APARTHEID & BEYOND

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APARTHEID AND BEYOND

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COVER The wall near Jerusalem. (Alfonso Moral)
Some words cannot escape the horrors of the human past. When, in September 2001, President George W. Bush proclaimed a “crusade” against terrorism, he evoked in Muslim minds the indiscriminate slaughters by knights seeking to reclaim the Holy Land for Christendom. People have been lynched in many times and places, but the word “lynching” will always conjure mobs of white men hanging a black man from a tree in the post-slavery American South. Perhaps most powerfully, the term “holocaust” is invariably linked in the modern mind with the Nazi effort to annihilate the Jews of Europe. The association runs so deep that the word almost never appears uncapsitized in print, except in the phrase “nuclear holocaust,” the only calumny that seems to beggar the imagination like the mechanized mass murder at Auschwitz and Treblinka.

To use such words in description of the present is perforce to compare. It is to risk giving offense, for it unsubtly hints that the suffering of the past is not special. It is to yank that pain forward in time and display it anew. It is therefore to court accusations of irreverence or insensitivity, at best, and rank opportunism, at worst. Such comparison is a political act. It should be undertaken only with great care.

“Apartheid” is a word bomb akin to “lynching” or “untouchables.” It explodes upon the page, ripping the scabs off the wounds of state-enforced segregation in South Africa, a system that ended only in 1994. It exposes, like “untouchables,” the habit, visible in most societies in history, of ranking human beings to favor the few at the expense of the many. The collective shame of this tradition is sharpened in the case of apartheid by its attempts at gilding virulent racism with the language of science, the measuring of skulls by people with advanced degrees uncovering the dark side of the Enlightenment.

We have used the word “apartheid” to describe Israel’s system of rule over the Palestinians with eyes wide open to the incendiary quality of the term and the uniqueness of the South African ordeal that it automatically evokes. Our purpose in making this comparison is not to shock—we are hardly the first publication to assay it. Rather, we seek in this issue of Middle East Report to stare hard, cold realities in the face and to participate in the discussion about how to transcend them without compounding the loss and dislocation they have already caused.

The hard, cold realities are these: Without a heroic reversal of decades of US policy, there will be no two-state solution in Israel-Palestine. As Oren Yiftachel demonstrates in these pages, the willingness of Israeli leaders to speak of Palestinian statehood has increased in inverse proportion to the chances that such a state will come into being. The advance of the settlement project, the proliferation of physical barriers between Palestinians and Israeli Jews, the cantonization of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the agony of Gaza—all of these facts stand in cruel mockery of Israel’s stated determination to pursue a comprehensive peace. For its part, the Obama administration has backed away from its early advocacy of a settlement freeze, so eagerly taken as evidence of tough-mindedness with Israel, and hunkered down in the standard finger-pointing at the Palestinian side. Shortly after the release of the carefully compiled Goldstone report alleging Israeli and Hamas war crimes during the winter war of 2008–2009 in Gaza, Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice made known her opinion that the document was “anti-Israel crap,” and thereby announced that the new president would keep the world safe for Israeli impunity.

“Apartheid” is different, however, from its fellow word bombs in that it shakes loose memories of hope as well as despair. The regime of discrimination in South Africa, though it lasted for the better part of a century, did not endure. It was overthrown and replaced with far greater democracy with no one firing a shot. It is not inevitable that Israel’s system of rule over the Palestinians will go the way of South African apartheid—injustice, in fact, often prevails. But neither are people of good will foredoomed in their efforts to imagine, and work for, a better future.
Raising eyebrows all around, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced on August 16 that he would nominate at least three women to be ministers in the new cabinet that, unresolved controversy notwithstanding, he will head as president of Iran. It was a step unprecedented in the 30-year history of the Islamic Republic, whose backers in the conservative clergy regard the concept of women in high office as contrary to God’s will. And it was Ahmadinejad, of all people, who broke this barrier? His political opponents among reformists and feminists were, if anything, more suspicious of his intentions than the conservative clergy. But Ahmadinejad was true to his word, and later that week, he proposed that Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, Fatemeh Ajorloo and Soosan Keshavarz become the ministers of health, social welfare and education, respectively. Dastjerdi was approved by the Majles, the legislature of the Islamic Republic, and is now on the job.

It misses the point to scrutinize these nominations for evidence of budding “pro-woman” or sneakily downplayed “anti-woman” tendencies in the Iranian president. He is rather showing just how narrow is the political base that he and his allies, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the security apparatus, plan to rest on in the aftermath of the disputed June presidential election. Dastjerdi and the two other nominees have ties to the Revolutionary Guard, created by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini because he did not trust the regular army, and the Basij, the “peoples’ adjunct” of the Guard founded during the Iran-Iraq war. And all three women are members of the hardline Islamist women’s organizations around the Basij, which have been agitating

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Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not known as a friend of freedoms for women. So when he nominated three women to be cabinet ministers, a first in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran, both his narrow base of supporters and his millions of opponents wondered what he was up to.
for promotion of women to ministerial rank. With the appointment of Dastjerdi and the nomination of Ajourloo and Keshavarz, Ahmadinejad is in a sense declaring his independence of the clergy and the traditional conservatives, but revealing his dependence on the most authoritarian sectors of the lay establishment in Iran.

And yet, the implications of these measures of political consolidation for women’s rights are ambiguous: The woman nominees and the organizations from which they hail are undoubtedly conservative and, by the lights of many Iranian feminists, “anti-woman” in their attitudes. The record, particularly that of Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, nonetheless shows some success in improving the status of women and promoting certain women’s rights. Meanwhile, the debates around these nominations have brought women’s issues to the fore in ways that Ahmadinejad likely did not foresee. The irony, then, is that concrete improvements in Iranian women’s lives may be achieved despite the general increased repression.

Not a Republic of Mullahs

Ahmadinejad is not known to be a friend of greater personal and political freedoms for Iranian women, but has sometimes sought to appear as such, perhaps to make a fresh appeal to women voters. During his initial campaign for the presidency, in 2005, he dissembled in response to repeated questions about his stance. Asked about bad hejabi (laxity in women’s “Islamic” dress), for instance, he looked into the camera and said: “Why do you humiliate people?... Do you really think the country’s biggest problem right now is the kind of dress a young woman wears?” But the fears about Ahmadinejad proved to be well founded. Less than a year into his first term, there was a noticeable uptick in the state’s efforts to banish bad hejabi from the streets. There is dispute over who exactly was behind this “culture of modesty” campaign, but the police and the Basij were clearly under orders to restore stricter standards of veiling in public, amidst calls for further Islamization of the public space.1 Dastjerdi is considered to be the mastermind of one such proposal, for gender-segregated health care facilities.

As president, Ahmadinejad has generally stuck to the line that Islam holds the female sex in high esteem, saying at a May 2006 press conference in Jakarta: “Women are the crowns of men’s heads.” Yet his sentiment that “women are cherished in Iran” has been applied selectively, at best, by his administration. Since 2005, several women’s organizations and publications have been shut down, including Zanan, the reputable feminist monthly founded in 1992. Women activists, for example, those working for revision of the personal status clauses in the Islamic Republic’s constitution, have been subject to arrest and imprisonment.

