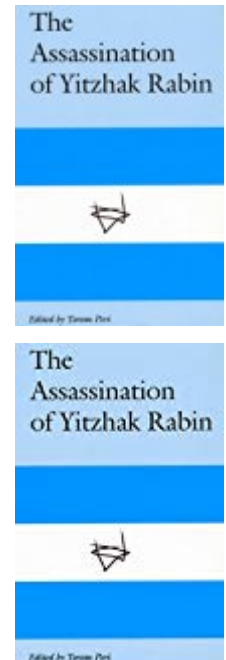


Samuel Peleg. *Zealotry and Vengeance: Quest of a Religious Identity Group: A Sociopolitical Account of the Rabin Assassination.* Lanham and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002. xii + 189 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7391-0332-6.

Yoram Peri. *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. viii + 386 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8047-3837-8.



Reviewed by Dov Waxman

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The Enemy Within: Religious Extremism, Political Violence, and the Murder of Yitzhak Rabin

Eight years have passed since the assassination of Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin by a young militant right-wing religious Zionist. On the evening of Saturday, November 4, 1995, the twenty-five year old assassin, Yigal Amir, walked up to Prime Minister Rabin, who had just finished addressing a massive rally in support of the Oslo peace process, and fired three shots from a revolver into his back. Rabin died shortly afterwards. Amir was immediately arrested and was later sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder. As news of Rabin's murder spread, Israelis reacted with shock, horror, and disbelief. In the week following the assassination, a massive out-

pouring of public grief and mourning took place. It was estimated that almost a million people passed Rabin's coffin lying in state at the Knesset (Israel's parliament), and about half a million took part in the funeral cortege or visited Rabin's grave on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands more, especially young people, congregated in the square in Tel Aviv where the murder took place (the square now bears his name). Rabin's funeral ceremony was attended by heads of state and dignitaries from around the world, who paid tribute to the courage of the man who had embarked on the peace process with the Palestinians, signing the Oslo Accords with Israel's long-time nemesis, the Palestinian Liberation Organization and its leader Yasser Arafat.

Rabin's assassination was a deeply traumatic event for Israelis. As with all traumas, one can attempt to repress the event or come to terms with it. Although many in Israel since the assassination have tried the strategy of repression, for the future health of Israeli society and democracy there is ultimately no choice but to face what happened, to ask why it happened, who bears responsibility, what implications it has, and what its repercussions have been. These difficult questions are at the heart of both of the books under review. Each provides some of the answers, giving the reader a much deeper understanding of the reasons behind the assassination, especially the political, cultural, and social background against which it took place.

In attempting to understand the assassination of Rabin, both books to their credit share the conviction (albeit unstated) that it is not enough to simply delve into the biography of the assassin to find clues for his pathological and murderous behavior. This psychological approach—which is so popular in the media—may offer some insights into the mind of the assassin, but runs the risk of obscuring the broader social, cultural, and political context within which the assassination took place. In the case of some assassinations, the personality and background of the assassin can provide much of the explanation for what happened. This is especially the case when the assassin appears to have been a social misfit, a loner, and his action the result of personal malice or a deranged mind. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald appears to be the classic example of this. Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, however, was no Oswald. Amir was not simply a lone, crazed gunman. He was popular, intelligent, and had a "normal" background, similar to that of many other religious Zionist youth. He came from a devout Orthodox home, grew up in a Tel Aviv suburb, had served in an army combat unit, and at the time of the assassination, was studying law, computing, and Jewish studies at Bar-Ilan university, a religious Zionist institution.

