Right-wing Israelis greet soldiers returning from rotation in Bethlehem, April 24, 2002. MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP

The Shrinking Space of Citizenship

Ethnocratic Politics in Israel

Oren Yiftachel

On February 14, 2002, the Israeli government sent several light planes to spray 12,000 dunams of crops in the southern Negev region with poisonous chemicals. The destroyed fields had been cultivated for years by Bedouin Arabs, on ancestral lands they claim as their own. The minister responsible for land management, Avigdor Lieberman, explained:

> We must stop their illegal invasion of state land by all means possible. The Bedouins have no regard for our laws; in the process we are losing the last resources of state lands. One of my main missions is to return to the power of the Land Authority in dealing with the non-Jewish threat to our lands.[1]

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Lieberman's words clearly proposed a forceful separation of Palestinian-Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel. Expressions such as "our land," "our laws" and "their invasion" demarcate sharply the limits of identity and rights in the Jewish state. Not surprisingly, Lieberman (a West Bank settler, and thus, ironically, an "illegal invader" himself) failed to mention that the Bedouins are citizens of the state of Israel, and hence can, and should, receive state lands for their needs. The minister failed to explain why the state never attempted to enforce the law by legal means. Worse, he overlooked the ramifications of the aerial attack: a growing sense of alien-

ation among Bedouins, once a community keen to integrate into Israeli society.

The destruction of the Negev crops was one of many recent attacks on Arab rights in Israel. The state's hardening ethnic policies and practices, coupled with increasingly confrontational Palestinian resistance, have pried open the conflict between the state's Jewish majority and the Palestinian Arabs who form 18 percent of the citizenry. The result has been to shrink the space for Palestinian citizenship.

In Israel, as in other ethnocratic states like pre-Dayton Serbia, Sri Lanka or Latvia, a constant tension exists between citizenship and ethnicity. Times of ethnic conflict typically present a "golden opportunity" to advance nationalist agendas of "ethnicizing" control over land and resources. But the shrinking space of citizenship is ominous: it represents a long-term threat to political stability, with the likely specter of ethnic politics dragging communities into cycles of protracted conflict, spawning a growing delegitimation of the state.

After the failure of peace talks in the summer of 2000, the eruption of the violent *intifada*, the October 2000 events within the Green Line, the growing brutality of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, the wave of Palestinian terror attacks in Israeli cities and the September 11 events, ethnic politics in Israel-Palestine are highly volatile. Framed by growing public hysteria about "us" and "them," anti-Arab sentiments and practices have become common in Israeli Jewish discourse, leading to a notable marginalization of the state's Palestinian minority.

A Not So Academic Debate

During the 1990s, a serious debate began for the first time in academic and intellectual circles over the nature of the Israeli state, after decades in which Israel's putative "Western and democratic" nature was taken for granted, both in Israel and abroad. The main triggers were worldwide discussions of democratization following the end of the Cold War and the passage of two basic laws in 1992. These laws declared the state to be "Jewish and democratic," and enshrined several key human rights as part of an expandable "modular" constitution.

Typical of the conventional outlook among Israeli intellectuals was the statement by Aharon Barak, the active president of the Israeli High Court of Justice: "Our existence as a Jewish and democratic state, with non-Jewish minorities who deserve full equality, reflects our basic principles and values."[2] Mainstream scholars like Shmuel Eisenstadt and Asher Arian accorded with the Israeli High Court, defining the state to be a liberal democracy, albeit with certain deficiencies. A second approach was advanced by scholars such as Sami Smooha, Yoav Peled and Ruth Gavison, who defined Israel as an "ethnic democracy." They discerned persistent and systematic inequalities between Arabs and Jews (especially in the exercise of collective rights), but also an overall democratic framework which guaranteed basic civil rights. This setting, so they claimed, led to the gradual acceptance of the "Jewish and democratic" formula by the state's Arab citizens, and created conditions for sustaining political stability.

