**The Sulam group and Dr. Israel Eldad as leaders of an alternative ideological worldview and a source of anti-establishment activities in the first decade of the State of Israel (1948–1958)**

The popular image of the first decade of the State of Israel’s existence is that of a country dominated by Mapai as the major large party with a forceful David Ben-Gurion at the helm, buttressed by broad parliamentary and public support, and serving as Prime Minister for most of the decade. These conditions allowed the leadership of the new state to effectively implement its plans in a wide range of areas, thereby realizing its vision of Zionist-Socialism and its support of statism, or centralized state control of the society and the economy. Nonetheless, despite the dominance of the ruling party in Israel’s first ten years as a nation, there remained pockets of ideological and political opposition to Mapai, its leaders, and the worldview and vision they had for the young state.

One of these oppositional forces was the Sulam group, founded in April 1949, (continuing its activities until approximately 1963) and led by Dr. Israel Scheib (later known as Israel Eldad), a former member of the leadership of Lehi, a Zionist paramilitary organization in the years of British rule, and one of its leading theoreticians. Upon joining Sulam, Eldad was asked to add commentaries and explanations to a document entitled *Ikarey Hathia*, (*Principles of Resurrection*), an ideological treatise penned by the founder of Lehi, Abraham Stern, known by his underground nickname, Yair. In this endeavor, Eldad first became acquainted with the idea of “The Kingdom of Israel*,*” a concept that would shape his ideological future. Eldad would come to emphasize what he saw as an obligation to establish an independent State of Israel that functions as a kingdom in its essence. During his time within Lehi’s ranks, Eldad would try to promote this idea among his friends, but many of them opposed its far-reaching implications.

In the run-up to the election of the First Knesset, members of the *Ha-Lochamim* Party (the Fighters’ List, representing former Lehi members) refused to comply with Eldad’s and his followers’ demand to place the idea of The Kingdom of Israel at the center of the party’s election campaign. As a result, Eldad and his followers left the party and decided to focus on publishing a monthly journal, *Sulam (Ladder) for the Thought of Liberty (Herut) Israel*. At the same time, the group began hosting regular political meetings at branches located in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem to discuss the major issues on the political agenda of the young Israeli state.

For Sulam’s members, the Kingdom of Israel idea was the ultimate solution to what they viewed as fundamental problems and defects in the state that threatened its continued existence. The philosophical principles of the group had an effect on its sociological structure and its activities throughout the 1950s. Of greatest significance was the group’s status as a cultural and social enclave alienated from, and resentful toward the governmental establishment, as well as toward broad strata of the Israeli public.

Therefore, a key conclusion of this study is that the combination of a radical and far-reaching worldview dedicated to establishing the Kingdom of Israel and the existence of an “enclave culture” wherein members demonstrate intense loyalty and personal commitment to the group, played a vital role in creating the appropriate conditions for the establishment of two underground organizations: The Kingdom of Israel underground that operated in 1953, and the squad that carried out the assassination of Dr. Israel Kastner in March 1957.

Another fundamental question arises from the Kingdom of Israel idea and from Sulam’s radical position on issues such as the desired character of the Israeli state, the rule of law in the country, and the nature of its judicial system. Did these ideological leanings place thegroup at the far right of the Israeli political spectrum and did it even include certain elements of fascism within it?

An in-depth study of the views expressed by Sulam in its magazine and other publications indicate the existence of a number of similarities between the characteristics of the far right in general as defined in the academic literature and the ideas subscribed to by the group. However, a question remains as to whether the integration of apparently fascist attitudes in the group’s worldview and flagship program was deliberate and reflected a deep commitment to such ideas, or whether it was done for limited, short-term purposes and did not really represent any true fascist sympathies. The ongoing efforts of Israel Eldad and his supporters to shake off the image of extremism and zealotry that clung to them indicates that, in their subjective perception at least, the fascist program was not integral to the group’s identity. In addition, Ben-Gurion’s statist approach, which was acceptable in those years (although it was criticized as étatisme by its critics), provided legitimacy to Sulam’s leadership, who supported this policy in principle, even if they demanded greater use of state apparatus to pursue the goal of establishing the Kingdom of Israel.

**Sulam as a cultural and social “enclave”**

The founding nucleus of Sulam included about 30 people, most of whom were former Lehi members born in Eastern Europe in the first and the second decades of the 20th century and who were mostly in their 20s and 30s when the group was founded. Having grown up in middle-class Zionist families that still maintained religious lifestyles in Europe, they received a traditional Jewish education in their youth but once in high school, they usually acquired a general humanist education, some of them receiving academic educations, mainly in the humanities. Another small group of Sulam’s founders, originally Lehi members, were born in Palestine. Most of these Sulam founders lived in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Israel’s largest cities. On the whole, they belonged to the middle class, were considered “veterans” of the country’s society, having lived there before the establishment of the State of Israel. During its first years, Sulam did not have a foothold in the periphery or the more vulnerable socioeconomic areas of the big cities. Nor were any of those who arrived on during the mass aliyah (immigration) to Israel from North African and Arab countries following the founding of the states represented in Sulam’s ranks.