To understand why this promising young man decided to kill his prime minister, therefore, one has to go beyond the individual level of analysis. As Yoram Peri, the editor of *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*, writes in his introduction: "To understand the assassination of Rabin, one must embark upon an anthropological journey into Israeli society, exploring the forces at play and the rules of the game, which will reveal the underground currents and motivating mechanisms.... Thus, sadly, the assassination provides a unique lens for observing contemporary Israeli society and democracy" (p. 13). Hence, rather than examine Rabin's assassination through a psychological analysis of the assassin, Peri's book presents it as the product of the broader socio-political environment within Israel in the mid-1990s. Similarly, in his book *Zealotry and Vengeance*, Samuel Peleg analyzes the social and political motivations and conditions that encouraged the growth of political violence by religious right-wing extremist Jews such as Yigal Amir. As such, both books give the reader an understanding not only of Rabin's assassination, but also of the political, cultural, and social forces operating in Israel and the intense struggles being waged between different groups within Israeli society.

Peleg's *Zealotry and Vengeance*, in fact, provides much more analysis of the wider ideological milieu from which Yigal Amir emerged than it does of Rabin's assassination itself. It is only in the final chapter of the book that Peleg actually discusses the assassination, previously mentioning it only in passing. This is disappointing since the subtitle of the book promises "a sociopolitical account of the Rabin assassination." This subtitle is highly misleading because so little space is devoted to analyzing the Rabin assassination. One suspects that this subtitle was added after the bulk of the book was already written, and that the last chapter in which the discussion of Rabin's assassination appears was included in order to connect the book's argument to the assassination, perhaps in the interests of topicality. This suspicion is bol-

stered by the author noting in the preface that his Ph.D. dissertation completed in 1992 was "the embryonic version" of the book (p. xi). One cannot help but wonder how much was changed in the process of his Ph.D. dissertation becoming a book. Much of the book reads like a Ph.D. dissertation--there is a lengthy review of the literature (pp. 9-35), and statements of the author's conceptual framework (pp. 43-50) and research focus (pp. 50-51). The manuscript would certainly have benefited from thorough editing, as well as careful proof reading because the book contains numerous errors. (For instance, an Israeli right-wing nationalist party is spelt in two different ways on the same page--"Tehiya" and "Techiya" [p. 119]). The author also incorrectly states that thirty-nine Muslim worshippers were killed by the Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs on February 25, 1994, when the actual number was twenty-nine (p. 160). For a book examining religiously motivated political violence this is a careless error.

Zealotry and Vengeance is more concerned with exploring the dynamics of social conflict than it is with presenting a detailed sociopolitical account of the Rabin assassination. To this end, Peleg devotes considerable attention to a theoretical discussion of the role of "revitalized identity groups" in protracted social conflicts. These are social groups whose membership is defined by ascriptive criteria (p. 38) that are "motivated by the force of a desire to rebuild the whole complex of social and political relations around it" (p. 39), and which conduct their political activities outside the formal political arena (p. 3). Peleg argues, a little too repetitively, for the importance of these groups in making sociopolitical conflicts more complex and protracted. He is certainly right to emphasize the role that non-state actors play in escalating and prolonging conflicts (although this is hardly an original insight). Examples abound in the Middle East and elsewhere of the destructive and destabilizing impact that extremist groups can have. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict, for instance, the activities of certain groups within both Israeli and Palestinian society have helped make that conflict as tragically intractable as it is.

One such group is the religious Jewish settler movement Gush Emunim ("Block of the Faithful"), which Peleg uses as his case study. Formed in 1974 (during Rabin's first term in office as Israel's prime minister), the movement spearheaded the Jewish settlement drive in the territories Israel had conquered in the 1967 war--the West Bank (often referred to in Israel by the biblical names, Judea and Samaria) and Gaza. Peleg describes Gush Emunim as a "revitalized religious group involved in a protracted conflict with other groups that are perceived as a threat to its needs, and consequently confronts a government that tries to instill order" (p. 51). As such, he is concerned with explaining the intensification of this conflict, specifically the processes by which Gush Emunim came to directly challenge the authority of the Israeli state. Part of this challenge involved the use of violence and even terrorism by individuals and ad hoc groups associated with Gush Emunim. Gush Emunim settlers, for instance, have regularly clashed with Israeli soldiers seeking to evict them from unauthorized settlements, and in the mid-1980s an underground organization (whose twenty-eight members included prominent Gush activists) was uncovered that had carried out terror attacks on Palestinians, and even planned to blow up the Muslim shrine of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The adoption of terrorism by radical offshoots of Gush Emunim marked a significant escalation in the conflict, and Peleg attempts to explain how this came about. In doing so, he provides a general theory to account for the recourse to terrorism by members of religious groups. At a time when religiously motivated political violence appears to be on the rise and has seized the attention of governments around the world (especially in the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001), there is clearly an urgent need to understand its origins and devel-

