

<i>VII. Government and Civil Society</i>	213
Government and Civil Society in Palestine <i>Dr. Salim Tamari</i>	213
Government and Civil Society in Jordan <i>Dr. Sabri Rbeihat</i>	220
Israel's State and Civil Society after 50 Years of Independence <i>Dr. Yossi Shain</i>	224

Government and Civil Society in Palestine***Dr. Salim Tamari****Director, Institute of Jerusalem Studies, Jerusalem*

This intervention will address the manner in which the issue of identity among the Palestinians in the post-Oslo period has been transformed, not only by the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), but also by the developments in civil society that have redefined the relationship between the Palestinians who remained in their homeland and the Diaspora community.

At the risk of oversimplification we can see that prior to Oslo, the images of Palestinian dismemberment and the paradigms of exile dominated the debate over Palestinian identity. After Oslo we notice that juridical aspects of identity (citizenship, the Jordanian dimension, etc.) and the related issues of residency and access to citizenship under a regime of qualified sovereignty began to dominate this debate.

But this dichotomy between the politics of exile and the politics of statehood camouflage a more profound - and more interesting - aspect of Palestinian identity: the question of localized consciousness on the one hand, and the tension that arose due to the Oslo dimension versus the regional dimension in the new Palestinian social formation on the other.

Localized Consciousness

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries the local community in greater Syria, whether based on the village, city or regional unit, played an overriding role in defining Palestinian - and other Arab - loyalties. These points of reference, together with kinship, took precedence over religious and national identities. Localism was reinforced by a decentralized system of administration and regional markets, and was

expressed through distinct recognizable dialects. Such forms of communal loyalty reached their zenith under the system of *iltizam* (tax farming) through the rule of Ottoman Mashayyikh and village potentates.

Modernity, marked by the campaign of Ibrahim Pasha and the Tanzimat following the collapse of Egyptian occupation, British colonial rule, and Zionism all contributed to the weakening of Palestinian localism and its contestation by a countrywide national identity, which often transcended the boundaries of modern Palestine, constituting the core of modern Palestinian regional nationalism.

But this regional identity was itself riddled with ambivalence. At the turn of this century this ambivalence resulted from the contestation of regional Palestinian identity by those who felt that their main allegiance was to greater Syria (Bilad As-Sham) and that Palestine was part of Southern Syria (Istiqlal Party), and partly by the Pan-Arab supporters of King Faisal and the Arab Revolt. Both of these currents were the precursors of the Nasserist, Ba'thist and Syrian Nationalist currents that dominated Palestinian political trends in the 1950s and 1960s. And though they were eclipsed by the rise of the PLO, they nevertheless continue to contribute to its wider frame of reference in the cultural domain today. (There is a lot of debate today, for example, about the need to infuse Palestinian culture with an Arab dimension in the cultural periodicals.)

The Politics of Exile and Identity

The decisive marker of contemporary Palestinian identity, however, has been the politics of exile. This is rooted in a social feature of the Palestinian experience, namely, that the bulk of the Palestinian leadership, together with the intelligentsia and its professional base - that is all those who played a critical role in the formulation of Palestinian national consciousness - were either expelled or exiled, or (as in the case of Mahmoud Darwish) chose exile.

The politics and poetics of exile became so dominant in this formative period that the conditions, aspirations and outlook of those Palestinians who remained in Palestine (almost half the total number of Palestinians) were virtually forgotten. They were rendered into an abstract object of glorification and heroism. In practice they were

marginalized, but not only as a component of Palestinian politics: they were also subsumed as a residue, a remnant of a people whose real place was in the Diaspora. Subliminally there was an element of betrayal, due to the fact that they too were not exiled, or chose not to live in exile. This was the height of schizophrenia in Palestinian national identity.

