New Politics, No Politics, and Antipolitics: The Dilemma of the Religious Right in Israel

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Different explanations have been offered for the widespread phenomenon of disillusionment, disengagement, and escape from politics in general or from involvement in formal political activity in particular. These include an aversion or disinterest in the political sphere altogether as a result of a change in sense of public and civic duty, a rejection of politicians as self-serving at best or corrupt at worse, or as a result of the convergence of the policies of political parties, who offer little to choose between them (Hay 2007, 56).

How do these phenomena impact on the behavior of political parties? One result is the attraction to short-lived "non-political" parties that try to benefit from the disgust from established politics. The success of the Retirees' party in the 2006 Israeli elections was an example of this trend (Susser 2007); it was expected that in the 2009 Israeli election parties focusing on environmental issues would benefit from such antipolitics. Established parties also tried to capitalize on such perceived tendencies. They try to attract new faces, untainted with the stain of being "politicians."[1]

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*   At the conference in December 2008, Israel was entering an election campaign that culminated on February 10, 2009. I have tried to include events leading up to the election in an epilogue to this paper.

1   For example, in the recent Israeli elections the head of the left-wing Meretz party, Haim Oron, said that his party wants to attract votes from

What is the relative importance of the different factors? To the extent that escape from politics is caused by policy convergence that leads to the Tweedledee-Tweedledum perception that "they are all the same," a party that offers (as Barry Goldwater did in the US elections in 1964) "a voice, not an echo" may be less affected. A party with a committed voter base and a clear ideology is less vulnerable to desertion and escape. Lower turnout in the population at large will allow greater representation of groups who are not turned off and can be mobilized to vote. In addition, the atmosphere of antipolitics and the "corruption eruption" may itself allow such a group to position itself as the "antipolitical party."

In that context, I wish to examine the different options open to the religious right in Israel in the present political situation. This is a study of a group within the Israeli political scene and the interface of its political ideologies with the phenomena of escape and anti-politics. Despite the relatively small size of the religious Zionist sector in the Israeli population, it is worth examining due to the proportional nature of the Israeli electoral system and the unique ideological ferment of this group.

The 2009 elections confronted the leadership of the religious right with dilemmas that caused them to consider alternatives to "politics as usual." I will attempt to describe the dilemmas and analyze the alternatives.

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the "party of the despaired" and "the party of the indifferent." In that interest the Meretz list was augmented by a number of people who had not previously engaged in political activity, most visibly by newscaster Nitzan Horowitz, in the hope that this combination would add clout to the list.

At the end of the day, these expectations did not materialize, for reasons that will be touched on the epilogue.

As has been shown in numerous studies, self-definition of left or right in Israel is determined by the attitude to the territories and peace—those who see themselves as "left" are both more optimistic about the chances for peace and more willing to make territorial concessions in order to achieve it (Shamir and Arian 1994; Hermann and Ya'ar-Yuchtman 1998, 65). As Yuchtman-Ya'ar and Peres (2000, 67) describe the predominance of the question in Israeli politics:

> Individual leaders and entire political camps are defined; engage and disengage; rise and fall; and ultimately, leave their imprint in the collective memory in accordance with their station on the continuum between partitioning greater Israel between the two peoples who inhabit it (doves) and keeping all or most of it under Jewish-Israeli control (hawks).

This divergence closely correlates with the religious divisions within Israeli society.

Israelis often speak of a fourfold division of Israeli Jews into secular, traditional, religious, and Haredi (once known as "ultra-Orthodox"). The third group is also referred to as "Religious Zionist" or "National Religious" (*dati-leumi*) as opposed to the Haredi community, which is non-Zionist or anti-Zionist.[2] In the 2008 Guttman study 10% of the Jewish population (about 8% of the total Israeli population) defined itself as "religious" (Ventura and Philippov 2008).

There is a clear correlation between identification as secular or as religious and political identification.

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2   Jews who identify themselves as Reform or Conservative with regard to their religiosity are not statistically significant and do not play a role as groups in Israeli politics.