opment. Those looking for a clear, cogent, and parsimonious theory will be, however, disappointed by what Peleg offers. He presents a complex model based upon rational choice theory setting out the sequences of choices available to leaders of identity group at various stages of a conflict (pp. 43-50). The model (which Peleg helpfully presents in the form of a diagram) charts the evolution of an identity group's conflict towards either a resolution of the conflict or its escalation. The problem with Peleg's model (aside from the fact that it is based upon many untested assumptions) is that it presents the intensification of a conflict and its turn to violence as the result of numerous decisions by a group's leadership on the basis of rational cost/benefit calculations. Whilst the leadership of a group such as Gush Emunim may indeed engage in such rational strategizing, they are often constrained in their decisions by their constituents who may be driven more by emotions such as fear, hatred, and the desire for vengeance than by hard-headed political assessments. Moreover, the embrace of violence by religious groups may be especially ill suited to a rational choice model in so far as such violence serves expressive, and not merely instrumental purposes.

The strength of Peleg's book lies not so much in the theory of conflict escalation that it presents, but in its thorough examination of Gush Emunim. Peleg discusses the background of its members and their mindset, its guiding ideology (which he labels "Kookism" after its chief ideologues, Rabbi Avraham Kook and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook [p. 81]), and its political strategy and tactics. Of particular interest to students and scholars of Israel is Peleg's account of the emergence and rise of Gush Emunim. Although there are already some excellent studies of Gush Emunim, these tend to stress the impact of Israel's conquest in the 1967 war of areas considered sacred by religious Jews (since it was believed to be land that God had promised Abraham) in inspiring the political and settlement activism of the religious

Zionist community, with Gush Emunim as its vanguard.[1] According to this conventional account of the rise of Gush Emunim, religious Zionists viewed Israel's victory in 1967 as a clear indication that the messianic process of redemption was underway. It was thus incumbent upon believers to settle in the newly "liberated" territories and to prevent them from being exchanged or compromised, since this was a violation of God's will and would mean forfeiting divine redemption. The 1967 war, therefore, has been generally regarded as providing the initial impetus for the rise of Gush Emunim. The novelty of Peleg's account lies in his argument that the 1967 war was just the "inspirational trigger" that helped galvanize young religious Zionists into political activism (p. 45). But there was already a "ripe and well entrenched disposition among a very distinct group of individuals" without which Gush Emunim would not have come into being (p. 52). This disposition involved an intense hostility to secular modernity and a devout belief in the supremacy of religion over man-made laws and in the imminence of messianic redemption. This developed, according to Peleg, due to the disaffection and frustration experienced by young religious Zionists in the new State of Israel. To their dismay, they found themselves in a secular state in which they were alienated from the politically, culturally, and socially dominant secular Zionists, as well as from the secluded population of non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox Jews. They grew up segregated from both their secular and ultra-Orthodox peers, attending separate schools (as a result of the State Education Law of 1953) and their own youth movement (Bnei Akiva). Peleg argues that this segregation was instrumental in laying the foundations for the emergence of Gush Emunim, because it was by attending the same schools, youth movement, and yeshivot (religious seminaries) that members of this generation of religious Zionists developed the strong social bonds, extremist mentality, and ideological commitment that would later characterize the members of Gush

Emunim (p. 54). This is an important argument since it underlines the state's role in incubating the social forces that would later challenge it.