It took two spectacular events to transform this outlook: Land Day (1976), marking the assertion by Palestinians in the Galilee (and later among Israeli Bedouins in the Negev) of their national identity, and the *Intifada* of 1987. The former case established the struggle for equality with Israel society as a legitimate and recognized current within Palestinian politics. It brought more than ever the perspective and aspirations of the Arabs that had remained in Israel to the national conscience of the Palestinians as a whole. The *Intifada*, on the other hand, redressed the imbalance in the hegemony of the PLO over the 'forces of the inside'.

Inside / Outside

The *Intifada* itself was the culmination of a protected process by which the PLO, acting as the torchbearer of Diaspora politics, realized, after years of Arab encirclement and Israeli military subjugation, that it had to re-anchor itself in the emergent political will of the Palestinian homeland. This shift has been recognized, in formal terms, as a shift away from a strategy of liberation, towards adopting a strategy of independence. Such a shift not only required the adoption of the new pragmatic politics of territorial compromise and dialogue with the enemy, but also constituted a radical rupture with the established ideological heritage.

This heritage revolved around the notion of 'redemption through return' as the underpinning of all Palestinian political strategies. Its vision was amplified by a reconstitution of an idealized Palestinian past, which the dismembered Palestinian nation sought to recapture. Its vehicle was a combination of mass mobilization, armed struggle, and the linking of the exiled communities through the leadership of the PLO. The social base of these politics was the refugee camps in the Arab host countries, in addition to the mercantile / professional sectors in the Gulf countries and Jordan.

By contrast, the shift in the 80's towards a 'territorial' strategy was a move in the direction of grounding Palestinian politics into the relatively stable (and conservative) communities of the West Bank and Gaza. Although they contained a large refugee component, these communities, to a large extent, constituted a historical continuity with the peasantry of the Palestinian highlands and their regional elites.

But these stable communities did not constitute a *national* community. They did exhibit a high degree of nationalist consciousness, and increasingly - beginning with the 1970's - began to articulate their political aspirations within the confines of the PLO. But unlike the 'external forces' in exile their leadership remained in the hands of the local regional elites, who derived their power, wealth and prestige from an extended network of kinship and putative identities, rooted distinctively in Nablus, Hebron, Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

State Formation and Identity

The assumption of power by the PNA after the Cairo agreement (1994) was therefore not only the beginning of the process of state-formation, but also the incorporation of those regional social groupings and political elites within a reconstructed national formation. The PLO through its cadres and relocated Diaspora bureaucracy thus performed a crucial integrating role for the segmented communities in the West Bank and Gaza, which the nationalist movement during 29 years of Israeli rule was unable to do. Because this process is still in a state of flux we are sometimes unable to see the forest from the trees. In the current debate about the role of the returnees in the allocation of positions and clout, references are made about familial and regional forces being over - or under - represented. Certainly the PNA (and Arafat) had to take the weight of these forces into account when deciding who to appoint to certain positions. Increasingly, however, we see a new *national polity* asserting itself that is gradually transcending its constituent parts. The main victim of this corporate body has not been the regional elites but the private business sector.

This trend became more distinct during and after the elections for the Legislative Assembly in April of 1996. The campaign itself seemed to signal a return to familism and localism, but eventually the dominant forms of mobilization during the campaign reflected a mix of national and local concerns. The result was clearly the triumph of nationalist

politics over localized localities. This was reflected not only by the program adopted by a majority of candidates - which was mostly rhetorical in content - but also by the background of candidates favored by the electorate, which displayed a clear preference for people with a history of national political activism and former refugees or exiles with a weak or non-existent local social base.

The New Divide

Despite the current hegemony in Palestinian politics - the politics of the 'returnees' - I would argue that the hitherto dominant divide in Palestinian politics between outside/inside forces has been transcended by the current consolidation of the PNA. To the extent that the former divide still persists, it reflects the contestation over clout and patronage by a minority whose politics, social background and ideological predisposition is essentially the same as the 'native' community. One only detects a difference in matters of cultural socialization, with the returnees displaying a background (rooted in their exile experience) that is more urbane, secular, and alienated. The transplanted community is still in search of its hinges.