The group was overwhelmingly male in composition and men occupied the majority of roles in the day-to-day running of the journal. However, some female activists who belonged to the founding group gained a central and important status due to their organizational and social contributions.

Sulam’s original relatively homogenous socioeconomic profile became far more diverse in the first half of the 1950s as new and younger members joined the group. Most of the new adherents had been born in Palestine, but their parents had immigrated from a wide variety of countries. Prominent among the newcomers was a group of Yemeni descent. These new activists came mostly from the lower-middle class, and some of them were even drawn from Israel’s most vulnerable populations. In this sense, the group became a sociological cross-section with a diverse social composition of people from different socioeconomic, educational, and ethnic strata. The unifying factor was the deep commitment to Sulam’s ideology and common goals, as well as the collective feeling of belonging. Indeed, key activists in Sulam repeatedly emphasized their shared aspiration to establish the Kingdom of Israel despite the fact that mainstream Israeli society found the vision extreme and unacceptable.

Sulam’s structure was built on a foundation of symbols and rituals which created its unique character. They held regular meetings in the Sulam club in Tel Aviv that included political and cultural events (such as Bible lessons and studying the poetry of Uri Zvi Greenberg), until Dr. Israe Kastner’s assassination in March 1957, which represented a turning point for the organization and its purported role in it. In addition, lectures were given on current political issues, followed by open discussions. Similar activities took place at the Sulam club in Jerusalem, but on a smaller scale.

Their main annual event took place on the anniversary of the death of Lehi’s first commander, Abraham Stern, Yair (usually in February). This day had symbolic significance for the group and was considered an opportunity to demonstrate their influence by organizing large open assemblies which were widely publicized among the general public well in advance.

Cultural or social events were held infrequently because Sulam leaders did not believe that such events could help further their ideological goals. Nonetheless, Sulam enjoyed an active cadre among its ranks, and its participants developed a culture of solidarity and deep commitment to the group’s values and norms.

Sulam’s unique ideological, social, and cultural elements render the group an ideal case study for the “enclave culture” model as proposed by British anthropologist, Mary Douglas. A culture enclave is usually created by a group of people whose views are not acceptable to the public at large, sometimes even challenging generally accepted norms. The activities of such groups can lead to resentment, fear, criticism, or censure of its members on the part of the general public, who perceive these groups as a threat to the existing political and social order. As a result, these groups create closed social and cultural units that gradually cultivate independent identities and set clear boundaries between themselves and mainstream society.

It did not take long from Sulam’s founding for its members to begin acting as members of an enclave culture. The main reason for this were the constraints and limitations they faced from the Israeli political establishment and the broader society, although an element of willful self-imposed isolation cannot be discounted. In this way, Sulam leaders and followers sought to maintain their special ideological position and to emphasize the civic and cultural differences between themselves and their ideological and political rivals. Their primary ambition was to topple the Mapai regime, but the Herut movement, Mapai’s main opposition, was also firmly in their sights. Herut’s insistence that they were the sole successors of its founding leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky meant that they became Sulam’s main rival in the Revisionist movement representing a more maximalist form of Zionism emphasizing Israel’s territorial integrity and the right to Jewish sovereignty.

Lehi veterans who tried to integrate into the public sphere after the State’s establishment, above all in order to secure a livelihood, encountered numerous obstacles owing to government policies hostile to them. The administration at the time feared the possibility that the presence of former members of the *Porshim* extremist organizations in the public sector would enable them to enjoy a public platform to spread their extreme views. One of the most prominent cases of attempts to restrict Sulam members from taking on roles as public servantsr was the attempt by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, in his capacity as Defense Minister, to prevent the employment of Israel Eldad as a teacher in the state education system. In an explanatory letter, Ben-Gurion claimed that: “[Eldad] wants to use weapons against the IDF and the Israeli government in special cases.” Although the Supreme Court revoked this directive, it cemented the antagonism against Mapai and its leaders among Sulam’s members. In response, they formulated a special system of covert beliefs, concepts, and symbols known only to them. In this sense, Sulam’s members created an “emotional community” as explained by American historian Barbara Rosenwein, which distinguished them from broader Israeli society, and distinguished their relationships and attitudes toward other political groups. Sulam’s leaders emphasized that their ambition “to work for the realization of a founding idea,” which referred to the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel, and which obliged them to be different ideologically, conceptually, and emotionally from the rest of the country.