Another important contribution the book makes to our understanding of the rise of Gush Emunim lies in Peleg's detailed analysis of the factors that facilitated the remarkable success of the movement. Peleg shows how Gush Emunim was able to penetrate into the formal Israeli political system at all levels, while simultaneously operating outside of it and conducting extra-parliamentary protest activities (p. 119). Whilst mobilizing their supporters by vociferously attacking the political system, the state, and secular Zionism, the leaders of Gush Emunim assiduously cultivated close ties to members of Israel's political establishment. The support that Gush Emunim received not only from its major political representative, the National Religious Party, but also from high-ranking members of the Likud (most notably, Ariel Sharon) and Labor parties was important to its success. When government officials were not sufficiently responsive to Gush Emunim's demands, however, the leaders of the movement operated against the government, increasing their protest activities (such as demonstrations, rallies, hunger strikes, clashes with police, and establishment of illegal settlements) (pp. 117-118). Even when members of Gush Emunim engaged in illegal activities, including the use of violence against Palestinians in the occupied territories, they were treated leniently by Israeli governments and courts. The indulgent attitude of the authorities toward violence perpetrated by Gush Emunim settlers in the territories served to encourage further violence both by Jewish settlers and Palestinians in the territories. As Peleg writes: "The preferential treatment Gush activists receive enraging Arab inhabitants and provokes them to strike against Jewish targets. This prompts retaliation from Jewish settlers, and the cycle of violence escalates" (p. 128). Alas, this cycle of violence in the occupied territories continues to this day.

Peleg places the assassination of Rabin within this context of growing settler illegality and violence. The lawlessness and violent atmosphere that Gush Emunim and its extremist offshoots encouraged within the territories eventually spilled over into Israel proper. Perhaps this was only a matter of time as the normative constraints on the use of violence were increasingly loosed. But it was not only settler violence that created the conditions within which the assassination of Rabin could occur. Peleg notes that contrary to its self-image, Israeli society is "frighteningly violent" (p. 2). As such, one should not be surprised that an Israeli prime minister could be murdered: "The carnage on the roads, the pushing and shoving at queues, violence against women, arresting Arabs at road blocks, differential wages for equal labor, as well as TV Debates and talk shows in which participants are unable to finish one sentence, and the murder of a prime minister—all constitute one totality. The difference is quantitative but not principal" (p. 2). Peleg is right to remind his readers that as an act of violence, the assassination of Rabin was not an aberration, but rather a culmination of growing violence within Israeli society. Despite public campaigns and appeals, this violence has not subsided since Rabin's death. Nor have the divisions, between Secular and religious Jews, between supporters of territorial compromise with The Palestinians and devout believers in the process of messianic redemption through settlement in the entire Land of Israel, disappeared. Although Gush Emunim is now defunct, what it stood for and the ethos it espoused continues to be supported by many Jews within Israel and the occupied territories. "The spirit of Gush Emunim is still haunting Israeli politics and public life," Peleg concludes (p. 151). As long as it does, Peleg's somber warning that "a second political assassination in Israel is imminent" and will likely come about if and when Israel finally dismantles Jewish settlements in the territories, seems justified (p. xi).

Similarly bleak analyses of Israeli politics and society are offered in Peri's edited volume *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*. The book contains a collection of essays written by Israeli scholars in the fields of political science, sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, communication, and education. As such, the book represents a major interdisciplinary effort to explore the political, social, cultural, and psychological processes which prepared the ground for Rabin's murder; the reaction of the general public, the Israeli media, and different sections of Israel's population to the assassination; and the long-term impact of the assassination on Israeli society. Taken together, the essays not only provide the reader with a better understanding of the assassination and its aftermath, but also of the deep cultural schisms within Israeli society and the highly contentious issues Israelis are struggling with.