Palestinian pluralism, as a political form, is highly overrated, but it is nevertheless real; or at least it has a real kernel. It is rooted in the multiplicity of political experience in exile, and in the diversity of forms of resistance to Israeli rule. In the Arab Diaspora it is based on what amounted to a stalemate in the ideological struggle between nationalist and leftist (or what was leftist) currents. Inside Palestine - and also within the Arab community in Israel - it is based on the voluntary coexistence between Islamist and nationalist political tendencies. An important contributor to this persistence of pluralism is a style of leadership, which so far has preferred the politics of co-optation and patronage over the politics of confrontation and one-party control. Today we witness a significant deviation from this tradition in which the institutions of civil society and the variety of communal groupings that emerged during decades of occupation are engaged in a new battle for democratic space against an emergent state power.

Conclusion: Civil Society and the end of 'Embryonism'

During the 1980's the strategy that prevailed within Palestinian mass organizations was one of 'embryonism'. This is the term that refers to a

the perception on the part of a variety of resistance groups that since Israeli occupation is likely to prevail for an extended period, the task of Palestinian resistance inside the West Bank and Gaza was to establish alternative organs of power, both at the institutional level (municipalities, universities, schools, etc.), and in the provision of public services in the arenas of health, credit, day-care, and so on. Politically these institutions and services will ultimately converge in establishing an alternative organ of power to the colonial state apparatus. When the historical moment comes, these 'embryonic' institutions will act as the nascent alternative state in the making. Any future Palestinian state will have to establish its power base on foundations of these nascent organs.

As it happened this strategy proved to be completely mistaken in anticipating the nature of the power arrangement that actually emerged with the establishment of the PNA. At one level the nature of these institutions of civil society were much more attuned to organizing resistance than to establishing sustainable institutions of governance. But basically their 'failure' was due to a willful choice by the PLO to establish its power base on a combination of alliances with local social elites and the returning cadres of the PLO. The emergent state institutions in Palestine have much more in common with neighboring Arab regimes than with institutions of civil society established during years of resistance. Whatever future exists for the residual mass organizations that are still active today would seem to be the search to build an oppositional force that would focus on democracy, civic rights, and political pluralism. The natural arena for this battle includes the legislative assembly, the municipal council, and extra-parliamentary bodies like the media.



Government and Civil Society in Jordan

Dr. Sabri Rbeihat

Sociologist, University of Philadelphia, Jordan

The topic of government and civil society is a difficult one from the Jordanian perspective. This is because civil society, which supposedly embraces all organizations that fill the vacuum between the family and the state, is mainly related to urban areas/cities. Following are the three main questions that should be raised with regard to the issue of government and civil society in Jordan:

- (1) What does the term 'government' mean in Jordan, as opposed to other countries?
- (2) How democratic is the government in Jordan?
- (3) How effective is the Jordanian government in carrying out its role?

The above can be answered to some extent by comparing the following theories of political systems:

- *Theory of Democratic Systems*: characterized by widespread participation and freedom.
- *Elites Theory*: policy-making as dominated by a select few.
- *Pluralist Theory*: politics as group policies whereby each group has the chance to be heard.
- *Hyper Theory*: policy-making as a complex that no one really governs: 'government of people by people and through people'.

In Jordan, government is based on a tribal society and a concept of 'state' that has gradually evolved since 1920: a political, military-based regime. A democratization process has begun, but the fact that no substantial efforts have been made has led to several setbacks. Speaking about democracy, we must look at the principle of equality and the degree to which it is applicable in Jordan.

The same goes for the principle of information. Today, Jordan has 24 newspapers, most of which are known to be regime-friendly, while the

others are labeled 'opposition papers'. It is no secret that the three main papers receive instructions from 'above' on what - and what not - to print.