Against this background, Ahmadinejad’s naming of three female nominees for his cabinet seemed not only out of character, but also out of step with political reality in the Islamic Republic. There were no women heading ministries under Ahmadinejad’s predecessor Mohammad Khatami, the self-described reformist who rode a wave of support from women, particularly younger, well-educated women, to victory in 1997 and 2001.

At the start of Khatami’s second term, many turned hopeful eyes his way, anticipating that he would include women on his list of cabinet nominees. One hundred sixty-three reformist members of the Sixth Majles signed an official letter expressing this expectation. On the list that Khatami finally submitted to the parliament, however, there were no women. Khatami explained that he was not willing to risk angering conservative clerics, who might issue fatwas instructing citizens not to pay taxes to his “un-Islamic” government. He tried to mollify the reformists by appointing a woman, Masoumeh Ebtekar, as his vice president and head of the Department of the Environment, both non-ministerial positions.

When Ahmadinejad announced his nominees, the clergy made their distress known in private meetings and through their tribunes in mosques and in elected office. Mohammad Taqi Rahbar, leader of the Clerics’ Faction in the Majles, worried openly about “a new challenge between Ahmadinejad and the clerics.” Rahbar was referring to a spat in the first year of Ahmadinejad’s presidency over whether to allow women to attend soccer matches. In response to agitation from women fans, Ahmadinejad had reversed the ban that was in place and demanded that a special section be reserved for women, so as to create a “healthier atmosphere” at stadiums. The high-ranking clerics were irked, to say the least, that they had not been consulted about the reversal of the ban. The controversy came to an end only when Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, intervened to ask Ahmadinejad to retract his statements.

In August, however, the Leader did not intervene. He refrained from coming out in support of the president, but also did not object when conservative women officials reported his privately favorable comments. So this time Ahmadinejad did not back down. He insisted on having his choice of ministers even when the clerics publicly opposed his decisions. “This is a rightful demand on women’s part,” he declared, implying there was no need even to consult the clergy. It was a provocative remark from a champion of the same Islamic Revolution that established velayat-e faqih (rule of the jurisprudents).

Khamenei’s tacit approval, however, had the desired effect. The uproar in the conservative-dominated parliament quieted down, and in the end 175 out of 286 MPs voted Dastjerdi in as the first female minister to serve in the Islamic Republic. Along with a male candidate for the Energy Ministry, the two other woman nominees were rejected, ostensibly due to “lack of experience.”

Thus partly rebuffed, Ahmadinejad used his executive authority to appoint a woman, Nasrin Soltankhah, as vice president for science and technology. He has also broached the idea of elevating the headship of the Presidential Center for Women and Family Affairs to vice presidential rank, in
whileלי should Shirin Ebadi be the one who claims the credit for the promotion of women’s rights?” asked a conservative commentator.

A Presidential Gift

Many argue that Ahmadinejad nominated women to appear somehow responsive to the hundreds of thousands of women who protested the procedural irregularities in the June 9 election. It is an unlikely story, since no feminists and reformists rallied to his defense during his scuffle with the clergy, many refusing even to comment lest the nominations divert attention from the scandal of the election itself. As Rafat Bayat, a former conservative MP, says: “I doubt that, in nominating female ministers, Mr. Ahmadinejad wants to attract the 16 million people who voted for his opponents.”

There has, of course, been a long-standing demand from women’s movements that women be appointed to high political office. Prior to the June election, 42 women’s groups and 700 individual activists from across a wide spectrum, secular and liberal on one end and religious on the other, formed a coalition called the Convergence of Women with the aim of pressing the presidential candidates to announce their plans for the advancement of Iranian women’s status. Could Ahmadinejad be trying to alleviate the pressure on the government from these women and their international supporters? Not likely. In fact, he was the only presidential candidate who refrained from participating in Rakhshan Banietemad’s documentary, *We Are Half of Iran’s Population*, about the Convergence and its program.

The introduction of women ministers seems to be less of a response and more of a reaction to such coalitions. Conservative and religious women’s organizations, which are hooked into state institutions and lobby for change from the inside, were far more influential. The Zeinab Society is one such organization.

Founded in 1987, the Zeinab Society is one of the 14 factions comprising the Front of the Followers of the Path of the Imam and Leadership, a right-wing coalition that has representation in the Majles and is often described as “traditionalist.” The Society has 90 offices across the country: 22 in Tehran, 62 in other cities and eight in the women’s seminary at Qom and other centers of religious study. According to the Society’s website, the seminary office is the most active. Its internal reports reveal an organization interested in enhancing knowledge of religious and ethical concepts and practices among women, with a focus on the disadvantaged and unemployed, housewives, high school and university students, and war widows. The Society presents religion courses, organizes educational tours and offers unemployment benefits. Like the Sisters’ Basij, it emphasizes that “women should not just be passive observers of the political, religious and current affairs of their society.” Thus, while the Society’s activities may seem apolitical, its board members are prominent in the public sphere. Maryam Behroozi, the Society’s president, is probably the most vocal. She has a seminary degree, served in the first four post-revolutionary parliaments and has always been daring in her political pronouncements. She was the only woman from the conservative camp to congratulate the human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi on her 2003 Nobel Peace Prize and brave the criticism that followed. She has also actively pursued a place for women in the upper echelon of state institutions.

Behroozi says that she paid a personal visit to Khatami to express this wish on behalf of the Zeinab Society. It was her conservative sisters, as well as reformist and feminist women, who were disappointed when Khatami failed to name a woman minister. In 2004, several months before the election in which Ahmadinejad first ran, Behroozi was interviewed demanding that the next president of Iran appoint at least four women to his cabinet. When Ahmadinejad won, she went to see him with women colleagues and repeated the request. In the Majles, meanwhile, Zohreh Elahian presented a bill helping to remove the barriers to women occupying top state jobs. Ahmadinejad

which case he would need to introduce another female vice president. As for the two ministries that remained vacant, he proposed the names of Fatemeh Aliya and Zohreh Elahian, both conservative MPs. Both women nonetheless withdrew from consideration so as not to offend the clerics.

Rahbar, head of the Clerics’ Faction, frowned upon what Ahmadinejad had done, stating, “The president’s behavior regarding this issue conveys a sense of obstinacy.” Indeed, with Khamenei’s backing, Ahmadinejad seems to be quite willing to antagonize the conservative clergy. Having lost much of the support that helped him in 2005, among the rural poor and recent urban migrants, he now appears to be concentrating on and responding to the demands of one sector of his base, those groups that feel left behind by the dimming of revolutionary fervor and relative cultural opening in Iran since the end of the 1980–1988 war with Iraq. These groups are the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij and their ideological fellows.