> [T]he religiosity-secularism dimension is the most important factor in determining the positions of the public regarding the Oslo process, as well as other aspects of the peace process. Religiosity, it appears, is more influential in the area than socio-demographic factors such as education, ethnic background, age, gender, income etc.
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> The polls of the peace project show consistently that the religious-secular dimension is the most important factor in determining the positions of the public regarding the peace process. This element is more influential than factors such as education, land of origin, age, gender, income etc. (Hermann and Ya'ar-Yuchtman 1998, 63)

This rift continues to influence Israeli politics. Regarding Israeli society as a whole, it is thought that there has been a convergence of public opinion into the center—an acceptance of some version of the two-state solution merged with skepticism about the chances of reaching a final status agreement with the Palestinians. For example, *the War and Peace Index* of April 2008 (Yaar and Hermann 2008) showed that 70% of Israeli Jews support the two-state solution while only about 26% believe that negotiations with the Palestinians will lead in the coming years to peace.[3]

On the other hand, a different survey from March 2008 found 82% of those who define themselves as religious against the establishment of a Palestinian state (Dor-Shav 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising

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3   See Waxman (2008) who describes this convergence. His conclusions may have to be rethought in light of the 2009 elections which were interpreted by some as a rejection of the two-state solution. However, see the March 2009 War and Peace index (Yaar and Hermann 2009) in which 56% of the Jewish population say that the government should work toward such a solution.

that religious voters vote overwhelmingly for right-wing parties—mostly for the Likud, the National Religious Party (NRP), and the National Union (*Ha-Ihud Ha-Leumi*)—while only some 15% of the religious sector votes for center-left or left-wing parties—Kadima, Labor (which in recent elections included the dovish religious party Meimad) or Meretz (see Cohen 2007, 340).

Of course, the Israeli right is not of one cloth. There is a pragmatic right, which emphasizes security considerations and distrust of Arab intentions, but is willing to consider limited concessions and is afraid of jeopardizing relations with the United States.

Within the religious right, however, there is an ideologically committed group, which is absolutely opposed to any withdrawals. They see any evacuation of settlements as absolutely proscribed for religious reasons. This ideological hard core is perhaps a numerical minority within the community, but the influential Religious Zionist rabbinic and educational leadership overwhelmingly supports its positions. In addition, the numbers of Religious Zionists in settlements over the Green Line, and their social networking with their counter parts within Israel, amplify the commitment of the community to the settlement project.

The rigid ideological aspect of the opposition to withdrawal dictates the political positions of the Israeli religious right. Analogous to the religious right in the United States, in which the issue of abortion is dominant, the Israeli religious right ultimately evaluates all political phenomena by this one criterion. An example of this is the list of endorsed candidates for local office circulated by one right-wing group, which included only those who opposed the 2005 disengagement from the Gaza Strip, despite the irrelevance of the disengagement to municipal issues (Eyadat 2008). A political issue is thus a central focus of the religious identity of many Religious

Zionists, and therefore a disengagement from the political sphere is inconceivable.

In fact, the trauma of the disengagement from Gaza (which the ideologues of the religious right insist as referring to as "the expulsion"), which displaced thousands of Religious Zionist settlers from their homes, was a decisive moment for the religious right. It raised both theological and ideological questions about the relationship with the state,[4] while challenging its political strategy. Indeed, the watershed event generated doubts as to the very utility of their political activity. Ariel Sharon's decision to initiate and carry out this plan pitted them against a leader who they had idolized for a generation. When the time came for implementation of the withdrawal, the parliamentary representatives of the religious right (in the NRP and the National Union party) were unable to stop Sharon, while most of the MKs of Sharon's own Likud party did not rebel against his leadership. After the failure of parliamentary action, the attempt of the religious right to foil the withdrawal through direct action failed. In the southern village of Kfar Maimon, there was a direct face-off of thousands of religious demonstrators with the army. At the crucial moment, the extra-parliamentary leadership of the settler movement shied away from a direct confrontation—leaving them open to subsequent criticism that they stabbed the movement in the back.

On whom was this failure to be blamed? As mentioned, there was widespread criticism of the leaders of the settler movement leading ultimately to a change and reorganization of the leadership of the *Yesha* council, which represents the mainstream of the settler movement.

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4   This is a complex question, beyond the scope of this paper.

There were also calls for a change of the political representatives of the religious right in the Knesset.

On a deeper level, however, there was a more profound soul-searching. The fact that the icon of the secular right had betrayed their cause required explanations. These were basically of two types, not entirely independent of each other.