The level of public participation as a feature of democracy can be measured according to the level of participation in voting. In the last elections 50% of voters - but only 0.25% of candidates and 1.25% of parliamentarians - were women. When studying the issue of representation, we have to differentiate between actual versus virtual representation.

The first political party in Jordan was the Independent Party that emerged in 1922 but dissolved itself four years later. Between 1921 and 1948 a total of ten political parties emerged, most of which were formally established but without any democratic substance; they had neither a platform nor a program or agenda.

After 1948, the political spectrum included many active parties and movements. Amongst them were the Muslim Brotherhood, Communists, Ba'ath, Tahrir and the National Socialist Party, all of which were influenced by the new Palestinian-Jordanian relations and by those Jordanians who had returned from studying in Syria and Lebanon.

Between 1967 and 1970, as a result of the war and defeat, most Palestinian organizations returned to Jordan. They found themselves forced to choose between taking a pro or contra position. This situation came to an end with the events of 1970 and the banishment of the PLO from Jordan. The East Bank/ Jordanian identity began to develop partly as a reaction to the Palestinian issue, that gradually made its way from the sub-conscience to the conscience of the Jordanian people. This situation lasted until 1988, when the King made the first moves towards democracy. The developments on the East Bank coincided with the *Intifada* on the West Bank. When the ban on political parties was lifted in Jordan, several new political organizations emerged.

Professional associations have existed since 1944 when Jordanian law provided a legal frame. The first was the Lawyer's Association, founded in 1950, and it was soon followed by many others. The government felt threatened, especially at a time when the atmosphere was highly politicized and a large number of graduates were returning - full of

new ideas and approaches - after having completed their studies abroad. The professional associations developed politically rather than professionally, which was the reason why they were denied a real mandate. Even today, everyone has to be part of a professional association; the fact that Jordanians do not 'choose' to join directly contradicts the 'civil society' nature of such organizations.

In Jordan we have a hybrid society, and every family and tribe, in one way or another, is a part of the system. Although the system occasionally gives the impression of being somewhat progressive, it is basically based on traditional structures. Despite the fact that the democratization process has been initiated, organizations still develop according to tribal or family lines, especially in terms of loyalty, though the interests of individuals as the smallest units of society vary. The legitimacy of Jordan's political regime is until today determined by religion and tribalism, the religious determination stemming from the fact that the ruling family are direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. The tribal structure in Jordan has always been contained and preserved, and the government makes use of it for its own purposes. As tribalism is an obstacle to progress and modernity, Jordanian society does not move forward; in former years, tribalism was a social and economic requirement, whereas today, it is a structure that disturbs reality. The government (cabinet) changes on average every 15 months, which means there is no stability and mandates are not taken seriously.

The image of Jordan's political leaders and the founders of its political parties is tarnished by the fact that many of the latter proceeded to 'hijack' the parties following their formation. Many politicians are well-known figures with industrial backgrounds and professionals. The people, meanwhile, remain wary and suspicious of parties and politicians.

If you fail to 'sell', i.e., apply properly, modern *modi vivendi*, people will turn back to traditions or other means. The *Intifada* in Palestine was imported to Jordan though the media, particularly the television news, which led the Jordanian youth to copy what they saw in an attempt to counter-transform Jordanian society from within. Such things should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, it is important to note that if people are not motivated in the first place, it is impossible for change to take occur.

Israel's State and Civil Society After 50 Years of Independence

Dr. Yossi Shain

Chair, Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv

I was asked to speak about the evolution of Israeli civil society. The subject matter is both conceptually and empirically tied to the evolution of the Israeli 'state' and Israel's 'political society'. My main argument is that the triadic relations between state, civil society and political society in Israel have undergone a critical evolution since Israel's independence. While in the first two decades of the state, civil society and political society were largely subordinated to the power of the state and the overriding concern for survival and consolidation, the state's power (in the post-1967 period) gradually declined and its position in the civil and political sphere has been challenged by newly empowered agents. These agents have contested early state hegemonic ideology and state monopoly over the economy and religion, and have begun to revise the national ethos. As a result the character of Israeli society is a subject of heated debate and the role of the state has been severely eroded. Before I present my thesis I would like to clarify some of the concepts.