His women nominees are a case in point. While in school, Fatemeh Ajourloo belonged to the Students’ Basij of Azad University. Nasrin Soltankhah is a member of the Professors’ Basij and was backed in her parliamentary campaign by Basijis. Several of the women, including the new minister of health, Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, are associated with the conservative Zeinab Society.

Therefore could she be the next president of Iran appoint at least four women to his cabinet. When Ahmadinejad won, she went to see him with women colleagues and repeated the request. In the Majles, meanwhile, Zohreh Elahian presented a bill helping to remove the barriers to women occupying top state jobs. Ahmadinejad
did not comply during his first term, but the conservative women did not give in.

The August 2009 nominations of women, Behroozi claims, came as no surprise to her. Prior to the June election, members of the Zeinab Society, along with the Council of Principalist Women, a like-minded group, met with Ahmadinejad again specifically to discuss the place of women in his administration. When they suggested that he appoint women ministers, Behroozi recalls, “Mr. Ahmadinejad smiled.” After the balloting, the delegation of women offered him a list of names. Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi was on it.

In 2005, Ahmadinejad was widely perceived to have won on the strength of his pledge to “bring the oil money to people's dining room tables”—the chicken-in-every-pot politics employed by many a right-wing populist to woo the disadvantaged. But the president’s accomplishments in the economic realm so far are nothing to boast about and he cannot rely on the working classes to back him amidst the ongoing post-election turmoil. His base in the Revolutionary Guard, Basij and related groups has backed him to the hilt and will continue to do so to protect the privileges they have accumulated. 3 Now the president’s base is flexing its newfound muscle in various domains, including women's rights. Whereas four years previously Ahmadinejad was able to ignore their requests, in 2009 the ideologically right-wing women, from their relatively secure position in the polity and because of an increase in their bargaining power, were able to push him to act. To the extent that the more liberal, secular organizations played a role, it may have been to provoke a reaction. As one conservative commentator writes, “Why should Shirin Ebadi, with her Western approach and attitude, be the one who claims the credit for the promotion of women’s rights, and the Islamic system the one that falls into a passive or defensive mode?”

The Gray Area

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the most serious challenge to Ahmadinejad’s women nominees has come from the best-known feminists and reformists. “If women activists insist on having women in policymaking positions, it is because they want them to understand women's needs and improve their situation,” says Fatemeh Haqiqatjoo, a former reformist MP who is now a research fellow at Harvard University. She doubted that Ahmadinejad's women nominees would do anything to better women's status, “because [they] have extremely traditionalistic approaches to women.” Shadi Sadr, a leading feminist lawyer, describes Ahmadinejad's appointees as “yes men” and, along with other feminists, worries that they will propound “anti-woman” legislation. Known to be a fervent follower of the Supreme Leader, Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi did not accept the nomination for minister of health until she paid a visit to Khamenei's office and was assured that she had not issued any statement against the appointment of women ministers. She has also come under particular scrutiny for her advocacy of segregated health care facilities and her opposition to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Dastjerdi’s record, nonetheless, makes her difficult to pigeonhole: She was born in 1959, entered Tehran Medical School at the age of 16 and graduated with a degree in gynecology in 1988. As a doctor she has directed Arash Maternity Hospital, located in a low-income neighborhood in northeast Tehran. Between the years of 1994 to 2001, she was on the managerial board of the Family Planning Association of the Islamic Republic of Iran, during which time the population growth rate fell to 1.3 percent. As an academician she is on the faculty at Tehran Medical School and was on the Ministry of Health's Council for Professional and Medical Training in the 1990s. As a politician she has served in the Fourth and the Fifth Majleses. She was one of three women selected by the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council in 1987 to form the Women’s Social and Cultural Council, which later became a major conservative policymaking institution. She has also sat on the board of the Zeinab Society for several terms.

Far from a passive adherent to a hardline conservative men’s agenda, Dastjerdi is often up front about her opinions on women’s rights, which at times clash with those of her male counterparts. In 1993, Dastjerdi stood in front of an assembly full of male MPs to speak emphatically for women’s right to ministerial positions:

I doubt that anyone believes that men are born ministers…. In an Islamic society where women can simultaneously maintain their chastity and work alongside men, sometimes even harder than men… why shouldn’t we make use of women at the ministerial level?... Considering how male ministers have performed so far, it seems that the situation could not worsen!

In the Fifth Majles, Dastjerdi was head of the Commission for Women, Youth and Family Affairs. She blocked several men from joining the Commission because of their hardline views. “If you want to turn the Women’s Commission into the Anti-Women’s Commission, go ahead and vote for them!” she told the Commission's presiding board. In her capacity as an MP, she was also influential in the passage of bills on the establishment of special Civil Courts assigned to family matters, which require the presence of female advisory judges, amendment of the child custody law, which gives the court the power to place restrictions on the father’s right to custody and remove custody from him under circumstances the court considers harmful to the child, adjustment of dowries for inflation, and pensions for dependent children of deceased women. "These reforms, although dismissed as "insufficient" and "minor" by some feminists, were moves in the direction of advancing women’s rights.

In 1997, Dastjerdi was interviewed by Elaine Sciolino in the privacy of her Tehran home. The New York Times reporter was
surprised to find that Dastjerdi believed that women should serve as judges as they had done under the Shah; that the right of unilateral divorce for men should be curtailed; that the state should establish shelters for battered women; and that non-Muslim female visitors to Iran should be allowed to wear hats instead of headscarves. Nonetheless, when it comes to Iranian women, she and her conservative colleagues actively support the strict controls on women’s dress through the “culture of modesty” campaigns.

Clearly, opinions about the rights of women and their status in society do not always track with opinions about the reformist-conservative conflict, velayat-e faqih and other controversial issues in Iranian politics. Conservative women who voted for Ahmadinejad in 2005 and 2009 do not necessarily hold stereotypically conservative opinions across the board. Second, and more important, there is no fixed agenda for what the rights and interests of Iranian women are. Defending her proposal on the sex-segregated hospitals, Dastjerdi argues that she aims only to provide women with greater comfort and privacy. The proponents of this proposal contend, as well, that a patient has the right to be treated by a doctor of the same sex. They worry that some women might be unwilling to be examined by a man and thus put their own health at risk. Hossein Ali Shahriari, a member of the Health Commission of the Majles, states that the proposal aims to eliminate these situations. While some women find the idea of gender-segregated clinics discriminatory and offensive, others think they will actually expand access to health care for women. Figuring out which position is “pro-woman” and which “anti” is a tricky business.

Reforms of the Anti-Reformists?

Mohammad Taqi Rahbar complained of Ahmadinejad, “The insistence of the president upon nominating women may create cognitive spasms in the Parliament, seminaries and society.” He was right.

The nominations spurred a series of debates about interpretation of the Qur’an, hadith and sunna, as well as Ayatollah Khomeini’s own statements about women’s role in an Islamic society. Once a marker of difference between reformists and conservatives, the question of women’s status is now bringing out fissures in the conservative firmament itself. For the first time since the revolution, the issue of appointing women ministers appeared on Iranian state TV and percolated through society.