Critical scholars, however, argued that Israel was more accurately described as an "ethnocracy," an "ethnic state" or an "imagined democracy," and exposed the range of structural impediments to the establishment of a stable democratic system.[3]

The wave of critical works highlighted the nature of Israel as not only a Jewish, but also a Judaizing state, with features at odds with the tenets of democratic citizenship, namely pervasive discrimination against Palestinian citizens, the political role of religion, the blurring of the state's geography and the ongoing military control and settlement of the Occupied Territories, whose Palestinian residents remain disenfranchised. These critical voices, however, encountered strong opposition from the intellectual mainstream.

Needless to say, scholarly positions on the nature of Israel are not purely academic, but function as professions of faith in a political system. Following the events of October 2000, in which 13 Arab citizens were killed by the Israeli police during mass demonstrations (where a Jewish citizen was also killed), and in the wake of the *intifada* which has claimed nearly 2,000 lives (mainly Palestinian, but also over 400 Israeli lives, including 120 settlers) over 20 months, it became clear that, despite mainstream scholarly claims, the Israeli system is neither democratic nor stable. On the contrary, Israel shows signs of fragmentation and chronic instability, resembling Northern Ireland, Serbia or Sri Lanka.

Israeli Jewish academia has thus played a major role in creating and maintaining an illusion of democracy. Scholars turned a blind eye to the 35 year-old occupation, the unresolved refugee problem, the ongoing Judaization of lands, Jewish-only immigration and the continuing roles of religion and world Jewry in the Israeli polity. The illusion of democracy has given internal and international legitimacy to Israel's expansionist policies and practices, and helped foster and preserve a system of unequal citizenship.

Despite these undemocratic features, several important (if insufficient) democratic bases do exist within the Israeli polity, including the important ability of minorities to mobilize and protest in the public arena. Israeli authorities have also taken several significant democratic steps in recent years, including the High Court ruling which prohibited discrimination against Arabs in the allocation of state lands, the near equalization of budgets for Arab local governments after decades of blatant discrimination, the first-ever appointment of an Arab minister to the Israeli government[4] and even the ultimately failed attempts by former Prime Minister Ehud Barak to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories. These are important steps, although in many respects they run against the grain of recent popular sentiments and policy agendas, which have taken Israel further down the ethnocratic path.

Rethinking Citizenship

In Israel, systematically stratified citizenship has developed from the combination of Judaization policies and religious-legal control. Several types of citizenship have emerged, differentiated by the combination of legal and informal rights and capabili-

ties. Each category, especially among religious groups, is also divided internally on gender lines, with men enjoying a superior position. The groups include: a) "mainstream" Jewish citizens, b) ultra-Orthodox Jews, c) "pseudo-Jews" (mainly Russian immigrants recognized as Jews under the Israeli law of return, but not recognized as such by the religious establishment), d) Druze, f) Palestinians holding Israeli citizenship, g) Bedouins, h) East Jerusalem and Golan Arabs, i) Palestinians in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza and j) immigrant labor.

Over 2001, as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pursued aggressive anti-Palestinian policies, the thin illusory layer of equal citizenship continued to erode. Ethnocentric rhetoric from leaders and politicians, both Jewish and Arab, heightened. Such escalating rhetoric led to the indictment of MK Azmi Bishara, who is now facing charges of "supporting a terror organization," "inciting violence" and "endangering state security." The charges followed his well-publicized June 2001 appearance at a memorial service for the late Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad where he claimed:

> The Sharon government is distinguished by the fact that it came into power after the victory of the Lebanese resistance, which benefited from the enlarged realm that Syria has continuously fostered between accepting Israeli dictates regarding a so-called comprehensive and enduring peace, and the military option. This space nourished the determination and heroic persistence of the leadership and membership of the Lebanese resistance. But following the victory of this resistance, and following the Geneva summit and the failure of Camp David, an Israeli government came into power determined to shrink the realm of resistance, by putting forth an ultimatum: either accept Israel's dictates, or face full-scale war. Thus, it is not possible to continue with a third way—that of resistance—without expanding this realm once again so that the people can struggle and resist. Nor is it possible to expand this realm without a unified and internationally effective Arab political position.[5]

