Editors' Note

The crisis of liberal democracy affecting a large number of Western countries is, unsurprisingly, also manifesting itself in Israel. Yet it is noteworthy that the extensive literature describing these processes in countries where illiberal regimes have developed and populist leaders now govern, such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and others, does not mention Israel in this unholy list. This is the case even though in Israel in recent years one cannot but notice a relentless battle against 'elites', undermining the rule of law and the justice system, taking control of independent media, weakening civil and social rights organizations, narrowing civil society, and developing signs of authoritarian rule.

Recently, two remarkably similar events occurred in Germany and in Israel, and the difference in the response to them indicates how serious the Israeli case appears to be. In the German state of Thuringia, the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Free Democrats (the Liberals) lost their majority in an election. In order to return to power, the two invited the right-wing party *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD) to join their coalition. The AfD is a far-right, racist, and anti-Semitic party, whose leader, courts have ruled, can be publicly labeled as a fascist without fear of libel law. When Chancellor Angela Merkel of the CDU heard about her own party's new coalition partner in Thuringia, she was publicly shocked and distressed. AfD and other extremist parties have long been considered beyond the pale in mainstream German politics, a taboo that the Thuringian branch had now broken. Merkel reminded those who seemed to have forgotten that this process was similar to how the Weimar Republic had deteriorated into Nazism not so long ago.

Merkel's shock clearly expressed the mood of the wider political class in Germany. Indeed, the consequences were swift, and the local Thuringian CDU party quickly withdrew from the agreement. Even more tellingly, the current minister of defense, who had already been designated as Merkel's successor as chancellor when she retires at the end of her current term, and who had accepted the despicable move, announced that she was stepping down from the national party leadership and her intended role.

And what happened in Israel? The contrast is worrying. Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud and head of the center-right camp in power, feared he would not succeed in obtaining a majority in the March 2020 elections and would not retain the premiership. What did he do? He approached the head of the most extreme right-wing party on Israel's political map, the Kahanist Itamar Ben Gvir, and invited him to join his future coalition in return for not competing in the election. Likud leaders welcomed the move as the only way to assure victory.

What was the public reaction? With few exceptions, the public responded with a shrug. Fatigue from successive elections and a profusion of parties, as well as the internalization of undemocratic, clerical, and racist values and practices, all combined to reduce the reaction to almost nothing. This is despite the fact that the individual in question is head of an extremist party that was banned from running for Knesset in 1988, when its leader was Rabbi Kahane. Since then, Kahanist leaders have generally been shunned by the right-wing establishment, a taboo Netanyahu broke, seemingly without consequences.

At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, another process is also underway in Israel. The liberal camp that believes in multiculturalism has lost the understanding that there must be a limit to the power of minority groups to impose their worldview and their normative system on the public sphere. The desire, justifiable in itself, to include Haredim in the higher education system to enable them to integrate into the workforce of modern society has led some higher education institutions to allow Haredi students to study under their own conditions and maintain a separation (*hafrada* in Hebrew) from other students, and even to enforce their norms (such as gender separation) on non-Haredim.

Cultural groups certainly have the right to maintain their lifestyles in their private space, perhaps even in some restricted public space, but they should not be allowed to change the character of the general public sphere. This is not the meaning of multiculturalism or pluralism; rather, it undermines the democratic nature of the state and society.

The self-doubt that has characterized the progressive camp in Israel for quite some time is so deep that, in the name of apparent liberalism, it is ready to give up basic values. This camp, which has concentrated on the struggle for peace in recent decades, seems to have surrendered another important principle—that religion should not be coercive (remember Herzl's vision that rabbis should restrict themselves to their synagogues?).

The Israeli democratic left that shaped a secular, although somewhat limited, worldview as part of the Zionist revolution has lost its way when faced with the unexpected religious resurgence that has been growing for decades. This resurgence has strengthened the clerical Jewish component

of the collective identity cluster, thus playing into the hands of the nationalist establishment, by which religion is employed to strengthen its ethno-nationalist tendencies and its vision of the Greater Land of Israel.

Our journal is academic, not political, but we raise these issues here because they have a direct bearing on the freedom, independence, and integrity of Israel's academic world. We recognize that politicians, by definition, have political needs; they must build coalitions not only to stay in power, but also to maintain a functional government. The academic system, however, should not so easily relinquish the fundamental democratic and liberal values it is built on. Without these values, it will collapse. The higher education system should indeed encourage the entry of Haredim into its institutions, but not at the cost of compromising its principles and losing its identity. Moreover, its political scientists must call attention to instances when politicians transgress the foundational, shared norms of the society.

We now turn, with some relief, to the articles we are offering. In this issue, for no discernible reason and without prior planning, most of the pieces are skewed toward Israeli history, including how we remember (or forget) it; the lone exception focuses rather strongly on the contemporary. We begin with Menachem Klein's article on alternative memory agents. In it, Klein compares museums and other institutions that portray the past in both East and West Jerusalem and analyzes the narrative each supports regarding the role that Palestinian Arabs and different groups of Jews played in Jerusalem's history. He concludes that the agents of alternative collective memory, although much more modestly funded, convey a more heterogeneous and fuller picture of Jerusalem's diverse histories than the officially sponsored and supported agents of hegemony.

The next article, by Moshe Naor, examines the Sephardi and Mizrahi leadership in the late Mandate and early statehood periods, until the dissolution of their community councils in 1951. Naor shows how the councils' inability to withstand the ideology of statism (*mamlachtiut*) prevented them from continuing to give voice to the issues that particularly pertained to those communities.

Yossi Goldstein writes about a similar period, but with a very different focus. His article re-examines David Ben-Gurion's attitude toward Palestinian refugees during 1948, and concludes that it was only in late May and early June of that crucial year that he decided to oppose their return. Based on extensive archival research, Goldstein challenges previous conclusions on this rather controversial issue.

Na'ama Sheffi and Anat First use yet a different lens to examine portrayals of Jerusalem, namely, Israeli banknotes. They show that before the 1967 War, banknotes depicted pictures connected only to West (Israeli)

Jerusalem. After the war, the focus changed, and most depictions of Jerusalem on banknotes since then have been of sites in East Jerusalem, conquered in 1967.

We break the historical mold with our next article, which examines gay tourism in Tel Aviv, especially the 2016 Pride Parade events. Amit Kama and Yael Ram discuss how Tel Aviv deliberately and officially depicts itself as gay friendly, a view they believe is correct and shared by international LGBTQ+ tourists.

Brent Sasley contributes an essay to our occasional "Teaching Israel Studies" series. He suggests that instructors consider using disciplinary tools to examine Israel in comparison to other countries, stressing similarities and differences, and provides suggested discussion questions to facilitate this approach.

We conclude with our usual *mélange* of book reviews on widely different facets of Israel Studies, including Israeli-Chinese relations, the neo-revisionist right, fascism in Palestine during the Mandate (yes! Jewish fascists!), Arabs and Jews in the Ottoman period, contemporary minority policy, and 'intensive mothering' in today's Israel.

As we recently advised the AIS officers and members, we are both planning to retire as editors of the ISR, a job we have done since 2011, as of the summer of 2021. We have four more issues until then, some guest-edited, some 'regular', and we hope they will hold your interest until our (as yet unknown) successors arrive.

— *Yoram Peri and Paul L. Scham*