The debates are not limited to religion. For some, the question revolves around something deeper, what they call “natural” gender roles. The concern is that women who are active in public life will be unable to serve as the foundation of the family. This concern transcends the reformist-conservative divide; even Mohammad Khatami on occasion fretted about the effects of women’s employment. Others, like Hojjat-ol-Islam Salman Zaker of the Principalists’ Faction in the Majles, do not consider women capable of doing jobs traditionally performed by men. But even supposing that women are capable, Zaker says, they cannot serve. “Due to the specific culture of Iran, men will not readily obey women,” leading to debilitating interruptions of the chain of command at ministries.

Surprisingly, even those who are not against the act of appointing women ministers draw upon the concept of “natural” feminine attributes of women to argue that women are better suited to some ministries than others. Ironically, there is no consensus upon which ministries are best. Both Ahmadinejad and Rafat Bayat, the former conservative MP, posit that women’s “motherly care and supervision” and “nurturing capacities” qualify them most for the Ministry of Education. Esfandiar Eghtiari, representing the Zoroastrian minority in Parliament, finds the Ministry of Education to be “the worst option for women”—too big a job, he says. His suggestion is to start by “offering women the vice presidential position of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts.”

Not every faction in Iran that has taken up the question of women’s rights during the period of ferment over Ahmadinejad’s ministerial nominations has done so out of genuine concern for women. Nevertheless, the conflicts among those who claim to speak on behalf of women have enriched Iranian public life and—quite possibly—boosted the chances of concrete improvements in women’s lives and life opportunities.

What all this suggests is that, ironically, reform may come at the hands of anti-reformists. It all depends on two factors: first, how vigorously international organizations press the Iranian government on violations of women’s rights, and more important, how consistently the secular and liberal activists try to form coalitions with more conservative civil society organizations, like the Zeinab Society and the Council of Principalist Women. One such coalition was formed in 2008, during Ahmadinejad’s first term, when all of these women joined forces to block passage of Clause 23 of the notorious family bill, which would have facilitated polygamy by canceling the requirement that a man obtain the agreement of a judge and his first wife before taking a second. The progress of the quest for reform and democracy may indeed be necessary for advancement of women’s rights in Iran across the board, but the retrogression of that political project with the consolidation of the hardliners’ power will not necessarily lead to a degradation of women’s rights and status.

Endnotes

On July 5, 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s prime minister, said something that had many rubbing their eyes in disbelief. Reviewing his government’s first 100 days, he pronounced, “We have managed to create a national agreement about the concept of ‘two states for two peoples.’” Can it be that the hardline leader of the Likud, known for opposing almost every withdrawal from occupied territory Israel has ever undertaken, now believes in a peaceful two-state solution?

On the surface, it is hard to tell. On the one hand, Netanyahu is hardly the first Zionist leader to declare support for peace through Palestinian statehood accompanied by Israeli territorial withdrawals. On the other hand, he is solidly within the Zionist consensus behind colonial and oppressive practices that work to further “Judaize” contested space and deny Palestinians—on both sides of the Green Line marking off Israel proper from occupied Palestine—their legitimate rights.

But the prime minister is not schizophrenic, and there is no contradiction between these two positions, which in fact crystallize the latest phase in the changing political geography of Zionist-Palestinian conflict: a phase of neither two states nor one. In place of movement toward two states or one, there is a process of “creeping apartheid”—undeclared, yet structural—reordering the politics and geography of the country between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The colonized West Bank, the besieged Gaza Strip and Israel proper, each with its own official set of rules, are in fact merging into one regime system, ultimately controlled by the Jewish state, which increasingly appears to bear the characteristics of apartheid, and inhabited by people with citizenship status akin to “blacks,” “coloreds” and “whites.” Repeated statements by Israeli leaders in support of Palestinian statehood have thus far functioned to lend this process legitimacy, rather than lead to the end of colonial settlement, military occupation, minority oppression and resolution of the conflict.

The Israeli regime system has long been “ethnocratic,” that is to say, an overall logic of Judaization prevails in all regions under Israeli control despite the differences in their legal and political circumstances. Over time, however, the contradictions of ethnocracy have led to a deepening of the “separate and unequal” conditions in Israel-Palestine. Jews enjoy a relatively even and privileged political and legal position, while Palestinians are divided into several proto-groups, each having a differently inferior set of rights and capabilities. Under the process of creeping apartheid, Palestinians are increasingly confined to a series of what may be called “black” and “colored” ghettos, while Jews reside in relatively open localities, both in Israel and in the Judaized West Bank.

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Crossing the Rubicon?

A new political geographic phase has prevailed since the early 1990s, leading to a sea change in the discourse of Israeli leaders toward the Palestinians. Under the new approach, Israeli leaders are gradually recognizing Palestinian collective rights, although in vague terms and with perpetual delays in implementation. The shift came after decades of intransigent denial of the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood, combined with support of Jewish expansion into the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Palestinian regions inside Israel.

A notable early turn into the new discourse was taken by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was willing to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization and “Palestinian national political rights” as enshrined in the Oslo accords of 1993. Another premier from the Labor Party, Ehud Barak, negotiated at Camp David in 2000 and at Taba in 2001 over the shape of a Palestinian state, and ordered withdrawal of the Israeli army from Lebanon. The Labor Party’s reputation, if not its policies or actions, had been moderate for some time, so the change in discourse became much more conspicuous when right-wing nationalist leaders such as Ariel Sharon and Netanyahu began to use it. These men had built their careers on advancing Zionist colonization and advocating violence in order to achieve strategic defeat of Palestinian nationalism, what Baruch Kimmerling aptly termed the “politicide” of the Palestinians.

The transformation was starkest in Sharon, justly regarded as the father of the settlement project in the West Bank and a long-time champion of the idea that Israel’s security required a Greater Israel stretching from the river to the sea. In 2002, Sharon rejected the idea of leaving even the most isolated outposts in Gaza: “Under my leadership there will be no empty concessions to the Palestinians. The fate of Netzarim and Kfar Darom is the same as Tel Aviv.” Just over one year later, the aging premier reversed himself: “It is impossible to continue keeping 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation. Yes, it is occupation, and it is bad for Israel.” Moreover, unlike other Israeli leaders who had expressed comparable sentiments, Sharon turned his words into action, carrying out a unilateral military withdrawal and evacuation of 25 Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank in 2005. It was the first time that Israel had willingly vacated areas it considers to be the Jewish homeland, that is, the biblical Land of Israel.

Before he slipped into a coma in early 2006, Sharon also led a coterie of ideological confreres out of Likud and formed a new party, Kadima, whose raison d’être was to complete similar withdrawals, or “disengagements,” from more of the West Bank. His successor as prime minister, Ehud Olmert of Kadima, actively sought to effect this withdrawal and, failing that, to negotiate a two-state agreement with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. In a rare burst of frankness, Olmert later declared: “Failure to reach a peace agreement and create a viable Palestinian state could plunge Israel into a South...
African-style apartheid struggle.” If that happens, he said, “the state of Israel is finished.” He was backed in the spirit of these comments by his foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, now leader of Kadima, whose 2009 election campaign was heavily focused on the two-state horizon.

