature, agricultural)
- New image (the 'new Jew')



Est. 1918

1949-1966

- 1950 – 1955 => Israel came under relentless attack of suicide terrorists in 435 cross-border raids into Israel murdering over 800 Jews
- Israeli troops hit back, but the violence continued
- 1956 => The Suez crisis/ Sinai War
- Jewish refugees continue to come from Arab lands to Israel
- 1964 => The “Palestinian Liberation Organization” forms in Cairo, the birthplace of its’ founder, Yasser Arafat
 - The PLO attempts to unite all Arab Terrorist groups
 - Its’ charter calls for the destruction of Israel