The book begins with an excellent introduction by Peri in which he asks why Rabin's assassination came as such a surprise to Israelis when, in fact, in the words of his subtitle, "the writing was on the wall." He writes: "In retrospect, it is hard to shake the feeling that Rabin's murder could have been expected. There were red lights and warning bells, and still the system did not believe it was possible" (p. 4). Like Peleg, Peri notes that "illegal political violence became a normative phenomenon among many Israelis" (p. 4). In addition, in the six months preceding the assassination there was a concerted campaign by opponents of the Oslo peace process which began by discrediting and delegitimizing the Labor-led government, and then proceeded to delegitimize Rabin personally in order to undermine his self-confidence and dehumanize him among the Israeli public (pp. 4-5). In the course of this campaign, the ground for Rabin's murder was laid as follows: "first verbal invective, then symbolic behavior, then ritual murder and actual physical violence, and finally the assassination" (p. 4). It was not just right-wing extremists engaged in this campaign, but prominent members of the opposi-

tion in the Knesset. "A careful and sophisticated division of labor emerged between the nonlegitimate, extraparliamentary bodies and the parliamentary opposition," writes Peri, "and the latter used the former as it suited them" (p. 5). Yet, despite the mounting verbal and even physical attacks against Rabin, few believed that an assassination by a Jewish extremist was likely.

Why did people believe that an assassination in Israel was not possible? Peri identifies four factors that led Israeli society to discount the prospects of an assassination. The first was the deep-rooted self-identification of Jews as "the persecuted people," which resulted in the perception of evil as always emanating from outside the Jewish community. According to Peri: "This historical proclivity of Jews to see evil as stemming from the outside obstructed the ability to identify internal sources of evil, even when the alarm bells were sounding" (p. 7). The second factor, related to the Jewish self-image of being powerless victims, was the longstanding belief that Jews are not violent collectively or individually--they are the victims of violence, not its perpetrators (pp. 7-8). Third was a prevailing belief in the power and stability of Israeli democracy, which obscured the weakness of Israel's democracy (p. 8). Finally, the belief in the omnipotence of Israel's security forces gave rise to the feeling that they would easily be able to prevent any assassination attempt (p. 8). The self-image and beliefs of Israeli society, therefore, resulted in a widespread inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the possibility that a right-wing extremist Jew might seek to murder Prime Minister Rabin in an effort to halt the Oslo peace process.

Following Peri's introduction, the rest of the book is divided into four parts. Part 1, entitled "The Road to Rabin Square," is concerned with the background to the assassination. The opening chapter, also written by Peri (who contributes two more chapters to the book), provides a sweeping overview of the assassination; analyzing its caus-

es, the meanings that were ascribed to it, and its repercussions, Peri places Rabin's assassination within the escalating cultural war that was taking place in Israel at the time. The peace process involved more than a historical accommodation between Israel and the Palestinians and the final setting of Israel's territorial borders. It also involved the re-shaping of Israeli collective identity and the emergence of a new secular Israeli identity (p. 26). Israel, it seemed to many, was on the verge of entering a new "post-Zionist" age, one in which the spirit of liberal individualism would replace the nationalist collectivism of old. "In the historical struggle between opposing schools of Zionism, the universalist, democratic-liberal approach was about to carry the day over the particularist, exclusivist approach supported by the nationalist camp," writes Peri (p. 27). Those Israelis who welcomed this development Peri labels the "liberal-democratic peace camp," and its opponents the "clerical-nationalist camp" (p. 29). Although one might object to Peri's division of Israeli society into two large camps, rather than multiple smaller groups, more problematic are the labels Peri uses to describe these camps. In particular, it is very misleading to suggest that supporters of the peace process were only those who embraced universalism, liberalism, and democracy. Certainly, there were many who did champion these values, but for many of its supporters, the withdrawal from the territories that the peace process promised was attractive because it was seen as a way of safeguarding Israel's Jewish identity, a particularistic and nationalist value. The peace process, in other words, was not necessarily in conflict with Jewish nationalism, as Peri implies. Nevertheless, Peri's observation that in the eyes of the clerical-nationalist camp, Rabin was not only the leader of the peace camp, but also symbolized "the secular, Hellenist, non-Jewish Jew" (p. 31) is crucial to understanding why Rabin was assassinated. In effect, by murdering its leading representative, Yigal Amir was attempting to stop both the peace process and the rise of the new secular

Israeli identity. He was also attacking the state because, as prime minister, Rabin represented the state. Thus, Peri argues, that Rabin's assassination was not only directed against the "liberal-democratic peace camp," but also against the state itself (p. 31).