**Malchut Israel – The Kingdom of Israel as the founding idea of Sulam**

The central mission and driving engine of Sulam throughout its existence (1949–1963) was the vision of the Kingdom of Israel. As mentioned above, Israel Eldad, the main founder of Sulam, was exposed to this idea during his first meetings with Lehi commander Avraham “Yair” Stern. In these meetings, Yair shared with Eldad his *Principles of Resurrection (Ikarey Hathiya)* which he wrote in the second half of 1940 outlining the elements of how to oppose British rule and providing a guide for Lehi members following the foreseeable end of the independence struggle in which the period of “lordship and redemption” in the history of the nation would begin. The phrase The Kingdom of Israel appeared in section 10 of Yair’s document, in which it is stated that one of the main tasks after the end of the British Mandate was, “*Kibbutz Galuyot Shalem* (a complete ingathering of the exiles) within the Kingdom of Israel.”

The term “kingship” as an expression embodying independence and complete sovereignty that appeared in Uri Zvi Greenberg’s poems. The poet, known for his ultra-nationalist views, greatly influenced Eldad, whose ideological and political worldview was also heavily influenced by a number of European philosophers, most notably Friedrich Nietzsche.

Abba Ahimeir, who headed the *Brit Ha-Birionim* (Alliance of Bullies), also used to emphasize in his publications that the Zionist movement should strive for the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel and not be content with the building of “national home” as set forth in the Balfour Declaration.

The interpretations and expansions which Eldad added to Stern’s *Principles* document, at Yair’s request, focused on the idea of Kingdom. However, after Yair’s murder by a British officer in February of 1942, Natan Yellin-Mor and Yitzhak Shamir (born Itzhak Yezernetzky, and who would serve as the seventh Prime Minister of Israel), took command of the organization (in collaboration with Eldad), and rejected both Stern’s document and the broader conclusions Eldad drew from it. Shamir, who was part of Lehi’s leadership in those years, postponed any further action regarding the Kingdom idea until after the foundation of the state.

In February 1949, Eldad presented an organized plan for practically advancing this ideal at the conference of the political party, the Fighters’ List, to which he belonged, as did many other former Lehi members. The program was given the symbolic name: “The Ladder of Jacob our Father”(*Sulamo shel Yaakov Avinu*). The plan stated that the first stage relied on the establishment of a powerful sovereign entity that would have regional power, military strength, economic viability, and social stability. This would attract mass immigration (aliyah) to the country. The second, and the more important stage of the plan, was the building of a national and cultural framework to renew the ancient moral and spiritual values of the Biblical era and the Prophets. At this point, all foreign ideologies and fashions that still clung to the nation (both Eastern European socialism and western capitalism), would be eliminated.

After most of the party members rejected Eldad’s and his followers’ demand to put their plan at the core of the party’s platform, they decided to withdraw from the party and focus on publishing a monthly journal to discuss and disseminate their position to the Israeli public.

Sulam’s main argument was that the concept of the Kingdom of Israel was the only way to solve the complex problems facing the country since its establishment. Sulam leaders claimed that the State of Israel represented mere a transitional stage until the establishment of the Kingdom. However, they were also cognizant of the fact that existing conditions in the country made it highly unlikely that they would succeed in mobilizing any mass public support for their vision. Moreover, the existence of a strong central government discouraged radical action as a path to achieving the group’s political goals. Added to these tangible, pragmatic problems was the difficulty Sulam’s leadership had in articulating a clear conceptual or practical framework for their vision regarding certain key questions about the composition of the Kingdom of Israel. Substantive issues, like whether the kingdom would be a literal or symbolic monarchy and what the relationship between the government and religion would remain nebulous and unresolved.

During its existence, Sulam presented two action plans for the realization of the Kingdom, but these plans were limited in scope compared to the grand vision of the original program. At the end of 1955, in response to what they considered the government’s failure in the security and the political sphere, Sulam presented a limited program entitled “The Solution: Emergency Government, War of Independence, and Political Neutrality.” The plan called for the immediate establishment of a “national emergency government” whose ministers would be drawn from the ranks of the people and not from the political parties. The main task of this government would be the conduct of a “second liberation war that would complete the occupation of the entire country which remained unachieved.” In May 1958, on the tenth anniversary of independence, and following the Sinai War, another plan was published, “The State of Israel as a Bridge to the Kingdom of Israel.” The plan sought to clarify the main ideological and political foundations of Sulam’s Kingdom aspirations, as well as emphasize the state’s responsibility for implementing it. In addition, the “spiritual revival” stage, which was supposed to be the final phase of the plan, was introduced only on the theoretical level because it was impossible to ascertain when it could be attained. These changes from the earlier plans were probably attributable internal reactions to the Kastner assassination, committed by some activists who were part of the group and caused severe damage to its public image. It also reflected real concerns about the possibility of Government enforcement activity against them.