Bishara's appearance at the ceremony, where he was seated close to some of Israel's most notorious adversaries, irked the authorities and Jewish public. Their anger was exacerbated by other statements made by Bishara about the "sweet taste" of Hizballah's victory, and by his defiance in the face of criticism, including his declaration: "I am not an Israeli patriot." The state's attorney general moved to indict Bishara—marking the first time a Knesset member was put up for trial on non-criminal grounds, and the first time parliamentarian immunity was stripped on the basis of political views.[6]

The discriminatory treatment of Arab leaders became conspicuous when the same attorney general declined to press charges against Jewish leaders who expressed more inciting statements. For example, MK Michael Kleiner claimed that leaders such as Bishara who speak against their state "are routinely put in front of a firing squad in most countries."[7] Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, spiritual leader and political authority of the large Orthodox Shas movement, declared in July 2001 that Israel should "bomb the Arabs with missiles, through and through," and on another occasion that "most people know the Arabs are snakes...and snakes should be dealt with like snakes."[8]

These leaders, as well as other Jewish politicians, such as the ministers Avigdor Lieberman and Efraim Eitam or deputy minister Gideon Ezra, who all made inciting public comments about Israel's Palestinian citizens, but remained untouched by state authorities. In contrast, from the end of 2001 to the beginning of 2002, three other Arab MKs were charged with incitement, following statements supporting the violent Palestinian *intifada* or the resistance of Palestinian Arabs in Israel to oppressive policies. The chasm between Jewish and Arab political space has thus widened significantly in the recent past, seriously shrinking the ability of Palestinian Arab citizens to mobilize within the confines of Jewish tolerance and Israeli law.

Mainstream Israeli Jewish intellectuals have helped to maintain an illusion of democracy in Israel.

Judaizing the Jewish State

Following the 1992 constitutional changes, the notion that Israel is a "Jewish and democratic" state has become a near consensus among the Jewish public, to the degree that the terms "Jewish and democratic" are constructed as inseparable. The result has been a further shrinking of the political space available to non-Jews, because any activity against the Jewish nature of the state can be interpreted as an "attack on democracy." For example, Sharon justified the charges against Bishara by claiming that "democracy has to defend itself," though Bishara did not criticize Israel's democratic features, but rather sought to strengthen them. Similarly, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said in February 2001: "territorial compromise is absolutely necessary for maintaining a firm Jewish majority and hence a democracy in Israel. The only other option is a binational state, and the loss of our proud democratic tradition."

Such positions have been reinforced by a public discourse increasingly concerned with the "Arab demographic danger," and the increasingly combative stance of Palestinian citizens vis-à-vis the state's Zionist agendas. Against this background, the further Judaization of Israel has become a major concern for the state. New bills attempting to "anchor" (by special majority laws) Israel's character as a Jewish state, and as the state of the Jewish people, have been proposed in the Knesset by prominent MKs Limor Livnat (Likudnik minister of education), Tommy Lapid (head of the centrist Shinui Party) and Ophir Pinhess (parliamentary leader of the Labor Party). None has passed into law as yet, but the efforts are continuing.

However, two other bills did pass into law in May 2002, restricting Palestinian Arab political activity. The first amends Israel's electoral law by prohibiting the candidacy of any party or individual who "supports (in action or speech) the armed struggle of enemy states or terror organizations." The second is the "law against incitement for violence," which speci-

Children at play in West Bank settlement of Beitar Illit overlooking Palestinian village of Nahhalin. RUTH FREMSON/AP PHOTO

fies harsh measures, including five-year prison sentences, for supporting anti-Israel violence. Explicitly justified as measures to halt "subversive" political activity, these laws makes it far easier to disqualify Palestinian Arab (and critical Jewish) politicians from running for the Israeli parliament, especially on the basis of supporting (internationally sanctioned) resistance against the Israeli occupation.