The philosophical origin of the term civil society is rooted in the thinking about the evolution of capitalist economy, the bourgeoisie and their relations to political authority. From J. Locke and Rousseau through Hegel and Marx, the economic sphere was perceived by political philosophers as the embodiment of civil society. While for Locke the state was perceived to be a necessary evil intended to regulate unchecked violations of the state of nature, Rousseau and Hegel viewed civil society more as lower spheres of human condition where market transactions define the activity of the selfish Bürger or bourgeois. The state on the other hand was presented as representative of human higher capacities, i.e., reason. In civil society man engaged with others in competitive struggles to improve his lot in the marketplace, while in the state he interacts with his peers as a citizen.

Citizenship prescribed relations of 'shared ethical understanding or mutual recognition.' (Smith 1989:105)

While the distinction between civil society and the state remains the basis for many analyses of human interactions, the idealistic view of states as the embodiment of ethical reason seems anachronistic to many contemporary analysts. In fact, Locke's view remains the basis for liberal thinking about states. Thus social scientists who study civil societies today commonly address them in the context of struggles to limit state power and authority in spheres perceived to be the domain of human freedoms.

In all discussions it is taken as given that states are necessary bodies, and that they are prerequisites for the existence of democratic order. Although it is widely held that democracy requires a vibrant civil society, it is also understood that states have a great role in shaping such a society. In this context civil society is defined as 'the arena of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests.'

Civil society can include manifold social movements (women's groups, neighborhood associations, religious groupings, intellectual organizations, etc.) and civic associations from all social strata (such as trade unions, entrepreneurial groups, journalists, or lawyers). A higher degree of civil society autonomy has been the aspiration of many opposition groups that challenged non-democratic authorities. It is also a subject constantly negotiated in democratic societies where free political society is functioning and where the other 'fundamentals' of the modern states are more or less enshrined; including rule of law and a well-functioning bureaucracy. Indeed the last two components are themselves considered critical guarantors of civil society.

Political society is defined as the 'arena in which the polity specifically arranges itself to contest the legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus.' (Ibid.8) In a democracy it includes, 'political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership, inter-party alliances, and legislatures - by which society constitutes itself politically to select and monitor democratic government.'

Indeed, in all democracies, civil society and political society are mutually exclusive conceptually but are *de facto* complementary.

As we have seen the existence of a state is a prerequisite for the functioning of civil society. States are often perceived to be guarantors and facilitators of individual interaction. Indeed states always take precedence over societies but only in so far as they ensure the latter's autonomy.

The question of civil society therefore begins with ensuring the state's sovereignty and integrity. In this regard Carl Schmitt argued that the ultimate goal of the political realm as a confrontation of 'us versus them' is on the mark. According to Schmitt the definition of the collectivity and the preservation of its integrity and autonomy are the ultimate functions of the state 'for only if they are preserved can we perform such other actives as may be appropriate to the spirit of our collectivity.' (Poggi, 1918:6)

Defining the collectivity must be the work of an independent center; according to Schmitt it may be even a single individual. All other normative considerations, however important from the point of view of liberalism, are held in suspension when questions of existential matters are at stake.

The dynamic described above can serve us in understanding the changing nature of the Israeli polity since independence in 1948.

Israel's early years and its struggle for survival have elevated the state to near hegemony in terms of its relations with its society. The 'us versus them' posture prevailed not only with regard to the Arab states but also internally. Emergency laws pervaded Arab-Israeli society until 1965.