What, then, were the repercussions of the assassination? According to Peri, it ushered a deeply shaken Israeli society into a period of agonizing self-reflection, in which it asked fundamental questions about its character and the strength of Israeli democracy. Consequently, "the self-image of a homogenous, democratic, and internally strong society marked by internal cohesiveness gave way to the recognition that Israel has a fragmented and weak social fabric, and that the foundations of democracy are rather fragile" (pp. 46-47). But, despite the hopes of some in the immediate aftermath of the assassination that the event could be a sobering, even cathartic one for Israeli society, leading to national unity, a stronger democracy and a better society, Peri argues that Rabin's assassination was not a "transformative event" for Israeli society: "The fundamental character of Israeli society and democracy, including the existence of an antidemocratic ecology, remained the same after the assassination as it had been before" (p. 55). Peri does, however, see one positive outcome of the assassination. By forcing Israelis to acknowledge the violence within their own society, "the assassination succeeded in stopping the escalation of political violence in the context of the process of withdrawal and separation from parts of the Land of Israel" (p. 54). This, however, may be only a temporary lull. After all, in the years since Rabin's assassination, Israel's withdrawal from the territories was slowed under the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu and, since the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, has now ceased altogether. It has even been reversed with the military reoccupation of much of the West Bank and Gaza by the Sharon government. If the process of Israel's withdrawal from the territories does finally resume, it

may well be met again with a resurgence of political violence by right-wing extremist Jews bent on preventing it by any means necessary.

The reasons why right-wing Jewish extremists might again turn to violence to prevent Israel's withdrawal from the territories can be found in Ehud Sprinzak's chapter, "Israel's Radical Right and the Countdown to the Rabin Assassination." In it, Sprinzak—who until his recent death was a leading expert on right-wing extremism in Israel—reconstructs "the psycho-political trajectory of the Israeli extreme right, which paved the way for Yigal Amir and strengthened his determination to act" (p. 96). According to Sprinzak, the terrorism conducted by the Palestinian militant Islamist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad beginning in late October 1993 led to a radicalization of the settler community, who responded by conducting a "Jewish intifada" involving attacks on Palestinian cars, road blocks, tire burning, damage to Palestinian property, and physical assaults and even killing of individual Palestinians (p. 97). The settlers saw the Oslo accords as empowering terrorists—in their eyes all Palestinians were terrorists—with guns being provided to them by the Israeli government and international legitimacy being accorded to them. This represented an immediate and dire threat to their personal safety and the security of their communities. To make matters worse, Prime Minister Rabin, who never liked the settlers and their messianic rhetoric (p. 107), appeared to them to be cold, aloof, and completely unsympathetic to their concerns (p. 108)—a perception which, it should be noted, was not unfounded. Feeling abandoned by their own government, with their collective existence in peril, their messianic dream under threat, and suffering from Palestinian terrorist attacks, the settlers grew increasingly frustrated over their apparent inability to stop the peace process. As the established settler leadership ran out of ideas for derailing the peace process through legal means, other individual leaders and groups emerged with more extreme plans involving illegal and sometimes vio-

lent activities (p. 117). Although not himself a settler, Yigal Amir had ties to these extremist individuals and groups (but he was not a member of any of the groups), and it was through his involvement with them that he developed the conviction that "the killing of the prime minister [Rabin] was an order from God" which he was required to undertake (p. 121). Sprinzak shows how Amir came to this belief, discussing his personal background, his association with extremist groups and individuals, and his psychological state at the time of the murder. The portrait he paints is of a religious zealot and a troubled young man, someone who combined a fanatical religious commitment to the Land of Israel with a strong personal desire to prove himself to his family, friends, and the girl who had recently left him (p. 126). It was to prove a lethal combination.