Acting on the deeply ethnocratic notion that Jews need to maintain a strong demographic majority in all parts of the binational country, several key personalities and institutions released plans to "combat the danger" of rising Arab population. A prominent example is the group of professors and generals who formed the Herzliya Forum for National Strength. The Forum published its report in the spring of 2001, calling upon the government to "seriously consider" steps such as limiting the ability of Arabs to influence the long-term future of the Jewish state, especially in referenda on future borders, restricting Arab natural growth and explicitly raising the option of population transfer by recommending that Israel "find an outlet for this [Palestinian] population east of the Jordan River, if it doesn't restrain its rate of natural growth."[9]

"Transfer" and Ethnocratic Logic

Israel's geographic borders have never been demarcated clearly, facilitating the Judaization of lands outside the internationally recognized (pre-1967) sovereign area, chiefly in the Palestinian West Bank. Spatial Judaization has also been a prominent feature of Israel's policies inside the Green Line, enabling massive expropriation of Arab lands, the establishment of over 700 Jewish localities, the imposition of near total Jewish municipal control (stretching over 94 percent of the state) and the harsh neglect of dozens of Bedouin villages regarded by the state as "unrecognized."

Clearly, this spatial malleability stands in contrast to the basic principles of sustainable state building, which require a relatively stable geography. In deeply divided states such as Israel, defined spatial boundaries are ever more necessary, given the need to construct an overarching citizenship for the various ethnic communities, and build a system of accepted institutions, laws and political procedures.

But during the last 20 months, and following the important (although ultimately deficient) attempt by the Barak government to stabilize Israel's borders, the manipulation of ethnic geography with the goal of Judaizing Arab areas has gathered steam once again. First and foremost, the idea of "population transfer"—long unmentionable in public—has resurfaced. While the numbers of leaders openly supporting transfer is still small, several Knesset members and ministers have adopted the idea, often with feeble qualifications such as "if the need arises," or "only as a voluntary plan."[10] The racist transfer idea is now echoing aloud, gaining growing legitimacy among the Jewish public.[11] Here too, Avigdor Lieberman expressed sharp and controversial views:

> There is nothing undemocratic about transfer. Even in Europe millions were transferred from one place to another and it helped to bring peace... [T]he separation, like surgery, helps healing. When I see Arabs going to blow themselves up in Haifa or Nahariyya, or Arabs who donate to terrorists' families—if it were up to me, they wouldn't have stayed here one minute, them and their families.[12]

Accompanying these voices are several variations on the theme, such as the vision revealed by the leader of the National Religious Party, cabinet member Efraim Eitam.

> Jordan and Sinai are, in the final analysis, the territorial address for meeting the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Israel should control forever the entire territory between Jordan and sea. We should offer the Palestinians a choice between enlightened residency (with no voting rights) in Israel, or primitive Arab citizenship. The Arabs in Israel are a ticking time bomb... [T]hey resemble a cancerous growth. We shall have to consider the ability of the Israeli democracy to continue the Arabs' participation.[13]

Eitam's vision represents the ideal of many Zionists over the years—to control the land, while dispensing with its (non-Jewish) people. In effect, he is offering a mixture of measures ranging from firm ethnic control to apartheid and future transfer, but couching them in terms more acceptable to the Jewish Israeli ear. While his views are militant, they fall within the accepted boundaries of political debate in today's Israel, with the obvious effect of shrinking further the ability of Palestinian citizens to find an effective political strategy, beyond rhetorical provocations or withdrawal from the public arena.

Eitam is far from being alone. Similar strategies, with different geographical emphases, have recently come from the heart of "leftist" Zionism—the Labor Party. Most prominent has been a plan proposed in March 2002 by the minister of transportation, Labor's Efraim Sneh, that a future Palestinian state annex Arab localities close to the Green Line, in return for the annexation of West Bank settlement blocs by Israel. Sneh presented his vision (ironically labeled "stationary transfer") as democratic, humane and equal:

> No Arab will have to move from his/her home. We are offering them annexation to the Palestinian nation, with which they openly identify. All we say is: the 1967 borders are not sacred... [L]et's modify them to create a better ethnic political geography: Jews in the West Bank will be part of the Jewish state, and Arabs (who declare day and night that they are Palestinians) will become part of the Palestinian state, staying on their own lands. What is more simple?[14]

Among the Jewish public, these ideas have received growing credence, including support from prominent intellectuals and academics such as Ruth Gavison, former head of the Israeli Association of Human Rights, authors A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz and geographer Arnon Soffer. These leading voices all express the "need" to reshape Israel's borders according to "ethnic principles."[15] Recent surveys show that this idea is gaining popularity, reaching approval rates of 50-55 percent among Jews, and even 20-30 percent among Palestinian citizens.[16] Sneh's idea does present a real dilemma for Israel's Palestinian citizens, who have supported the Palestinian struggle for independence for decades, and have increasingly reconstructed their own identity as Palestinian.