Does this transformation signal the crossing of the peace Rubicon? It appears not. While the Greater Israel agenda is all but dead, its replacement is unlikely to be either a viable Palestinian state alongside democratic Israel or one democratic state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. Rather, its replacement will probably be peace-seeking rhetoric masking a reality of apartheid. In other words, the Israeli ethnocratic project is changing its character, from horizontal to vertical, and its main goal, from expansion to enhancement of ethno-national privilege. Jews, wherever they live, will be at the top of the ladder, and the Palestinians varying numbers of rungs below them.

This outcome is not inevitable. Concerted and determined international pressure, led by the United States, could still bring about a viable and fully sovereign Palestinian state, with international law implemented, Palestinian rights respected, legitimate Israeli rights protected and the region stabilized. Yet such a peaceful trajectory would require both Jews and Palestinians, and especially the former, to deal honestly with the core issues shaping the conflict, such as the consequences of 1948 war, the plight of Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, borders and the future of Palestinians inside Israel. It appears unlikely that any political force, including Israel's American patron, will have the wherewithal or the willpower to compel Israel to halt the process of creeping apartheid.

Aggression and Conciliation

The contours of the contemporary phase in Israel-Palestine's political geography are complex, including measured readjustment and some shrinkage of the Zionist territorial project, mixed with new forms of domination over Palestine and
Palestinians. The new phase follows decades of unabated Zionist demographic and spatial expansion, characterized by Jewish-only immigration, tight military control, construction of some 800 Jewish settlements in Israel proper and over 200 in the Occupied Territories, massive land confiscation and uncompromising attempts to Judaize all of the country.

Transition to the current phase occurred gradually, as a response to a range of events demonstrating that the previous colonial momentum could not be sustained. Chief among these events were the two intifadas beginning in 1987 and 2000, the Palestinian resort to suicide terror against Israeli civilians, the rise of Hamas and its rocket campaign from Gaza, and growing pressure against Israel's illegal settlements from an increasingly antagonistic world community. Israeli elites began to realize that further expansion and direct oppression bear high security, economic and social costs, which run counter to the increasingly popular agendas of globalization and liberalization.

In the absence of a genuine wish for reconciliation with the Palestinians according to binding international decisions, however, Israel sought to rearrange control over Israel-Palestine so as to minimize these costs. The overall strategy was unilateral separation, which saw the creation of parallel geographies for Palestinians and Jews in the West Bank, with concrete walls and high fences penning in Palestinian towns and villages, and asphalt highways easing settler travel, as well as the evacuation of Gaza and the maintenance of uneven segregation inside Israel.
Beyond the thrust for separation, Israel’s moves were often confused. On the one hand, it allowed settlers to build new “outpost” settlements wedged between Palestinian population centers; accelerated the expansion of existing settlements; mounted a series of “anti-terror” offensives using state terror against civilians; constructed the massive illegal separation barrier in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; tightened the years-long siege of Gaza; and launched highly destructive invasions of the coastal strip as well as southern Lebanon. These moves found echoes in new discriminatory policies toward Palestinian citizens of Israel, whose political and civil status within the Jewish state was further compromised.2

On the other hand, Israel also made gestures toward Palestinian rights: It recognized the PLO, allowed the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and declared its support for Palestinian statehood, which only a decade previously was anathema to over 90 percent of Israeli Jews. Israel also retreated from the main Palestinian towns and cities, southern Lebanon and the entire Gaza Strip; evacuated settlements; enshrined previously denied Palestinian rights to purchase Israeli state land; and recognized ten (out of 45) previously “illegal” Bedouin villages in the Naqab desert. In surveys, a steady majority of Jews agrees, in theory, at least, that Palestinian citizens should have equal individual rights in Israel proper, and that Israel should conclude a peace with a newly established Palestinian state encompassing the majority of the Occupied Territories. And yet—barring intense international pressure—these gestures do not provide a sufficient foundation for peace, because they are tactical and utilitarian, rather than strategic. They are evidence of conflict management, rather than a drive for reconciliation. Zionism remains a deeply ethnocratic movement, premised on a self-constructing narrative of an historical “right” to the entire Promised Land and the associated dispossession of Palestinians who object to the exclusivity of that right. Most Israeli Jews are accordingly unable to think productively about the core issues of the conflict, chiefly Israel’s role in the 1948 nakba. Denial of the nakba, as the Palestinians term their defeat in the 1948 war, the loss of their would-be state and the flight of refugees, has become a core Zionist value. Most Jews—officials, scholars and ordinary citizens—simply refuse to enter a discussion on the nakba, or alternatively justify it as “necessary,” thereby legitimizing the 1948 ethnic cleansing and the subsequent destruction of over 400 Palestinian villages and towns, and endorsing the continued “right” of Jews to colonize Palestine.

Thus blinded to the past, Israeli Jews cannot or will not look objectively at the present and future, whether regarding the Palestinian refugees, East Jerusalem, borders or the status of the Palestinians inside Israel. This avoidance is wrapped into Zionist discourse by continuous public invocation of (often genuine) communal fears in the face of anti-Jewish violence and the more radical, at times anti-Semitic, communiqués of Hamas and its allied organizations. These fears feed on ambient
Ethnocracy and Democracy

Apartheid conditions always develop on the basis of existing political and cultural foundations. In Israel, these foundations are the state’s long-standing ethnocratic regime and the associated racist treatment of Palestinians who stand in the way of the state’s program of Judaization.

Ethnocratic regimes are commonly found in contested territories in which a dominant ethnic nation appropriates entity settles hundreds of thousands of Jews in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and separates them legally and spatially from local Arabs.

The political system in Israel proper does maintain key democratic practices, such as periodic (though not universal or free) elections and protection of important civil rights such as freedom of speech, movement and association, relative (though far from complete) gender equality and homosexual rights. Israel boasts a strong, quite independent judiciary and relatively open media. Further, since the early 1990s, Israeli society has undergone significant liberalization, privatization and globalization, with greater exposure to international standards and influx of foreign investment. These processes have allowed Israelis greater economic and cultural freedoms, and enabled them to portray the nation as Western, free and progressive.4 It
is mainly Jews, however, who have benefited from these processes, while Palestinians remain either on the margins or locked out. In addition, the democratizing changes have not modified the most oppressive facets of the Israeli regime, such as the ongoing Judaization of land, the disenfranchisement of nearly 4 million Palestinians, the central role of the military and security forces, the Jewish-only immigration policies and the marginality of the 1.2 million Palestinian citizens.