The issue of state building and survival, the need to absorb a large influx of immigrants and the urge to quickly develop an economic infrastructure brought the Israeli state to near hegemony in almost all spheres of civil society. Keeping in mind that the official ideology of the state was socialist in its orientation, and that the main forces in political society were themselves almost identical with the state, the Israeli polity evolved, and society, to a large extent, was overwhelmed by the state administrative apparatus. Particularly interesting in this period is the marginalization of segments in the political society that were not part of the dominating elite - they were perceived to be outside the state or indeed felt like it.

Political figures of MAPAI and its offshoots, including the religious Mizrahi party, have acted as agents of the state. Ben-Gurion's decision not to separate state and religion was intended to enable state control over religion while integrating it within the Zionist ethos. The Zionist creed that negated any political platform that was either Ultra-Orthodox or ethnic in nature meant that non-state religious groups were seen as an anomaly (almost a tourist attraction). Ethnic divisions were overlooked or suppressed through political patronage. Certainly the main non-state economic agent, the Histadrut, was fully dominated by the dominating political elite and by extension became an agent of the state. Political parties that were outside the ruling coalition retained very limited civil society agencies. In fact, the state subsumed them through the IDF (which replaced the pre-state military wings) and through exclusive policies that discouraged the free market. Indeed, in its early years Israeli democracy had limited characteristics of a liberal democracy. In addition to domination over the media and popular culture the state, through its political agencies, was able to stem social conflicts on ethnic issues with very few exceptions (Vadi Salib riots). Moreover the school system was fully mobilized in the state project and the ethos of the melting pot in the Zionist state was to a large extent unchallenged.

The hegemonic period of the state (in conjunction with the rule of historic MAPAI as its political arm) started to decline in the mid-late 1960s. No doubt the Six-Day War was a watershed in this dynamic. To a large extent the days before the Six-Day War symbolize the ultimate fusion of state and society. Society was fully mobilized to preserve sovereignty and even historic political differences were brushed aside under the banner of national unity. The survival ethos reached its historical and romantic heights and patriotism was stretched to its zenith.

The victory in June 1967 opened a new era. No longer could 'state survival' be kept unchallenged on the agenda. The manifestation of Israel's power also meant greater demands for societal and political openings. Indeed, such demands were already made prior to 1967, when the state and its political extension seemed to fail in providing adequate solutions - social and economic - the recession of 1966 being one example.

Yet in the post-1967 era we are to witness a gradual decline in the stature of the state and greater divisions vis-à-vis its role and penetrating power, as well as its symbolic relations with the ruling political elite.

The decline in public confidence in the state hegemony became powerfully pronounced after the debacles of the 1973 war. It was apparent for the first time that the mighty army of 1967 - the ultimate guarantor of the state - was vulnerable and that its leadership, as well as the political elite so close to it, could no longer be blindly trusted.

In the early 1970's Israel witnessed growing manifestations of civil society discontent that challenged the monopoly of the state via its political proxy, the ruling ethos of the society and a recognition that a growing gap exists between state aspiration and civil society requirements for dramatic change in ethno-economic distribution and in terms of political empowerment and voice. These challenges were manifested in the activities of the Black Panthers that challenged the state social policy and the composition of the political elite, and by those who called for greater accountability of leaders who failed them in the 1973 War. (The protest movement of the post-1973 War brought about the resignation of Golda Meir and Dayan.)

The post-1967 years also resulted in a widening gap in Israeli society stemming from the abrupt end of the recession years and the accelerated economic growth out of which new and relatively small segments of society benefited. Perception of economic inequality combined with corruption involving prominent MAPAI political figures, and in conjunction with an ideological split on political matters (manifested in society by the extra-parliamentary activities of Gush Emunim and later by the Peace Now Movement) undermined the cohesion of Israeli society and changed its ethos from a society fighting for survival, to a divided polity yet to resolve its deep divisions and identity.