The main impact of these proposals, which are unlikely to be implemented, is the further diminution of citizenship. Constant geographical manipulation of the status of Palestinians in their own homeland represents the depth of ethnocratic values, which now dominate Israeli society and government. Such values have recently further elevated ethnicity over citizenship, presenting Arabs with little prospect of using their citizenship as a meaningful political asset.

Recently, ethnocratic logic has also been extended to Jewish groups supporting Palestinian rights, as exemplified by the demand of Minister of Education Limor Livnat to prosecute university professors who support conscientious objectors, the petition signed by 43 professors at Ben Gurion University to ban a lecture by former Labor minister Yossi Beilin, for his role in "orchestrating the disastrous Oslo agreement," and the abortive attempt to dismiss revisionist historian Ilan Pappé at Haifa University (see box).

Fault Lines

Typically, ethnocratic regimes construct self-fulfilling prophecies. Minorities and groups marked as "anti-national" are marginalized and oppressed, and when they resist, they are condemned as "disloyal" and thus deserving of further exclusion. But the manipulation of geography stretches wider in Israel than debates over state borders. While less prominent on the public agenda, issues pertaining to planning, land and development have pushed the state's ethnocratic agenda further over the last 20 months. For example, after a lull of several years, the state has initiated more large-scale Jewish settlement projects within the Green Line. In early 2002, 68 new settlements were in the process of approval, and 18 began construction.[17] These are added to the 920 Jewish settlements already existing in Israel-Palestine, and to the ongoing expansion of Jewish settlements in Palestinian territories.

In the meantime, four new Arab localities were also approved, but these are mainly aimed at concentrating Negev Bedouins into planned towns. The plight of the Bedouin community in the southern Negev continues to demonstrate the dark side of the Judaization program, which works per-

Pappé Faces Down Prosecution

On May 19, 2002, Ilan Pappé received word that an order for him to stand trial at Haifa University, where he teaches political science, had been rescinded. The prosecution, represented by Haifa's dean of humanities, had demanded Pappé's expulsion from the university due to positions he has taken on the controversial M.A. thesis of Teddy Katz. Katz claimed to have discovered evidence that Israeli soldiers massacred Palestinian villagers at Tantura in May 1948. He was sued for libel by veterans of the brigade in question, and never allowed to defend his thesis on its merits at the university, which disqualified him in 2000. In Pappé's view, his vigorous defense of Katz at the time was not the real reason for the university's belated case against him.

"I think there are three reasons for the timing," Pappé said in an interview May 18. "One is my signing of a petition endorsing the decision of European academics to boycott Israeli academic institutes. The second is a pending article of mine in Hebrew on the Katz affair, in which I repeat my critique of the university's conduct. The third is my known intention to give a course on the *nakba*."

"It also has to do with the general atmosphere...[which] has been well-manipulated by the political elite to drive into the center of the public stage discourse and ideologies that used to be regarded as belonging to the extreme right," Pappé continued. "Anyone who even slightly criticizes the national unity government's policies is immediately boycotted and silenced. And this is the time to settle old accounts with the 'new historians,' or what is left of them after the retraction of Benny Morris." The term "new historians" refers to a small group of Israeli researchers whose archival digging has unearthed evidence challenging the purity of Israeli arms in the 1948 war—a crucial foundational myth of the state—and supporting the Palestinian narrative that Palestinian refugees were forcibly expelled from their homes. Morris, never the most radical of these historians, has recently said that he was wrong to support negotiations with the Palestinians in the 1990s, and that refugees have no right of return. Along with other scholars who examined fractures of race, class and religiosity in contemporary Israeli society, the "new historians" were once regarded as harbingers of "post-Zionism" in Israeli Jewish intellectual life. Times have changed.