One, congruent with the atmosphere of antipolitics and ascription of base motives to all politicians, connected Sharon's volte-face with the ongoing investigations of suspected corruption by him and his sons. This explanation assumed that the legal and media establishments would soft-pedal Sharon's alleged crimes if he would rise to their expectations on the Palestinian issue. One media pundit (in no way identified with the religious right) referred to the protective media attitude to Sharon as an *etrog,* the citron used in religious ritual which must be protected at all costs lest it be blemished (Zach 2005; *The Seventh Eye* 2008). One vocal MK of the religious right (Zvi Hendel of the National Union) quipped that "the depth of the withdrawal is equivalent to the depth of the investigation."[5] This, of course, was all the more plausible given the general disgust with politics.

However, beyond the *ad hominem* criticism, there was a more radical stocktaking that took place in the internal conversation within the religious community. This spirited ideological discourse was not carried out in the mass media and only to some extent on the Web. It was manifest to a great extent in synagogue literature distributed every Sabbath in hundreds of synagogues in Israel.[6] These leaflets

5   These allegations have since been repeated by former Chief of Staff Ya'alon (2008).
6   There have been a number of studies of different aspects of this literature. I especially wish to thank Dr. Yoel Finkelman who was kind enough to send me a copy of his paper "It's A Small, Small World: Secular Zionism

comprise religious teachings, advice on personal matters (such as marital problems or child rearing) as well as political and ideological opinion. This is a unique medium targeted at the Religious Zionist community and is avidly read by a captive audience. There are many of such pamphlets, the majority of them manifesting a definite right-wing orientation.[7] I will try to focus on ideological trends that are reflected in these brochures. It may be the case that these writings do not represent the feelings of the "silent majority" of the religious community,[8] but they definitely articulate a significant trend among the rabbinic and educational leadership.

In many of them, as well as in other media of the religious right (such as the periodicals *Makor Rishon, Nekuda,* and *B'Sheva*), the "betrayal" of Sharon and of the Likud as a whole was described as a failure of the secular right as such. Support (or acquiescence) for the "expulsion" was seen as a result of a structural disability of secular Zionism, and the lack of devotion to the Land of Israel as a result of a lack of identification with traditional Jewish values. This diagnosis would seem to encourage withdrawal from traditional political activity, after its futility had been demonstrated. Yet, it seems that there was no drop in the high voting numbers of the Religious Zionist public.[9] Instead, an ideology developed which tried to replace "politics as usual" with a new agenda.

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as Reflected in a Contemporary Religious-Zionist *Parashat HaShavua* Pamphlet," delivered at the March 2009 Orthodox Forum. A recent study of one aspect of this synagogue literature is Bar-Tal et al. (2010).

7   To the best of my knowledge, only one such pamphlet, entitled appropriately *Shabbat Shalom*, and published by the dovish religious movement *Netivot Shalom-Oz Veshalom,* represents a left-of-center orientation.

8   This was the claim of Cohen and Cohen (2005) regarding descriptions of the traumatic effect of the disengagement.

9   See Cohen 2009, 6.

The trauma of the disengagement accelerated the appearance of an ideology that had begun to be articulated in previous years. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948 (and in the politics of the Zionist Movement which preceded the State), Religious Zionists (and especially the dominant Religious Zionist party, the NRP) have almost always been junior partners in coalitions, whether during the hegemony of the Labor party or (since 1977) under the Likud. In the first period, that of the "historic covenant," Religious Zionists refrained from taking a major role in determining national policy and concentrated on establishing and perpetuating the arrangements regarding religion and state known as the "status quo." The second period has been characterized by a demand to be more influential in major affairs of state, especially in the context of the debate on the territories, while being part of the "national camp" led by the Likud. As a result of the disengagement, some questioned this strategy and emphasized the need for the Religious Zionist representation to be strong enough to foil any possible concessions granted by the leadership of the right. These called for a union of parties to the right of the Likud who would be able to influence any right-wing coalition. However, some leaders of the community went beyond this. The latest development, accelerated since the disengagement, is their aspiration not just to share in leadership, but rather to replace the country's leadership. This call stems from the conviction that only Religious Zionism has the faith and commitment to the Land of Israel and to Jewish values necessary to lead the state and that ultimately any regime run by secular Jews will be unable to sustain the true Zionist vision.[10]

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10   The harbinger of this trend may have been Efi Eitam, a charismatic army officer who entered politics and was elected, for a short time, as the head of the National Religious Party. In an interview with *Haaretz* journalist Ari Shavit (March 22, 2002), he shared his belief that he had a calling to be the leader of the Jewish people.