The gap between the extreme ideology of Sulam leadership on the one side, and their circumspect conduct on the other side, created a sense of dissonance among many of the group members who felt that immediate action was required to realize the group’s revolutionary vision. This dissonance, coupled with the Sulam’s enclave culture, led to the creation of two secret and violent splinters within it. The first was The Kingdom of Israel Underground, which operated from the end of 1952 until the middle of 1953 in response to a series of Arab terrorist attacks, the *Fedayeen* insurgency in the country in the 1950s, resulting in hundreds of dead, and growing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe (the Prague trials, and the Jewish writers and physicians trials in the Soviet Union under the rule of Stalin). Another violent splinter group was behind the assassination of Dr. Israel Kastner in March 1957, the aim of which was to express their opposition to the government’s decision in the wake of international pressure on Israel to return all the gains made during the Sinai War and return to the ceasefire lines. Added to this, according to Zeev Ekstein, one of the murderers, was the motive to take revenge on Kastner for what they viewed as his willingness to collaborate with the Nazi regime during the Holocaust, about which facts emerged during the court proceedings of a libel suit brought with respect to accusations of his collaboration.

**The controversy between Sulam and Herut**

The position of Sulam as an enclave culture focused on achieving the idea of the Kingdom of Israel directly affected the group’s attitudes concerning a number of fundamental questions related to the nature and composition of the state and its administration; its civic image; the role and the status of the rule of law and the judicial system in the country; and the place of individual rights in Israeli society. Another significant question for them revolved around the legitimate boundaries of action in the public space for ideological and political groups, and, in particular, whether the use of violence could be justified in certain circumstances. Sulam’s radical position was to remove any obstacle that could prevent the implementation of its vision. While both Sulam and Herut followed the same trajectory of renouncing violence as a means to achieve political goals (Sulam in the context of Lehi and Herut in the context of the Irgun under the leadership of Menachem Begin), the two organizations took on very different characters.

Sulam became an enclave group located on the right-wing of the political spectrum, while Herut built itself into a broad-based political party in an effort to quickly transition into the center of the political spectrum and present a viable alternative to Mapai rule. To this end, it adopted democratic norms within a relatively short time and allied itself with political forces expressing moderate positions on the main issues.

The intensification of disagreements between the two movements was also a result of the stormy relationship between Israel Eldad and Menachem Begin. It began with their work together in the 1930s in the Betar movement in Poland which created a profound ideological and personal closeness between them, but it soon turned into a bitter rivalry in the 1940s, when Begin was appointed to the command of Irgun (December 1943), and Eldad became a member of the Lehi leadership. The rivalry intensified further after the establishment of the State of Israel, the main controversy being whether Herut and Begin were the sole successors of the Revisionist movement and its founder, Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Begin saw himself as the sole heir of Jabotinsky – the “founding father,” and constructed a convincing historical legacy from the Revisionist movement and Betar, an early Revisionist youth movement, through to Irgun’s campaigns against the British, and the foundation of Herut. Sulam and Eldad refused to accept Herut’s claimed monopoly on Jabotinsky’s legacy, appealing to the other side to recognize them as also a legitimate heir to Jabotinsky. Another demand of Sulam was for Herut to recognize Lehi’s significant contribution to the struggle against the British Mandate, and especially the “historical truth,” as Eldad put it, that Yair’s decision to launch an armed struggle against the British Empire preceded Begin’s declaration of “rebellion” against it.

Eldad also claimed that Begin’s legal education in Poland as a young man left him with an unwavering dedication to the power of the rule of law and his lack of tolerance for any criticism of the Israeli judicial system. According to Eldad, these attitudes also largely dictated Begin’s political conduct, which Eldad considered naive and ineffectual.

The main differences between the parties revolved around issues related to the rule of law and justice. Herut under Begin was relatively quick to adopt the principle of political change by democratic ballot only. This may have occurred in large part as a consequence of the strong reaction against them when they opposed the reparations agreement with Germany. In addition, Begin emphasized the “supremacy of law” and the sovereignty of the judicial system in the country. Sulam, on the other hand, regarded the democratic system as a mere instrument, as opposed to an inviolable principle, and whose continuation was contingent on its usefulness and its contribution to the achievement of national goals (as defined by Sulam) especially, of course, the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel. As a result, Sulam challenged the basic civic duty to obey the laws of the state and distrusted the judicial system, suspecting it of being an arm of the executive. A prominent example for this claim was found by Sulam in the government’s decision to hear the trial of the members of the Malchut Israel (Kingdom of Israel) underground movement not in a civilian court, as was customary in such cases, but in a special military tribunal established for this purpose at Tzrifin military camp (hence the group’s name – the “Tzrifin Underground”). Sulam’s leaders referred to the underground prisoners as “Hebrew patriots whose national dignity is not a ridiculous concept, but something sacred.” Hence their claim that the state laws did not represent binding norms, but only technical tools or “suggestions” that could be disregarded in the interest of achieving its goals. Indeed, in cases like the Tzrifin affair, there was even a moral justification for violating certain laws. In his defiant article: “I Preach for the Use of Weapons,” published in the February 1951 issue of *Sulam*, Israel Eldad demonstrated that he was entitled to “claim the right to preach using weapons in cases where he sees himself obligated to revolt against the Israeli government.” This article appeared about two months after the High Court of Justice accepted Eldad’s legal petition regarding his non-employment as a teacher in the state education system because Ben-Gurion, then Minister of Defense accused Eldad of preaching “the use of weapons against the IDF and the Israeli government in cases he sees fit.”