For Pappé, "[my case] provides in a way the ultimate proof of how innocent and overly optimistic I was in my assessment of the impact of post-Zionist scholarship on society. The early buds of pluralism and alternative thought have wilted the moment they grew into a significant flower. The Israeli Jewish public was indoctrinated as a militaristic and ethnocentric society for more than 50 years, and academics alone cannot change it. On the contrary, during the heyday of Oslo when peace discourse was *bon ton* we saw the flourishing of post-Zionism (and not the other way around—post-Zionism did not bring the Oslo accord). The moment the public atmosphere changed most of the post-Zionists recanted, and understood the *bon ton* was to be conformist."

Pappé credits the rapid mobilization of Israeli and international academics in his defense with compelling the university to drop its case. But on the larger questions he is less sanguine. "If we succeed in avoiding my expulsion, maybe academia [in Israel] could play a more constructive role, but I am somewhat doubtful about this. The more reasonable scenario is a conformist academia that will continue to provide 'scientific' scaffolding for the brutal policies inside and outside the country." ■

—Rebecca L. Stein

sistently to de-Arabize land wherever possible. Dozens of Bedouin villages—some in existence before 1948, and others built as a result of state-organized transfers in the early 1950s—are now regarded as "unrecognized." Residents are denied basic services, and pressured to move to planned towns, in order to shift further lands to state control. The resistance of the Bedouin has created a stalemate, and a precarious atmosphere of inflammable conflict.

The future tenure of state lands, which cover 76 percent of Israel's territory,[18] has received wide coverage in the media. State policy has aimed mainly to increase incrementally Jewish rights to state lands, while maintaining a meager allocation for Arab localities. But the main fault line in debates over state land tenure has not been Arab-Jewish, but has run between a pro-privatization coalition of Jewish farmers and developers and a group of anti-privatization social organizations headed by the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow.[19] Palestinian citizens have been totally excluded from this debate, despite their justified claim for a fairer share of state lands, much of which were originally confiscated from Palestinian refugees. Arab local governments cover only 2.5 percent of Israel, and the allocation of state lands to Arab localities over the last two decades amounted to less than one percent. Most Jewish organizations have simply ignored Arab claims and needs in the debate over the future of state lands.

But Palestinian issues have nonetheless entered the heart of the debate in one way: the pro-privatization coalition accused the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow of supporting the Palestinian right of return, and planning in secret to aid Palestinian demands to get their lands back from the state. A concerted smear campaign was launched in early 2002, aiming to delegitimize the anti-privatization campaign. Large banners were hung over dozens of road intersections, and the media was flooded with claims that the Mizrahi Rainbow was nothing but a cover for a scheme to open state lands to millions of Palestinian returnees. In his address to

the Israeli High Court against an appeal by the Mizrahi Rainbow to halt the privatization of land, prominent lawyer and property developer Shraga Biran stated blatantly:

> The acceptance of this petition, God forbid, is the acceptance of a post-Zionist, anti-nationalist argument. Would this honored court accept an argument that property should be taken from the Jewish public in the name of the [Palestinian] right of return? This honored court is asked to totally reject the petitioner's attempt to apparently erect a legal platform for the right of return and the movement of the refugees and displaced persons into the state's borders.

Hence, demonization of Palestinian Arabs lurks even in the background of public and legal debates in which they are not directly involved. In today's Israel, even the justification for putting agricultural land to lucrative commercial uses is argued by using emotional anti-Palestinian slogans.

Spaces of Joint Citizenship?

The aggravation of ethnocratic politics in Israel is not an independent intra-Jewish process. It feeds on Jewish concerns about Palestinian terrorism, on the hardened anti-Jewish discourse heard daily in Middle Eastern media and on the growing defiance of Palestinian citizens. Within this combative atmosphere, a gradual shift in the discourse of Palestinian citizens is clearly discernible. Issues of citizenship and equality, highly prominent in the past, have been partially replaced by matters of national identity, the embrace of Palestinian and regional Arab struggle against Israeli occupation, and a wide public support for the Palestinian right of return, which is perceived by most Jews as a taboo. Also discernible is growing support for anti-state strategies, ranging from Islamist agendas, which claim the entirety of Israel-Palestine as Islamic land to be liberated, to Arab separatism within Israel to traditional Palestinian nationalist goals of establishing one secular state "between the river and the sea."