I noticed the eruption of this rhetoric when visiting the demonstrators against the disengagement at Kfar Maimon.[11] The intense conviction of the demonstrators that they represent the true will of the Jewish people and their powerlessness in stopping the withdrawal brought about a call for a new political strategy.

In the wake of the disengagement, Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, the popular head of a yeshiva and the rabbi of the West Bank settlement of Elon Moreh, published a booklet, distributed widely in synagogues, calling for the Religious Zionist community to "assume responsibility" for the state as a whole (Levanon n.d.). He explains that the project of secular Zionism has failed and that only religious Jews have the commitment to preserve the very existence as well as the Jewish character of the State of Israel, while the secular-liberal force, which controls the media and the judicial system, wishes to be part of a "New Middle East" which will reject any Jewish uniqueness. Those like Levanon who speak of a need for religious leadership do not generally present a detailed plan for implementation (beyond an absolute rejection of any withdrawal from the territories and a call for emphasizing "Jewish" values instead of universal ones), but they are convinced that solutions to all problems can be found within the Jewish tradition.

This theme calling for religious hegemony is prominent in many of the synagogue pamphlets. For example, a popular pamphlet published interviews with three candidates for the leadership of a unified Religious Zionist party (that represented parties representing some 7% of the vote). A number of the questions that were addressed to the candidates dealt with their aspirations to become prime minister,

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11   Neuman 2005.

no less, as though this was a realistic goal (Identical Question 2008, interviews with MKs Elon and Ariel).

The vision of religious leadership of the country is a response to those who have despaired of influencing the political system. In a nutshell, it is "anti-antipolitics" because it offers a remedy to the apathy and impotence caused by the failure to stop the withdrawal from Gaza, by mobilizing the believers around a new political goal. They are energized by the increasing visibility of Religious Zionists in various national endeavors, especially in the officer corps of the IDF.

Obviously, the vision of hegemony is problematic for a group that is no more than 12% of the population.[12] How can it be presented as a plausible political prospect?

One response is the claim that the potential electorate of religious parties is much greater than it seems, and that in fact the religious community is not really a minority. For example, data published by the Israel Democracy Institute was presented in the media in a way that gave the impression that the secular community is a small minority. This, in turn, was presented in a synagogue leaflet in a way that suggested the possibility of religious hegemony.[13] In addition, there are those who foresee change of the demographic reality. A common claim is that the larger family size of Religious Zionists (and their lower numbers of emigration) will eventually bring about change in

12   See Cohen (2009) who says that the maximum potential of the Religious Zionist public is 15 MKs out of 120. Ya'akov Katz, head of the National Union, described the electoral power of the Religious Zionist community as 12–14 mandates. Baruch 2009.

13   Nachshoni 2007; Nachshoni 2008; "*Tradition of Israel*," 2007. As a result of these publications, the IDI published a paper clarifying the results of the Guttman Institute surveys and emphasizing that keeping some Jewish traditions does not preclude self-definition as "secular" or "not religious." See Ventura and Philippov 2008.

the relative size—and influence—of the community. Another hope is based on attempts, more common in recent years, of Religious Zionists to engage in proselytizing (previously prevalent among the Haredi community) intended to bring non-observant Jews to religious observance. Although there are a number of visible examples of such phenomena, they are certainly not significant numerically to the extent of strengthening the political force of Religious Zionism.[14]

Given the small size of the Religious Zionist community, what political strategies can be presented to make the idea of religious leadership seem plausible? A number of these are evident in the synagogue literature.[15]

One possibility is the establishment of a broad "Jewish-Traditional" party. This strategy would try to unite all Religious Zionists but also to reach out to Traditional Jews. This was one of the ideas behind the attempt (which ultimately failed) to create a unified party, which, it was hoped, could position itself as a serious alternative to the major parties. In this way it could maximize the influence of Religious

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14 See Sheleg 2003; Laks n.d.; Zvik 2009.Some of the synagogue brochures, noticeably *Mimayanei Hayeshua* and *Rosh Yehudi* see themselves as part of a new "movement of return" and feature stories of Jews who have recently joined the ranks of the observant.
It should be noted that there is an interesting phenomenon of blurring of borders between "religious" and "non-religious," reflecting postmodern liquidity of identity. One example of this is the penetration of religious texts and themes into Israeli popular music, and the attraction of some noted celebrities to Jewish tradition, while parts of the "religious" community adopt much of the lifestyle of the secular group. The political implications of such blurring are not clear.