**Phases of Colonization**

The historical momentum of Israel’s ethnocratic-colonial system is particularly important for the making of apartheid-type relations and requires some elaboration. The Zionist colonization of geographic Palestine has taken place in five main stages. The first, lasting from the late nineteenth century until 1947, can be termed the “colonialism of survival.” Most Jews who came to Palestine in these years were fleeing as refugees, from Eastern European pogroms, the mortal threat of Nazism and, then, the Holocaust. In Palestine, organized by Zionist groups and ideas, they expanded their area of settlement by purchasing land, often from absentee Arab owners, while forming proto-national institutions and armed forces, as foundations for a future state.

The second stage, during the 1947–1949 war, was characterized by ethnic cleansing. It saw the establishment of the state of Israel following the Arabs’ rejection of the UN partition plan and attack on the nascent Israeli polity. The war ended with Palestine conquered by Israel, Jordan and Egypt and the majority of Palestinians rendered homeless and stateless. 1948 was the watershed year shaping the Israeli regime, which is built to protect the military and demographic achievements of the 1948 war for Zionism, such as the seizure of Palestinian territory beyond the allocation of the UN partition plan, the expulsion of most of the land’s Arabs and the Judaization of vast tracts of land. Israel was accepted as a member state of the UN. The Palestinians became a fragmented and defeated nation, dispersed among six countries, unable to contest the Judaization of their homeland.

The third phase, from 1949 to 1967, was typified by “internal colonialism”: Most Palestinian villages now within Israel were destroyed, and the return of Palestinian refugees prohibited. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Jews, mainly refugees or forced migrants from Europe and the Middle East, settled in hundreds of new Jewish settlements, some erected on the previously Arab lands. The Jewish settlement project was centrally planned with modern methods, not only to de-Arabize Palestine, but also to build the Zionist nation. Israel established a formal democracy, although its Palestinian citizens were concentrated in enclaves and placed under military administration until 1966.

The fourth phase from 1967 to 1993 was marked by external, expansionist colonialism. It followed Israeli conquest of Gaza,
East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and saw a huge project of state-sponsored colonization. Over 100 Jewish settlements that today host nearly half a million Jews were built in breach of international law. The illicit settlements include those built in occupied Arab Jerusalem, which was partly and illegally annexed to Israel. Religious themes became central to the narratives of both nations, helping to justify the escalating violence. Much of the Jewish settlement was driven by the desire to “return to sacred sites” and Palestinians increasingly used Islamic rhetoric to fire their resistance. Within Israel proper, Judaism continued through the construction of dozens of semi-suburban Jewish housing tracts in predominantly Arab regions, with concomitant restrictions on building by Arabs.

The fifth and present stage, beginning with the 1993 Oslo accords, can be characterized as “oppressive consolidation” and marks the effective end of significant Zionist expansionism. Settlements are still being built in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, but the vast majority of Jewish population increase in the West Bank occurs in settlements of long standing. At the same time, bypass roads connect the existing settlements ever more closely to Israel proper, further “Israelizing” Jewish colonies. The wall-and-fence complex that has replaced the Green Line as the de facto border between Israel proper and the West Bank and the enormous terminals that have replaced checkpoints outside most Palestinian cities cast a mighty shadow over both Palestinian daily life, but in strategic terms, they are management techniques of the overall stalemate. Maximal separation (in Hebrew, hafrada) is the new logic. Both nations, not surprisingly, have become more polarized, and radical factions have risen. Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and violently took over Gaza in 2007. In Israel, two hardline Likud governments were elected, first in 2001 and then in 2009, and Orthodox Jews have become more influential in the country’s leadership and in the army.

And so it is not accidental that the term “apartheid” has entered the discourse about Israel-Palestine. The momentum of straightforward colonization—the conquest of Arab lands and expansion of Jewish settlements—has slowed, but the resulting stalemate is hardly acceptable to Palestinians, who resist in various ways. From the Israeli side, the attempt is to reduce the costs of its control while maintaining political and military superiority. It has chosen an undeclared system that resembles apartheid, a system of rule that aims to cement separate and unequal ethnic relations.

**Master Types**

But the definition of the Israeli regime is complicated by several factors, not least the mismatch between the territory under the state’s control and that within its internationally recognized borders. Creeping apartheid in Israel-Palestine is thus best described as a process, rather than a well-delineated system of government. The occupation of the West Bank and discrimination against the Palestinians there are considered by Israel, and to some extent by international law, as temporary conditions subject to the self-defined security needs of the occupier. At this point, with the occupation over 40 years old and the settlements being consolidated, these conditions are in total breach of international law. While Israeli elites and their apologists still resort to such manipulations, their legal and political power is waning.

For example, Jewish settlements in the West Bank—outside the state’s recognized sovereign territory—are both civilian and permanent. They cannot be understood as part of a temporary military occupation, as Israel still claims in legal forums. Why would Sharon and Netanyahu press for the “natural growth” of towns they view as ephemeral? The progress of the settlement project in the Palestinians’ midst shows that the indigenous residents have been unwillingly and unwittingly incorporated as third-class subjects of the regime. Israel’s ongoing interest in representing this situation as “temporary” derives from its “need” to avoid endowing West Bank Palestinians with full civil rights.

Further, in the fifth stage of ethnocratic colonization, apartheid practices are creeping back into Israel proper, albeit with lesser severity than in the first and second phases. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, as documented by Mossawa, Adalah and other human rights organizations in Israel, the state has promulgated a series of new restrictions upon the movements, personal freedoms, employment, land ownership and political rights of Palestinian citizens. There is openly racist talk of “punishing the Arab enemy,” redrawing borders for the purpose of “population exchange” (a code name for annexing settlements and, “in return,” excluding Arab towns near the West Bank border from Israel), and stripping Palestinians in Israel of their citizenship.

The creep of apartheid is most apparent to Bedouin Palestinians in the Naqab region, who struggle against constant threats to their localities on their ancestors’ land. As part of withholding recognition of land and residency rights, the state denies the Bedouin basic services such as water, electricity, roads and schooling. The state also refuses to recognize the Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages, elected by the Bedouin as a regional leadership. State violence is commonly used against the Bedouin, with 604 demolitions of unauthorized homes from 2001 to 2008. In some important respects, the plight of Bedouin in the unrecognized villages is worse than that of most of their brethren in the West Bank and Gaza.

The vagueness of the adjective “creeping” captures another definitional difficulty: the existence of legal and political differences between the various Arab areas under Israeli control. The West Bank is officially designated as under “belligerent occupation” and the Gaza Strip as “hostile territory,” while Israel proper is commonly called a formal democracy, where Palestinians hold equal individual rights under the law. But Israel itself ruptured the boundaries between these regions and hence undermined the fine distinctions of legal-political status. It has imposed Israeli law in the Jewish settlements
whose jurisdiction now covers around 40 percent of the West Bank—an act of de facto annexation. Israel continues to control nearly all key components of sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza, such as immigration, population registration, imports and exports, water management, transportation infrastructure, land and planning policies, foreign relations and investment. Simultaneously, Arabs inside Israel have become second-class citizens, de facto and de jure.