This has led to a certain convergence between Islamist and secular-nationalist forces on several issues, most notably a partial withdrawal from Israeli political and civil life, and a growing focus on building alternative Arab institutions. A remarkable success for this approach was achieved during the 2001 prime ministerial elections, when only 18 percent of Arab citizens (mostly Druze) turned out to vote. But this success also marks a new and alarming stage in Arab politics in Israel: Arab leaders may find it difficult to reverse the trend of political withdrawal, which weakens their ability to operate in the political process, and further diminishes the value of their citizenship.

To be sure, these are only incipient signs of ethnic separatism, displayed at times of acute conflict. But the power and following of separatist forces appear to be increasing, and their voices are commonly heard in the press.[20] Like most ethnocratic states, whose main project is the ethnicization of contested lands, institutions and resources, Israel is now facing an increasing challenge from an alienated and frustrated Arab public, fueled by the illusions of "democracy" and "equal citizenship." The more militant Arab voices are covered (and often sensationalized) by the Hebrew media, drawing on long-term Jewish fears and suspicions and energizing calls to deepen control over the minority and delay state allocations to Arab localities.[21]

But there is a further complication: the events documented above are inseparable from the protracted ethno-national conflicts in Palestine and beyond. The failed Oslo process, the violent *intifada* and—most acutely—Israel's renewed aggression and brutality toward the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, have cast a dark shadow over the joint future of the state's Palestinian and Jewish citizens.

Indeed, given the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the strengthening of Jewish settlement in these regions, the actual existence of an Israeli state (and hence citizenship) can be viewed as an illusion. Israel has ruptured, by its own actions, the geography of statehood, and maintained a caste-like system of ethnic-religious-class stratification. Without an inclusive geography and universal citizenship, Israel has created a colonial setting, held through violent control and a softening illusion of a nation-state and democratic citizenship. It seems that Palestinian citizens are waking up to this illusion, and are beginning to challenge its foundations. Occupation and settlement, which necessitate ever intensifying oppression of Palestinians with or without Israeli citizenship, have clear potential to make Israel gradually cave from within.

In the ethnocratic societies of Sri Lanka, Serbia and apartheid South Africa, the states responded to crises of legitimacy by deepening majority domination over disgruntled groups. Inevitably, this led in the long term to intensive ethnic conflict, political instability and economic decline. Other ex-ethnocratic states, such as Canada, or more recently Slovakia and Northern Ireland, took an opposite approach, working to democratize and equalize relations.

Will Israel learn from the painful and violent experience of other ethnocratic societies, and from its own bloody history? Will it listen to growing international and local pressures to end the occupation, redivide Palestine into two independent states and establish equal citizenship? The signs of the post-2000 era are ominous, showing a general mood towards further polarization and strengthening of ethnocratic forces, driven by the militant nationalist Jewish camp.

Strong voices, institutions and forces in Israeli society, among both Jews and Arabs, still struggle for equal citizenship and for improving the terms of coexistence. These groups are at the forefront of the fight to end Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, to find a just solution for the Palestinian refugees and to reopen spaces for all Israeli citizens seeking participation in the political and public arenas, as well as full equality in the allocation of state resources.

A notable example of such activity was a report prepared in late 2000 by a group of 26 Jewish and Palestinian lecturers in Israeli universities, which sought to identify immediate and long-term courses of action to reconstruct Arab-Jewish relations, following the violent events of October 2000.[22] The report was submitted to then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak and most of the relevant ministries, and received considerable media coverage. The Report of the 26, as it became known,

charted a course for building a future democratic Israeli state based on a new democratic "contract" between minority and state along consociational lines. Key themes included civil equality, Arab autonomy in diverse fields, separation of state and religion(s), proportional power sharing in most policy arenas and a new legal and geographical setting, ensuring individual and collective rights. Yet the reluctance of Israeli leaders to act on these recommendations, the apathetic and/or hostile reaction from the Jewish public and criticism from Arab politicians and NGOs illustrated the difficulties of finding a meaningful space for a joint Arab-Jewish civil agenda.