15 Rabbi Shlomo Aviner (2008), the rabbi of the settlement Bet El and one of the most prolific rabbis of the religious right, analyzed the political options, preferring himself a broad-based "Traditional" party focusing on social issues.

Zionist ideology (Cohen 2011). Some of the proponents of this proposal claimed that it would focus on "education first" and include in its list of candidates people who are not religiously observant (as opposed to the historic policy of the NRP). This would be an attempt to woo such Traditional Jews, supporters of Likud (or of Shas, which is ostensibly a Haredi party but which attracts many Traditional voters) or even lovers of the Land of Israel who are not observant but respect religion (Shilo 2008).[16] Such a new alignment would require a much more inclusionary mindset and a policy change regarding questions such as religious coercion, pluralism, and tolerance, akin to the transformation of Catholic parties in Europe to post-World War II Christian Democracy.

Another strategy to achieve hegemony would suggest political partnership with the Haredim. Such a union existed in the first Knesset (elected in 1949) when the United Religious Front (*Hazit Datit Meuchedet*) composed of all the religious and Haredi parties was represented by 18 MKs. At the time, the Religious Zionists had two-thirds of the representation. In recent elections the total number of MKs from the two Haredi lists (Shas and *Yahdut Hatorah*–United Torah Judaism) reaches close to 20, around twice the number of Religious Zionist MKs (counting those from all parties). There are periodic calls to create a united religious political force and have the Religious Zionist and the non-Zionist Haredi parties join forces.[17]

16 Some 30% of Israeli Jews identify themselves as "Traditional" (Ventura and Philoppov 2008). The Traditional sector of Israeli society has been largely ignored by scholars and has only recently been the object of serious study. See Yadgar and Liebman 2006; Buzaglo 2009.
17 See for example Wolpe 2008; Hendel (2005), who says that that unifying all the religious parties will lead eventually to a religious candidate for prime minister; Wasserman (2008), who says that it is important not to forget the lesson of the expulsion from Gush Katif for "only when we hold the reins

Given the proportional strength, such a union would require that the Zionists accept the sectarian concerns of the Haredim, who in turn would support the settlement project and oppose withdrawal.

A fervent proponent of this option is Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, who thinks that it would dovetail with popular disgust from the political elite:

> It is no secret that if the religious public would unite—it could lead the country. The NRP would concede to the Haredi public in matters of Shabbat or sexual modesty[18] and the Haredi community would concede to the Zionist one regarding the Land of Israel [i.e., the territories and settlements – K.N.] . . . many Traditional Jews could join this union. They have no one to vote for. They have had enough of all the corruption and "envelopes."[19] They are searching for clean leadership, leadership with values, true leadership. (Eliyahu 2008b)

This strategy seems to be popular among certain Religious Zionist rabbis, although it might be difficult to sell to the rank-and-file, who are often resentful at many aspects of Haredi behavior, such as the

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of power, will we be able to change the path where we are presently being led; Eliyahu 2008a (the author is the rabbi of the city of Safed and the son of former Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu). He explains the arithmetic involved (such a union would be the largest party and would be able to dictate terms to other parties; Eliyahu 2008c).

18   I assume that this means that the modern Orthodox would have to submit to strict Haredi demands regarding Sabbath observance in the public sphere and would be willing to limit women's participation in public affairs.

19   This was a euphemism for the accusation against former Prime Minister Olmert that he had been passed envelopes with large amounts of cash from an American fund-raiser.

wholesale exemption of Haredi yeshiva students from army service. An example of the problems of such an alignment was the recent Jerusalem mayoral election, when many of the leaders of the religious right (most of who live in settlements far from Jerusalem) called on Religious Zionist voters to support the Haredi candidate (who was described as an ally of the settlers). Despite this attempt, Nir Barkat, who is not religiously observant, won the election with significant support from Religious Zionist voters fearful of ultra-Orthodox domination of the city.