The ascendance to power of the Likud in 1977 put an end to MAPAI's hegemony, and ever since Israeli society has remained split down the middle in terms of its political orientation and societal preferences. Under Begin, Israel witnessed a further decline in terms of the state's survival playing as a vehicle for societal mobilization. The peace with Egypt further eroded the state claim for sacrifice. The liberalization of

the economy meant that the early socialist leaning that embellished the ideology of 'togetherness' and 'common destiny' could no longer remain the basis for solidarity.

The political division between Left and Right was also reaching new proportions when the war in Lebanon was perceived by a large segment to be a 'political war' and not a war of 'no choice'. Even as the two main political parties united in grand coalitions - mostly as a result of a deadlock in electoral preferences - the level of societal division grew widely as a result of economic inequality, ideological splits regarding solutions with Arabs and Palestinians, and schisms over questions of state and religion.

In the 1980's and early 1990's the Israeli economy was fully transformed, a transformation that was about to be further accelerated by the influx of Russian immigrants and the peace process. Remnants of state control in conjunction with the socialist agenda in society (as best manifested in the heydays of the Histadrut) were losing their base. The Palestinian *Intifada* helped to widen the gap among Israelis about the nature of the state, and even the temporary solidarity achieved during the Gulf War as the country took to the shelters, could not alter the fact that the fabric of society was tearing at the seams and state requirements could no longer hold the community together as before.

Indeed, international affairs have also had an impact on the state-society relations on the Israeli scene. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the decline of third-worldism, and the triumph of capitalism and privatization world-wide, had a very strong impact on Israeli society and the Middle East peace process. Many Israelis have moved away from the republican, communal tradition of citizenship, demanding more and more spheres of freedom and appreciating less communal voluntarism and altruistic investments. While in the past, symbols of 'belonging' and contribution to society were mainly associated with service to the agents of the state, primarily the military, status in Israel today is mainly economic and individualistic. Lawyers and hi-tech professionals are the exemplars of success. Foreign labor and not '*avoda Ivrit*' have become the more pronounced characteristics of Israeli society. The trans-national modes of transportation and communication that exposed the Israelis to the outside world also contributed to widespread resentment concerning the idea that, being

surrounded by enemies, 'we must dwell alone.' In fact, even the debased concept of 'yordim' (those who were repudiated for many years for departing the country) is being re-evaluated as the Knesset is considering permitting Israelis residing abroad the right to vote.

The over-secularization of a large portion of Israeli society that drew heavily on the prospects of peace — la Shimon Peres' 'New Middle East', on the one hand, and the growing fear of religious Jews that Israel is losing its Jewishness, thereby leading to religious extremism and messianism, on the other hand, have become the major features of Israeli society in the last decade. The heated split in the political arena is not only about solutions with the Palestinian Arabs, but even more so about the nature of the Jewish polity in the next century. While a large group is seeking to maintain a republican vision of solidarity that borrows more and more from religion, and less and less from the Zionist ideology that gave the state its *raison d'Être*, another segment is searching for a post-Zionist societal solution that challenges both the state and the religious traditionalist approach. This led to a growing Jewish domestic rift (as well as severe differences with the Diaspora) accompanied by increasing violence that culminated in the assassination of Rabin. Rabin embodied, in the minds of the 'secularists', the vision of a new society, while for the 'religious' and nationalists, he epitomized the breakdown of Jewish values.

The ascendance of Netanyahu in 1996 and the growing voice of religious and orthodox anti-Zionist parties, partly as the result of the new political system, have shown how the dichotomy of state/society/political society divisions have grown to the point of a dangerous rupture. We are now at the stage in which the Israeli identity crisis is so severe that only the conflict with the Arabs and Palestinians seems to hold the community together. Indeed, if and when the peace process materializes, the Israeli polity will find itself hard-pressed to redefine itself in a way that very conflicting visions can be accommodated in order to enable the Jewish community to settle its domestic tensions.