It is no longer possible to distinguish between different “regimes” in Israel-Palestine, as the entire space is ultimately controlled by the Jewish state. There are, however, gradations in rights and capabilities between Jews and Palestinians, and among various groups of Palestinians, which bring the process of creeping apartheid into focus. Israel officially ranks Palestinian groups and awards each a separate status according to a combination of ethnicity and location, while Jews, differences of class, color and religiosity notwithstanding, remain everywhere equal in civil status. Palestinians are classified as follows, in descending order of legal status: the Druze, many of whom serve in the army; Palestinians in the Galilee and “triangle” regions; Bedouin in the Naqab, the most under-privileged citizens; East Jerusalem Palestinians, non-citizen permanent residents who have yellow Israeli plates on their cars because they live in a city that Israel has partially annexed; Palestinians in the West Bank; Gazans; and refugees located outside Israeli-controlled territory who are denied their claims of residency and property rights by the regime.

The logic of Judaization underpins Israeli policies toward all these groups in unique ways, though the groups fall into two broad categories of citizens and non-citizens. The variations in legal standing and exposure to oppression and violence make a significant difference in Palestinians’ life opportunities, economic standing and ability to exercise rights.

To borrow the language of apartheid South Africa, Israel appears to have created three master types of civil status in the areas under its control: “white” (Jewish), “colored” (Palestinians with Israeli citizenship) and “black” (Palestinians in the Occupied Territories). Two brief examples will illustrate the point. Take, first, socio-economic status: The per capita gross domestic product of Israeli Jews in 2006 was about 15 times higher than that of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, but also twice as high as that of the Palestinians in Israel. Unemployment in the Occupied Territories reached 50–60 percent, while hovering around 12–15 percent among Palestinians in Israel, and around half that figure among Jews. About three quarters of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live in poverty, as compared to some 53 percent of the Palestinians in Israel and 17 percent of the Jews.

Second, take the issue of planning and construction. In Area C of the West Bank, the territory that remains under direct Israeli administration by the terms of the Oslo agreement, only one of the 149 Palestinian villages has an approved outline plan, enabling the residents to build legally. Consequently, 1,626 houses were demolished from 2000 to 2008 and an additional 4,820 were served demolition orders. At the same time, half the Palestinian localities in Israel lack an approved plan and they, too, are constantly subject to house demolition. In 2000, according to an inter-ministerial committee headed by Shlomo Gazit, there were 22,000 unauthorized buildings in Palestinian localities in Israel’s central and northern regions and 16,000 in their Jewish counterparts. Arabs had suffered over 800 demolitions in the preceding decade, as opposed to only 24 for Jews. This disparity was also vivid in the Naqab, where Jews built 62 family farms with no planning approval. Despite the appeals of several human rights and environmental groups, all were retroactively legalized in 2009. At the same time, Bedouins in the Naqab who reside on their ancestors’ land suffered 604 home demolitions between 2000 and 2008.

### Ghettoes...

Geography is vital because the creeping apartheid process relies heavily on a range of skewed settlement, land, development and boundary demarcation policies and regulations. Palestinians amount to 48 percent of the population between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, but control only 15 percent of the land, while Jewish groups and authorities, including the army, control the rest, including most parks, expanses of wilderness and natural resources. Inside the Green Line the inequality is even starker: Palestinians amount to 18 percent of the population but control less than 3 percent of the land. In 1947, Jewish individuals and institutions controlled only 5 percent of historical Palestine or 7 percent of what became Israel.

As a result, the Palestinians have been enclosed in “rough space”—an archipelago of ghettoes with their settlement system remaining nearly frozen since 1948. At the same time, Jews greatly expanded their living space and enjoy freedom of habitation, settlement and travel in the vast majority of the land. In its management of space, too, Israel-Palestine has been divided into three master types—“black,” “colored” and “white.” “Black” ghettoes, mainly in Gaza and the West Bank, are harshly policed, the residents confined by walls, checkpoints and periodic curfews. Physical and legal barriers also cut off the “black” ghettoes from each other, according to the desiderata of Jewish settlements and the military.

“Colored” ghettoes, where Palestinian citizens of Israel and most Palestinians of East Jerusalem reside, have more porous boundaries but also have major restrictions on land rights and development for the inhabitants. For example, Palestinians in Israel struggle to move out of their ghettoes due to limitations on their ability to purchase land and lack of educational, cultural and religious facilities elsewhere. The Arab areas are not only inferior in status to Jewish areas, but Israel also

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“Rolling into Gaza I had a feeling of homecoming,” writes the novelist Alice Walker. “There is a flavor to the ghetto. To the bantustan. To the ‘rez.’ To the ‘colored section.’” In a poetic vein, Walker captures the confinement and marginality one senses in the Gaza Strip, and its familiarity to those who have lived in segregated spaces in the United States and South Africa. It is the latter parallel that has captured the collective imagination in the early 2000s. More and more, Israel’s system of rule over Palestinians in the lands occupied during the 1967 war is compared to South African apartheid.

Apartheid is the Afrikaans term meaning “separation” or “apartness,” and is used most commonly to refer the system of white rule over blacks in South Africa that lasted until 1994. But in international law, apartheid is a general category of state practices and it is prohibited wherever it occurs. The 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid defines the word as acts “designed to divide the population...by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of racial groups, the prohibition of mixed marriages...[or] the expropriation of landed property.” In South Africa, apartheid was state-sanctioned segregation governing nearly all aspects of social life. A system designed to maintain white dominion over the indigenous black population and its resources, it rested on a complex legal system that severely hindered blacks’ mobility, denied them civil and political rights, and mandated that they live in townships and bantustans—semi-rural enclaves—kept separate from white areas. The indigenous population’s resources, particularly land, were transferred to white settlers. Blacks were subjected to forcible relocation in the service of the white-dominated economy in which they participated as cheap labor.

The apartheid project in South Africa was aided by the anthropological tradition of volkekunde, or knowledge of the native, which classified populations on the basis of identifiable physical traits, mainly skin color, as well as language, tribe and ethnicity. This anthropology derived from a German-Dutch idealistic tradition that worked to identify and preserve the cultural ethos of a particular population. The formation of territorial “reserves” for blacks in the early twentieth century was grounded in this pseudo-scientific conception of difference.

It was thus no small thing when the South African Human Sciences Research Council issued a report in 2009 concluding that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is a “colonial enterprise that implements a system of apartheid.”
Why Then, Why Now?

In November 1974, Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, addressed the UN General Assembly, shortly before the PLO was accorded observer status. In the previous month, the General Assembly had voted to exclude South Africa from its deliberations, and Arafat tailored his speech accordingly. He denounced the state of Israel for “bolstering the settler-colonialists in Africa” and “practicing racial discrimination more extensively than the racists of South Africa.” Here the PLO leader sought both to tar Israel by association, pointing to its economic and security ties with successive South African governments, and to aid his people by comparing their plight to that of South African blacks.