The principle ideological disputes between Sulam and Herut, and the personal confrontation between Eldad and Begin, influenced Sulam’s position on the question of Herut’s effectiveness as an opposition to the Mapai rule. The main argument made by Sulam throughout the 1950s was that Herut and Begin had become an integral part of the institutional political system, and in fact, that Begin’s Herut accepted Mapai and Ben-Gurion’s rule. Sulam’s criticism in this vein increased up to the elections to the Fourth Knesset (November 1959), when it called for a boycott of the elections, a move designed primarily to prevent its supporters from voting for Herut.

Even so, the deep ideological and political rift and the personal rivalry between the two sides did not prevent Sulam and Eldad from cooperating with Herut in certain areas, in part out of their desire to become, in some way, a source of conceptual authority that could wield some influence over Herut’s decisions by serving as its ideological “gatekeeper.” Eldad had no choice other than to accept Menachem Begin as the leader of the Revisionist camp but he expected that, in return, Begin would be willing to accept Eldad as his mentor and senior adviser. However, these conditions were not acceptable to Begin and his camp.

**Sulam and the radical critique of the Ben-Gurion State**

Having discussed the Kingdom of Israel concept and its development, and the functionof Sulam as an enclave culture with its own habitus, or worldview, that shaped its positions on basic civic and political questions, we now examine in greater detail the relations between the group and the local governing bodies, especially the General Security Service, better known as the Shin Bet. We will also examine the ideological and political discourse between Sulam and two other ideological and anti-establishment centers of political activity at that time and which adopted radical ideas on the question of the identity and goals of the Israeli state. The first of these was *HaOlam HaZeh*. the weekly magazineedited by Uri Avnery that also acted as an ideological-political movement, and The Center for Young Hebrews, led by Yonatan Ratosh, which was operated by activists of the former Canaanite movement. Basically opposed to Zionism and devoted to restoring the ancient Hebrew civilization, they resumed activities after the establishment of the state, operating until 1953. The discourse of these three extreme groups reflected the ideological and political mood that developed on the fringes of Israeli society in its first years and the way in which the fringe factions referred to the governmental and political center.

Throughout their years of activity, Sulam’s leaders engaged in continuous journalistic and public activity expressing their harsh and sometimes blatantly personal criticism of Mapai and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. Sulam’s journal regularly included harsh attacks on government policy in almost every area, often accompanied by predictions of the catastrophic destruction of the Israeli nation itself. One of the main areas subject to criticism was the foreign and security policy of the government which failed to offer a real response to the frequent infiltration attacks that caused many civilian casualties (many of them in frontier areas that were populated by immigrants (*olim)*. The attacks undermined the citizens’ sense of personal security and damaged national morale. As a result, Sulam accused the government of a failing foreign and security policy which was “pushing us into a political abyss.”

Another opportunity for Sulam to attack the government presented itself in January 1954 with the opening of legal proceedings in the defamation lawsuit filed by State authorities in the case of Dr. Israel Kastner (who was a Mapai activist and served as the spokesman of the Ministry of Trade and Industry), in response to the accusation of a citizen, Malkiel Greenwald, that Kastner had collaborated with the Nazis during and even after the Holocaust. After Judge Benjamin Halevy published his ruling rejecting the lawsuit and accepting most of Greenwald's claims (June 1955), Sulam coined the term “Kastnerism,” meaning that Kastner’s conduct, as revealed in the trial, was analogous to the “cooperation” of Mapai leaders with the enemies during the Mandate period, and especially against their opponents from the Revisionist camp.

The Sinai War (October 1956) and its military achievements aroused enthusiasm and hope among Sulam members for a real change in the country’s security and political approach, especially after Ben-Gurion’s declaration of “the establishment of the Third Kingdom of Israel.” But this hope was quickly replaced by feelings of disappointment and anger due to the government agreeing to return to the 1949 borders in response to heavy international pressure. Sulam claimed that the country’s leaders would succumb to every international demand just as the “Judenrat members agreed to send Jews to the kilns in the hope of saving the rest.”