Lest anyone think that Rabin's assassination was an exception in Israel's political tradition, Nachman Ben-Yehuda in his chapter "One More Political Murder by Jews" (also in part 1 of the book) surveys all the known political assassinations (both successful and unsuccessful) carried out by Jews over a roughly hundred-year period, from the beginning of modern Zionist settlement in Palestine in the 1880s until the end of the 1980s. His research reveals the startling fact that the assassination of Rabin is one of ninety-two "political assassination events" (p. 69).[2] The fact that most of these were aimed by Jews against other Jews—60 percent of the victims were Jews (p. 69)—clearly refutes the belief that "Jews don't kill other Jews" which was so common in Israel before Rabin's assassination and often heard in reactions to it (p. 63).[3] After analyzing these assassinations (including Rabin's), Ben-Yehuda notes a number of similarities in them: "Most of the political assassinations were directed by Jews against other Jews who underwent a process of strangerization, humiliation, and defamation. These victims were generally termed 'traitors,' 'informers,' or 'collaborators' and were perceived by the groups to represent a real and serious danger,

not just to their worldview but to what they regarded as 'the nation.' Another frequent motive in justifying political murder, and one related to the first, is revenge and retaliation for deeds that the victim allegedly perpetrated" (p. 87). Thus, Ben-Yehuda finds that "the assassination of Rabin fits the model of political murder that emerges from this study" (p. 88). But this model of political murder is not specific to Israel. Avoiding the tendency in much writing about Israel to regard it as highly exceptional, Ben-Yehuda briefly discusses political murders in other contexts and notes "that the model of political assassination that developed in Israel is not unique but is similar to models developed in other places in the world" (p. 87). What they have in common, according to Ben-Yehuda, is that they operate in accordance with an "alternative system of political-social justice" which justifies the killing (p. 88).

Parts 2 and 3 of the book examine the ways in which Israelis reacted to Rabin's assassination. Although the overwhelming reaction was one of shock and grief, there were a variety of different responses to Rabin's murder that characterized different sectors of Israel's diverse population. Religious Zionists, for instance, had to grapple with the troubling facts that the assassin had come from within their midst, that he justified his deed in terms of religious law, and that he received direct or indirect support for this from rabbinical authorities. In his chapter on the reaction of religious Zionists, Aviezer Ravitzky relates how some leaders of the religious Zionist community immediately responded to this by calling upon the community to take collective moral responsibility for the assassination; whilst others, though condemning the assassination, denied that they shared any moral responsibility for it. As the religious Zionist community came under increasing attack from secular Jews as well as from ultra-orthodox Jews in the wake of the assassination, the initial "internal moral criticism" that took place was replaced by an attitude of defensiveness and denial (p. 154). Then, in a third phase after the assassina-

tion, Ravitzky claims that as members of the religious Zionist community have internalized the trauma of the assassination, it has led to a "surprising ideological and theological silence barely preceded in the community for dozens of years" (p. 152). While this silence may be a welcome change from the heated rhetoric that religious Zionists (and others) engaged in prior to Rabin's assassination, it has come at the price of putting off the soul-searching that religious Zionists need to do in response to Rabin's murder by one of their own.

Another community in Israel with a complex response to Rabin's assassination was the Arab-Israeli community, discussed in the chapter by Majid Al-Haj. Despite their memories of Rabin as prime minister during the events of Land Day (March 30, 1976, when a number of Arab demonstrators were killed by the Israeli army) and as defense minister during the first Intifada (when he notoriously called upon soldiers to "break bones" in order to end it), Rabin was highly esteemed in the Arab-Israeli community for his courage in pursuing the peace process with the Palestinians (p. 170). Thus, Arabs in Israel expressed anger and pain over his assassination, just as most Jewish Israelis did (pp. 167-170). But this did not bring the two communities closer together. On the contrary, Al-Haj argues that "the feeling of belonging and partnership shown by Arab citizens [in the immediate aftermath of the assassination] quickly turned into disappointment and added to the existing frustration and alienation" (p. 173). This was because their reaction to the assassination was largely ignored by the media in Israel and by the Jewish public, for whom Rabin's assassination was "an internal Jewish affair" (p. 173). Instead of increasing the sense of belonging of Arab-Israelis in Israeli society, therefore, the assassination and its aftermath only served to underline their exclusion.