The need for Israel to democratize, establish equal citizenship and conform to its internationally recognized borders is more urgent than ever. But these concepts should now move from scholarly textbooks and political speeches to state laws and government policies. It is unclear whether the democratic forces in Israel can generate enough strength to launch such an agenda, but without it, Israel is most likely to sink into greater crisis and instability. ■

Endnotes

1 *Maariv*, February 15, 2002. Lieberman resigned from the government in March 2002, in protest of Sharon's "soft" dealings with the Palestinians. In April and May, there were moves to bring him and his far-right party, Yisrael Beiteinu, back into the government.

2 Aharon Barak, "The Role of Supreme Court in a Democracy," *Israel Studies* 3/2 (1998).

3 See Oren Yiftachel, "Ethnocracy and Its Discontents: Minorities, Protest and the Israeli Polity," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000) and As'ad Ghanem, "The Palestinian Minority: Challenging the Jewish State and Its Implications," *Third World Quarterly* 21/1 (2000).

4 Salah Tarif of the Labor Party, a Druze, was appointed by Sharon in February 2001 as minister without portfolio and responsible for Arab affairs. Tarif resigned after ten months, following his indictment on charges of corruption.

5 An excerpt from the text of the full speech, posted at http://www.adalah.org/bishara/speeches.htm. Electronic document, accessed on May 18, 2002. His use of the militant-sounding but somewhat vague Arabic word *muqawama* for "resistance" was one of the bases for charging him with supporting violence.

6 See coverage in *al-Ittihad* and *Maariv*, November 11, 2001.

7 *Ha'aretz*, September 22, 2001.

8 *Maariv*, July 12, 2001. In recommending the missile attack, Rabbi Yosef used the Arabic phrase, *'ala kayf kayfak*, connoting both thoroughness and his glee at the prospect. The attorney general opened an investigation of these comments, but concluded there were no grounds for prosecution.

9 Herzliya Forum for National Strength, *The Balance of National Strength and Security: Policy Directions* (2001). [Hebrew]

10 Benny Elon, minister of tourism, called for "voluntary transfer" in an interview with *Ha'aretz*, February 7, 2002.

11 In several opinion polls in early 2002, 25-46 percent of Jews supported the idea that "Arabs will be asked to move outside the Land of Israel." *Maariv*, April 5, 2002.

12 *Ha'aretz*, April 19, 2002.

13 *Ha'aretz*, March 22, 2002.

14 TV interview, "Politika Show" (Channel 1), March 4, 2002. Ex-Prime Minister Ehud Barak has recently supported this idea in an interview printed in the *New York Review of Books*, June 13, 2002.

15 Not all agree with the details of Sneh's plan, but all support the principles. See articles by Ruth Gavison, *Yediot Aharonot*, March 25, 2002; Amos Oz, *Ynet*, April 1, 2002; A.B. Yehoshua, *Maariv*, March 27, 2002.

16 *Maariv*, April 12, 2002.

17 *Ha'aretz*, November 6, 2001.

18 A further 17 percent are held by the Jewish National Fund and three percent by Jewish individuals, bringing the extent of Jewish control to over 96 percent of the state's land mass.

19 The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow is a movement, headed by second-generation Mizrahi Jews (those originating in the Muslim world), espousing a socially progressive agenda for Israeli society.

20 Debates on the issue can be mainly found in the Arab newspapers *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya* and *Fasl al-Maqal*, published by the Islamic movement and the nationalist Tajammu' party, respectively.

21 See two lengthy articles on the new Arab politics and growing separatism in *Ha'aretz*, April 16, 2002 and *Maariv*, April 19, 2002.

22 Danny Rabinowitz, As'ad Ghanem, Oren Yiftachel and R. Suleiman, eds. *After the Breakdown: New Directions for Policies Towards the Arabs in Israel* (2000).