The assassination of Dr. Kastner in early March 1957, which happened in the midst of government discussions about the completion of the withdrawal process, led Sulam to argue, after many pointed to their direct involvement in the murder, that the main beneficiary from the event was Mapai itself, as the assassination distracted public opinion from the security and diplomatic collapse. The decision of the Attorney General, Haim Cohen, in September 1957 to file an indictment against Eldad for his alleged involvement in Kastner’s assassination for “fulfilling a role in the management of a terrorist organization and publishing things that are a plot to incite rebellion” created deep feelings of injustice and personal persecution among Sulam members. However, after the state withdrew the indictment, Sulam began to moderate its anti-government stance, becoming more cautious and controlled. The attacks on the political and the security moves of the government continued unabated, but now the criticism was more restrained and avoided character attacks.

In the absence of any legal basis, the state authorities did not ban the publication of Sulam magazine (May 1949), or prosecute its circle of activists, but the security forces led by the Shin Bet did constantly monitor the group as part of their mandate to keep dangerous organizations under surveillance. As noted already, the first indication of this state oversight, indeed, interference, was the attempt to prevent the employment of Israel Eldad as a teacher in the state education system (September 1950). Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, in his capacity as Defense Minister, appealed to the Ministry of Education to prevent Eldad from becoming a teacher due to the extreme content included in his autobiographical book *Ma'asar Rishon* (*The First Tithe*), and in his journalistic articles. This attempt failed after the Supreme Court accepted Eldad’s petition on the matter, and perhaps for this reason, the authorities refrained from taking any other restrictive measures against the group in the following years.

The state security forces continued monitoring Sulam and its members, but in the second half of 1952, they nonetheless failed to prevent the emergence of the Kingdom of Israel Underground. The Security Services commissioner Issar Harel admitted that they had no prior information about the identity of the people who carried out a terrorist attack against the Embassy of the Soviet Union in Tel Aviv in February 1953. Although the government accepted the recommendation to declare the underground a terrorist organization (under the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance), it refrained from including the *Sulam* magazine and its group members.

In subsequent years, the Shin Bet increased its monitoring of the meeting places of Sulam activists and sent agents to report on the meetings’ activities. One of these agents was Zeev Ekstein, who became convinced by the movement, revealed his true identity to one of the group’s leaders (Yaakov Heruti) and was permitted to remain a member of Sulam provided he break ties with the security forces. Several years later, Ekstein was one of the assassins of Dr. Israel Kastner.

After Kastner’s assassination, the state law enforcement agencies sought to carry out broad enforcement moves against Sulam. In addition to the prosecution of the murderers, who were sentenced to imprisonment, but were eventually released from jail some years later, legal proceedings were instituted against several key proponents of the group, who were charged with indirect involvement and vicarious liability for the murder. Furthermore, the Attorney General filed an indictment against Israel Eldad, including three serious offenses: “fulfilling a position in the management of a terrorist organization”; “publishing material in a plot to incite rebellion”; and “intention to instill hostility toward the legally incumbent government.” However, a few months later, the case was closed after the prosecution failed in its attempt to prove the connection between the underground organization and Sulam.

Worth mentioning also is that in the mid-1950s, the state security forces tried to disrupt and reduce the activities of certain other ideological radical groups that were operating in the public sphere. One of them was the weekly *HaOlam HaZeh* edited by Uri Avnery, who set a critical agenda against Mapai leaders and institutions. Another one was The Line of Volunteers (*Shurat Hamitndvim*) organization, that fought against public corruption and in favor of moral purity. In an unusual move initiated by the Security Services Commissioner Issar Harel to undermine those bodies he described as “inciting and slandering the Israeli government, Mapai, and the Security Service,” for almost two years (July 1956 – April 1958), the Shin Bet published a weekly called *Rimon* which positively presented the government’s positions.

Another extremist ideological group that used to operate during that period was the Young Hebrew Center led by Yonatan Ratosh, which actually continued the path of the Canaanite Movement formed in the 1940s. During this period, they concentrated mainly on publishing the journal *Alef*, which expressed the extreme anti-Zionist positions of the Canaanites. Their main argument was that the basic goal of the Zionist movement to find a national solution to the “problem of the Jews” was fundamentally flawed since Jews are not a nation, but Judaism is a universal religion without a territorial basis. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the Canaanites called for the opening of the second phase of the Hebrew Revolution which would be the abolition of the existing political structure of the Middle East and its reconstitution into a federal structure based on an alliance between the “natural nations which were born and operated in the ancient land” of the Fertile Crescent.

The three groups presented a radical alternative to government policy, and after independence, they claimed that the main reason for Israel’s security, foreign, and economic problems, was its limited territorial area (the ceasefire lines) which, in fact, endangered its existence. Hence the urgent need to expand its borders, whether through military force as proposed by Sulam, or by the establishment of a broad regional federation framework in which Israel would play a key role, as proposed by *HaOlam HZzeh* and the Canaanites. In both cases, the abandonment of the Zionist character of the state was required.