The group that received the most media and public attention in the week of national mourning

that followed Rabin's assassination was the young. They are the subject of a chapter by Tamar Rapoport on "The Many Voices of Israeli Youth: Multiple Interpretations of Rabin's Assassination." In the collective Israeli memory, young people have become associated with Rabin's murder due to the spontaneous outpouring of grief many teenagers displayed (p. 199). Masses of them congregated in the plaza where the murder took place, sitting on the ground in small groups singing songs and crying around memorial candles. As a result, they became collectively known as the "candle children." Yet, contrary to the monolithic public image of a generation of young people mourning the death of Rabin, Rapoport's fascinating research (involving group and individual interviews with youngsters from different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds) reveals that the reaction of young people to Rabin's assassination was far from uniform. Instead their reactions were shaped by the various socio-cultural and political contexts in which they lived. Some mourned, others celebrated, while some just remained indifferent. By elaborating these mixed reactions, Rapoport effectively reveals the gap between public image and a more complex reality.

Later chapters in the book scrutinize almost every conceivable aspect of the public's and the media's response to the assassination and commemoration of it. There is even a chapter analyzing the car bumper stickers that proliferated expressing political messages, the most famous of which simply stated the words uttered by President Clinton after officially announcing Rabin's assassination, "Shalom, Haver" (which has a variety of meanings in Hebrew, but most simply means "Goodbye, Friend").

Given this very thorough treatment of the subject of Rabin's assassination, the absence of a chapter examining the reaction of the socio-economically disadvantaged Mizrahi population (those Israeli Jews originally from the Middle East and North Africa) is a striking omission. Although

Peri notes that "it is no coincidence that Rabin's assassin came from the ranks of the marginalized Mizrahi group" (p. 32), this observation is not explored further in the book. The fact that Yigal Amir is Mizrahi deserves greater attention. Nevertheless, *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin* provides the most comprehensive scholarly analysis of Rabin's assassination that is available to date. For those wishing to understand the causes of the assassination and the reactions to it, it is indispensable. It also provides a wealth of valuable insights for anyone interested in the social and cultural processes of national mourning, grief, and commemoration. Finally, the book offers an outstanding example of how contributions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives can explore a topic of common concern. One can only hope that more such interdisciplinary efforts will appear in future.

Notes

[1]. For those in English, see Lilly Weisbrod, "Gush Emunim Ideology: >From Religious Doctrine to Political Action," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1982): pp. 265-275; David Newman, ed., *The Impact of Gush Emunim: Politics and Settlement on the West Bank* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Jewish Messianism, Religious Zionism and Israeli Politics: The Impact and Origins of Gush Emunim," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23 (1987): pp. 215-234; Kevin Avruch, "Gush Emunim: The 'Iceberg Model' of Extremism Reconsidered," *Middle Eastern Review* 21 (1988): pp. 27-33; Ian Lustick, *For The Land and The Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988); and Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[2]. According to the author's usage, this is a broad term which includes those assassinations that succeeded in killing or injuring their victim, those which failed, those which were planned but not carried out for one reason or another, and

those which were seriously discussed and considered (pp. 68-69).

[3]. Most of the assassinations, attempted assassinations, and planned assassinations that Ben-Yehuda analyzes took place during the tumultuous years 1939-1948 when three rival Jewish underground organizations (the Haganah, Etzel, and Lehi) were engaged in fighting against the British Mandatory authorities and against each other. Most of the assassinations were carried out by members of these militia organizations (p. 69).

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