A third possibility for Religious Zionists to achieve leadership is to effect a takeover (some would say, a hostile takeover) of a major party. The Likud is obviously the party of choice for those hoping to achieve a leadership position. This is the strategy of Moshe Feiglin and his group, *Manhigut Yehudit* (Jewish Leadership). Feiglin is radically critical of secular Zionism and the liberal values of the Israeli elites and believes that "faithful" Jews who will be guided by "authentic Jewish values" must replace the present political establishment. He recognizes the convergence of all other political forces (even the religious parties) that have agreed to play according to the rules set by the secular elites. Feiglin hopes to register his supporters as Likud members, ultimately electing him as leader of the party. This is the way to bring about "the revolution of the faithful," the title of a book by one of the former leaders of Jewish Leadership.[20]

These three are all political strategies, albeit presenting new alternatives to politics as usual. Finally, on the margins of the Religious Zionist community and especially among the second generation of the settler movement who have set up their own

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20 Karpel 2003; Inbari 2007. In the elections for leadership of the Likud in August 2007, Feiglin won close to a quarter of the vote.

outposts—the so-called *noar ha'gvaot* ("hilltop youth")—the vision of hegemony is associated with an ideology of exit from legitimate political activity. The ideologue—or more exactly, the theologian—of this trend is Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburgh, who achieved notoriety after the publishing of his essay extolling the massacre carried out by Baruch Goldstein in Hebron in 1994 (Fischer 2005). The American-born Ginzburgh, whose synthesis of Kabbala and psychology with "New Age" elements finds many adherents, is not himself a Zionist (he is a follower of the Lubavitch-Habad movement) but many of his followers are disenchanted nationalists. Ginzburgh rejects working within the political system because, in his kabbalistic nomenclature, the judicial and media establishments are "husks (*kelipot*) surrounding the fruit," which have to be "broken" before the true Jewish state will emerge (Ginzburgh 2005; Ginzburgh 2006). Any cooperation with the political and legal system permeated by liberal and universal values is contaminating. As disciples of Ginzburgh explain, religious Jews have to stop being content with being the "interior decorators" of the state constructed by others, but should be those who will build an entirely new alternative edifice (Ofen and Ofen 2006).

An example of such antipolitics may be found in an interview in the weekly magazine *B'Sheva* with Rabbi Gadi Ben-Zimra, an educator in a women's high school in the settlement of Ma'ale Levona:

> [I]n the previous election I voted after profound soul-searching. But today I think that it is wrong to put all the eggs in the political basket. "Jewish Leadership" believes in replacing the driver of the bus in order to prevent it from falling off a cliff. . . . But I have a problem with

the bus itself. Democracy is a culture with personal and
spiritual depth. Any right-wing leader has to take into
account that the form of the bus influences the driver. . . .
My proposal is to act outside of the political system and
to form alternatives (Rotberg 2008).

This position is not a withdrawal from politics as such, but a vision
of achieving political change by working outside the political system.
This stance is presently that of a small minority, but may become more
attractive if working within the system fails to prevent a trauma even
greater than the disengagement. A major withdrawal from the West
Bank/Judea and Samaria may result in alienation of large segments of
the Religious Zionist community from Israeli society and its political
system in particular.

Epilogue – "Something old, something new, something borrowed . . ."

The election campaign of 2009 was overshadowed by Operation
Cast Lead in Gaza, which put all political activity on hold and muted
the rhetoric of antipolitics. Instead of political corruption being a
central campaign issue, the leadership qualities of the candidates for
prime minister were prominent. That was at least one explanation for
the failure of the two "green" parties to pass the threshold of 2% as
well as the dismal performance of Meretz (down to 3 Knesset seats
from 5), despite its attempt to include "non-political" candidates.

The political options open to the religious right played themselves
out in the months preceding the February 2009 elections. A number of
initiatives brought about an attempt to create a new Religious Zionist
party, which would replace the NRP and the splinters of the National

Union Party.[21] The idea to have the list of candidates of the new party determined by a council of prominent Religious Zionists who were not involved in politics (and were themselves committed not to run in the current elections) reflects the dissatisfaction from the traditional parties and an attempt to engage in "new politics."