At the civil level, the groups rejected the model formulated by the state leadership. Sulam supported Ben-Gurion’s statehood approach that demanded that citizens contribute toward advancing national goals, but at the same time, its leaders emphasized that the government failed to recruit all the potential inherent in the citizenry to achieve important objectives in terms of the state’s security and prosperity. On the other hand, *HaOlam HaZeh* strongly opposed the statehood policy and treated it as a draconian tool that intended to strengthen Ben-Gurion’s status. The desired model in its eyes was the ethos of “Hebrewness,” which embodied the authentic civic and social values that developed in the country during the *Yishuv* (pre-State) period and during the War of Independence. The Canaanites, argued that eligibility for citizenship should be reserved only for people with ties to the ancient Hebrew homeland as opposed to diaspora Jews.

Fundamental differences between the parties also revolved around the question of the state’s cultural identity and the place of the Jewish religion within it. Sulam emphasized the importance of the religious component, and the impossibility of detaching Judaism from the national and cultural identity. However, this did not infer the establishment of a “*Halakhic* State” (state base on Jewish law), but the renewal of Jewish thought and enterprise as part of their vision of the Kingdom of Israel. *HaOlam HaZeh* and the even more radical Canaanites insisted that the role of the Diaspora in Jewish life ended after the establishment of the State, and that Israelis needed to forge a new national identity without the influence of Diasporic culture. *HaOlam HaZeh* referred to the Jewish Diaspora as a reservoir for aliyah, but without any right to intervene in the nation’s affairs. The Canaanites for their part, called for a complete separation from Diaspora Jewry and the need to maintain complete secular rule in the country.

Any similarities in the worldviews of each of the groups did not prevent hostility and mutual rejection between them. The radical anti-Zionism of the Canaanites and their alienation of Diaspora Jewry made them illegitimate partners in the eyes of the public and caused Sulam and *HaOlam HaZeh* both to refrain from any possible affiliation with them.

The relations between Sulam and *HaOlam HaZeh* experienced fluctuations over the years. In the early 1950s, they were colored by the deep ideological differences between the “Maximalist Revisionist Zionism” of Sulam and the identification of *HaOlam Hazeh* with the radical left. In 1950, a scathing critique against Uri Avnery’s book, *The Other Side of the Coin*, which dealt with the questionable conduct of IDF soldiers during the War of Independence, was published in Sulam’s magazine. In response, a lawyer who was close to Avnery filed a civil lawsuit against Israel Eldad, on charges of incitement to murder and defamation. In addition, in December 1952, suspicion arose that people connected to Eldad had placed an explosive device near the building of the *HaOlam Hazeh* office in Tel Aviv. The relations between the two parties improved in the mid-1950s, following their standing together at the forefront of the struggle against Mapai rule. The rapprochement culminated after Kastner’s assassination; both groups vehemently opposed the government’s claim about the close connection between the perpetrators of the assassination and Sulam. They argued instead that the murder was intended to serve the interests of the government, and, therefore, there was a reasonable suspicion that the state security mechanisms were behind it. The ideological conflicts between the two groups reemerged in the following years. One of the reasons was the publication in 1958 of the manifesto *The Hebrew Proclamation: The Principles of Semitic Action* written by *HaOlam Hazeh* activists and a group of former Lehi members (headed by Natan Yellin-Mor) who belonged to the left wing of the organization. The document expressed a radical anti-Zionist line, centered on the statement that for “the rooting of the Hebrew nation in the Semitic space (the regional space), it must eliminate the Zionist regime and abolish the special status of its institutions.”

The Canaanite movement posed a different challenge to Sulam. Since his Lehi days, Israel Eldad’s rivals had tried to attribute to him an ideological affinity and sympathy for the Canaanite worldview, an effort that also took place in the context of the struggle between Eldad and Herut. Eldad’s writing did indeed contain some terms from the lexicon of the Canaanite group, such as the expressions, *Hebrew* and *Hebrews*, but on various occasions, he expressed his firm opposition to their positions, especially their willingness to reject Jewish history and heritage.

In conclusion, each of the groups that had clear positions and a limited but cohesive group of supporters strived for a Messianic-Utopian “correction of the world” (*Tikun Olam*) for the country’s inhabitants and even for the entire Jewish people. This would take materialize through the vision of the Kingdom of Israel according to Sulam, or through building a federation of the people of the region, as claimed *HaOlam HaZeh* and the Canaanites. Despite the fact they were small and marginalized groups, the authorities estimated that the potential danger they posed terms of political subversion, and even the use of violence and terrorism, was greater than their size suggested. Therefore, they were put under intelligence surveillance, and occasional attempts were made to disrupt their activities in various ways.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This study focuses on two kinds of interrelationships that existed within Sulam’s circle and influenced its unique approach. The first of them is the relationship between its founding idea, the Kingdom of Israel, and the social configuration in which it operated – an enclave culture. The second is between the extreme ideology and rhetoric that characterized the group and the illegal and violent practices that emerged from its ranks on two different occasions: the emergence of the Kingdom of Israel underground, and the murder of Dr. Kastner.

The Kingdom idea gave the group its distinct identity and created a rich cultural and social framework around it, as well as a unique system of concepts and symbols. However, the ideological and social differentiation of Sulam was also a result of the efforts of its ideological and political rivals, who sought to prevent it from expanding its scope of impact on the Israeli public. Sulam is a typical example of the fact that the praxis of an enclave group dictates its presence on the margins, a situation that prevents it from becoming a broad social movement capable of influencing the agenda of a democratic state.

The more significant affinity that existed within the group was between the ideology and the extreme rhetoric of many of its members, and between the illegal and the violent activities that arose within it. Although Israel Eldad was the most esteemed figure in the group, his flexible style of leadership had the effect of creating dissonance among many of its members, due to the large gap created between ideology and practice. In the absence of close supervision and a rigid organizational hierarchy, some of Sulam’s members decided to initiate independent moves to carry out its radical vision. This process led to the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel underground in 1952–1953, and the assassination of Dr. Israel Kastner in March 1957. Sulam members who took part in the terrorist actions treated Eldad as the authority that gave them the ideological and the moral confirmation, even indirectly, for their activities. However, the information available is insufficient to determine precisely the degree of his knowledge and involvement in each of these cases.

After the revelation of the Kingdom of Israel underground in 1953, Sulam’s leadership, and mainly Eldad, were still ideologically committed and their revolutionary vision remained a priority for them. This is evidence that they erred in their assessment of the resilience of the young state and its ability to successfully neutralize violent revolutionary threats from marginalized groups. However, after the Kastner assassination, the group’s positions started to show more signs of moderation and restraint, at least in how they were expressed publicly. It seems that at this stage, there was a growing understanding among Sulam’s leadership that any attempt to act in a revolutionary or violent way in a situation where there is a functioning democratic state with a sovereign government that enjoys broad public support is doomed to failure and would suffer from a harsh governmental response.

The significant impact of the interrelationships between a constitutive idea and a social configuration, and also between ideology and practice as a mechanism that provides insights into the dynamics of ideological-political enclave groups, has been expressed in similar contexts operating in Israel and also abroad. These included the Israeli extreme left group, the Red Front, headed by Udi Adiv and Dan Vered in the early 1970s, and the Red Brigades from Italy. Most of the activity of these groups concentrated on ideological and political issues, rather than on terrorist acts. Although these frameworks operated under different circumstances and conditions, one can perceive certain similarities in each of them to the enclave culture of Sulam.

Another important issue to address is whether the ideology of Sulam, and mostly the Kingdom of Israel idea, included fascist elements. An in-depth study of the positions expressed by the group over the years, both around the Kingdom idea, as well as regarding basic civic and political questions, points to quite a few assumptions with characteristics and features that the literature associates with the extreme right, and with a clear (albeit unconscious) affinity for major ideas arising from European fascism. However, Sulam members failed to pay sufficient attention to this issue, although its associations with fascism in the eyes of the Israeli public were a source of some embarrassment for the group. Accusations of overt subscription to fascist ideas are somewhat undermined by Sulam’s claim that its worldview was not based on imported foreign ideas (such as socialism or capitalism), but on ancient biblical heritage and the vision of the Prophets according to Sulam’s interpretation. For this reason, the painting of Sulam as a fascist group was considered by its members as just another attempt by their opponents to publicly discredit them.

A different explanation is that the statehood concept that the country’s leadership, and especially Ben-Gurion, worked to establish was not only perceived as positive and necessary in the eyes of Sulam’s leaders (unlike its critics who treated it as étatisme and even tyrannical) but, that they felt that this policy even needed to be extended in order to enlist the public to achieve national goals. It is therefore possible that Sulam’s members didn’t see themselves as possessing an unacceptable fascist worldview, but as having an activist and beneficial attitude toward the national interests. However, by using radical terminology that evoked fascism to an extent, they showed a great deal of recklessness and thoughtlessness toward the feelings of the Israeli public after the Holocaust.

Nearly 60 years after Sulam stopped operating, it is worth examining what is left of its heritage, especially in terms of the Kingdom of Israel idea. Currents which existed in Sulam which continue to find expression today concern the politics of the state vis-à-vis religion and Halakha and Messianic-Kabbalistic interpretations of political history. In a time in which the “end of ideology” is often proclaimed, there may still be room for the emergence of ideological enclave groups such Sulam whose existence is based on an extreme and separatist worldview of a fundamentally secular political as opposed to religious nature.