However, it was clear that the different strategies would create tensions. As the leader of the NRP wrote (again, in a synagogue leaflet) the united party would not present an agenda "with the political (i.e., territories and settlements) issue in front and educational questions at the tail. A change is required: a new agenda with education in front together with a struggle for the Jewish identity of the state and social values." This would seem to suggest a transformation into a "Jewish Democratic" party, which would be a significant part of the right but not an alternative to it.[22] On the other hand, the more radical element was apprehensive that a united party would follow a pragmatic line and ignore the centrality of the question of the territories.[23] To a large extent, the difference was between those who preferred the "old politics" of emphasizing community interests (such as education), while expanding the potential base and those who preferred a "new politics," present an alternative leadership and taking a radical stance regarding the territories.

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21 The NRP and National Union (itself composed of three splinter parties) had run on a joint list in the 2006 elections, but the difficulties arising from the existence of four distinct parties within one Knesset faction engendered calls for unity. Those calling for the creation of a new unified party thought that such a novelty would mobilize support for the party beyond its constituent parts. See Cohen 2010.

22 Orlev 2008. See "Identical Question" 2008, where Orlev envisions 15–17 MKs as a goal for the united party.

23 See "Open Letter" 2008.

Ultimately, the attempt to create a united Religious Zionist party failed and two parties of the religious right emerged:[24] The Jewish Home (*Ha-Bayit ha-Yehudi*) party (in effect, the successor to the NRP) and a newly constituted National Union, which included new elements, more radical politically and more inclusive toward Haredim,[25] but clearly unable to reach out to traditional and secular constituencies.[26]

What did this do to the ideal of religious hegemony? The inability to unite in one party underscored how remote the vision of national leadership was. Instead of competing as a major force in Israeli politics (the leaders of the abortive union saw a showing as the third largest party as a reasonable goal), both parties found themselves fighting to pass the 2% threshold, and the rhetoric of national leadership disappeared. The choices were between the old politics of pragmatism and accommodation on one hand (represented by the Jewish Home) and radical politics which might enjoy ideological purity but might find itself as nothing more than a protest movement (the National Union). The election results were disappointing. The Jewish Home won 2.9% of the vote and the National Union 3.3%, (Central Election Committee 2009); both parties were not major

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24 The dovish *Meimad* party ran together with the Green Movement, downplayed religious issues (emphasizing environmental questions), and did not pass the 2% threshold.

25 As a result, the National Union list did not include women, in order to attract Haredi votes (who see women's participation in public office as inappropriate) and was successful in a number of Haredi strongholds such as Kfar Habad or Beitar.

26 The National Union list contained a candidate who does not define himself as religious (Professor Aryeh Eldad representing the *Hatikva* [The Hope] party) but after the election the National Union leader admitted that the prospects for secular support of his party are extremely limited (Baruch 2009).

players in the coalition negotiations, and the vision of Religious Zionism presenting a plausible alternative for the leadership of Israel was shown to be a daydream. One of the rabbis of the more radical wing (Cohen 2008) was willing to admit that all that could be hoped for is "a small party which will hold fast to the Torah and its teachers, and will fight without compromise for all parts of the holy land, which even if it will be out of the government for a temporary period . . . [eventually] with God's help it will win an absolute victory."

On the other hand, the elections showed that a large proportion of Religious Zionist voters rejected both parties that nominally represent their community and voted for other parties, noticeably the Likud.[27] If this trend continues and brings large numbers of Religious Zionists to join the Likud as members, this may indicate a new phase of their political participation, one not representing "antipolitics," but quintessential use of political power: the attempt to influence (rather than co-opt) the Likud by strengthening its more traditional elements and its right wing. This may also bring about the end of sectorial national religious parties. This would have far-reaching influence not only within the Religious Zionist camp but on Israeli politics in general.[28]

27 MK Katz (in Baruch 2009) speaks of the religious voters electing 6–7 Likud MKs, making up half of the religious vote, while Cohen (2010) thinks that the numbers are closer to five MKs, about a third of the religious vote.

28 While revising this paper for publication in July 2011, the considerable influence of the religious right on the Likud Knesset faction was noted by two journalists in *Yediot Aharonot*. See Nahum Barnea, "The Right Marker," *Yediot Aharonot*: Sabbath Supplement July 15, 2011, 3 and Sima Kadmon, "The Wise Men of the Boycott," ibid., 4.

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Note: All references are in Hebrew unless noted; all websites were accessed in April 2009.

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