In fact, the African National Congress and the PLO were founded upon visions radically at odds with those of the South African and Israeli states. The ANC advocated a democratic South Africa that would be a state for all its citizens, blacks and whites, and initially the PLO advocated a democratic secular state in Palestine that would embrace Jews as citizens.

In 1975, the General Assembly passed Resolution 3379 declaring, “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” Other organizations followed suit: The Conference of the International Women’s Year declared that international peace required the end of colonialism, occupation, apartheid and Zionism. The Organization of African Unity stated that South Africa, Rhodesia and Israel shared a common imperialist history. Israel found itself in a diplomatic bind similar to South Africa’s, though not as severe; just as the United States, Britain and France had blocked a move to expel South Africa from the UN entirely, so it was often the US veto alone that saved Israel from Security Council sanction. Resolution 3379 was revoked only in 1991, as a condition of Israel’s participation in the Madrid talks, and under pressure from Washington.

The apartheid analogy resurfaced with renewed relevance in the mid-1990s, when white rule in South Africa had ended. The PLO had long since accepted the idea of two states rather than one secular state, and Arafat had become president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), a non-sovereign entity with administrative powers in Gaza and patches of the West Bank, but nothing close to independence. There were striking similarities between Area A, as the districts of PA administration were known under the Oslo agreements, and bantustans: The cantons were non-contiguous, separated from each other by Israeli settlements and military bases and ubiquitous checkpoints, and travel between them or into Israel was severely restricted. Israel began building a network of roads connecting settlements in the Occupied Territories to West Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and “bypassing” Palestinian population centers. These measures were adopted even as the PA, Israel and their international sponsors spoke of a comprehensive peace leading to Palestinian statehood. In reality, as Leila Farsakh writes, the Oslo process “paved the way for the ‘bantustanization of the area.”

The Oslo era closed with Arafat’s PA seemingly acquiescent in a barely autonomous Palestinian entity whose borders, waters and airspace were in the hands of Israel, whose sovereignty extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. With the outbreak of the second intifada in the fall of 2000, Israel tightened the closure of Gaza and West Bank towns that had been in place periodically since the early 1990s, penning in Palestinians amidst rising unemployment and poverty. The Israeli army invaded swathes of Area A, imposing days-long curfews, and checkpoints multiplied. But the parallels with apartheid began to take concrete shape, literally, when Israel broke ground on the wall being erected in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The wall starkly illustrated Israel’s logic of separation—Jews here, Palestinians there—and became a rallying point for a host of solidarity movements. Since 2003, when wall construction commenced, political activists have readily adopted the apartheid analogy. So the question becomes: What does the comparison mean and what is its utility?

Unambiguously negative in valence, apartheid in South Africa had few self-proclaimed adherents outside that country’s white community. By the late 1980s, with divestment movements in full bloom on American college campuses, almost no one would defend it or even downplay its horrors. Anti-apartheid events elicited few calls for a “balanced” approach or demands to invite pro-apartheid speakers. The same is emphatically not true of Israel’s system of control over Palestinians. “End the occupation,” though gaining currency as a slogan, does not carry anything like the same automatic moral weight as “end apartheid,” and occupation has numerous influential defenders, some who ruefully describe it as a grim necessity for Israel’s security, and others who unapologetically reframe the debate by lumping Palestinians together with al-Qaeda. Attempts to apply the word “apartheid” to Israel-Palestine run up against an additional problem of scope: Does the term apply merely to the Occupied Territories since 1967, to Israeli dispossession of Palestinians since 1948 or to the entire Zionist project? If “security” and “terrorism” are all-purpose buzzwords that mean too many things, and are applied with little precision, apartheid seems at risk of meeting the same fate.

Comparison

For Palestinians and their supporters, who have struggled for decades to advance their cause, only to suffer repeated setbacks, the impulse to compare can be overwhelming. Invoking a comparison with South African apartheid, as Arafat did before the UN, is a rhetorical device meant to make sense of enforced ethno-religious separation and mobilize action along the lines of the successful anti-apartheid movement. The comparison need not be exact. South Africa is not the benchmark against which all claims of apartheid must be measured; by the terms of the 1973 UN convention, apartheid is a crime wherever it occurs. Pinpointing differences between apartheid-era South Africa and Israel-Palestine need not render comparison an
inappropriate method of inquiry. Indeed, one value of the comparative method that is often overlooked is that it throws important distinguishing characteristics into relief.

A number of prominent persons have lately echoed Palestinians in making the comparison between South Africa and Israel-Palestine. In June 2001, Ronnie Kasrils and Max Ozinsky, two Jewish heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle, made it in an open letter published in a Pretoria newspaper under the heading, “Not in My Name.” The next year, Rev. Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town honored with a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending apartheid, caused a stir when he wrote: “I’ve been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa.” In 2006, John Dugard, a South African lawyer and former special rapporteur on Palestine to the UN Human Rights Council, said that Israel’s wall, checkpoints, permits, bypass roads, house demolitions and destruction of agricultural lands “in severity go well beyond,” “surpass” and “far exceed any similar practices in apartheid South Africa.”

Dugard was writing partly in defense of former President Jimmy Carter, another Nobel Peace Prize winner, who had recently published *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. In the US, the book was rapidly and repeatedly trashed in most newspapers of note, illustrating South African apartheid’s powerful legacy in American moral sensibilities. The furious response came, in part, because the term dramatically challenged the dominant narrative about Palestinian intransigence, “Islamic” terror and Israeli security, as well as the evangelical Christian narrative about a Chosen People with a God-given right to Palestine. In place of these familiar frames, Carter substituted a narrative of dispossession and occupation. It was equally the former president’s stature (and perhaps his own evangelical Christianity) that raised hackles. Human rights organizations had compiled and disseminated information about Israeli practices for decades. With only one paragraph on the comparison to apartheid, the book did not really make the case and, in fact, offered little that was new. But here was the man who helped broker the peace between Israel and Egypt placing Israel under a highly critical lens. The lens of “apartheid” illuminates an offensive rather than defensive posture on the part of the occupying forces and a well-designed plan of action rather than a series of hurried, situational responses to the violence of the occupied. Most significantly, it exposes the trumping of international law in the name of security.
Carter’s book supplied an object lesson in the power comparison can have. Comparison is a way of taking charge. If Israeli occupation practices are comparable to apartheid, then they must be condemned and made subject to sanctions.

**The Named and the Unnamed**

While South Africa was explicit about the goal of apartheid policies, Israel engages in discursive subterfuge so that the intent and effects of their policies must be seen on the ground to be fully comprehended. Shulamit Aloni, the former Israeli minister of education, relates an episode at a bypass road built for settlers in the West Bank:

> On one occasion I witnessed such an encounter between a driver and a soldier who was taking down the details before confiscating the vehicle and sending its owner away. ‘Why?’ I asked the soldier. ‘It’s an order—this is a Jews-only road,’ he replied. I inquired as to where was the sign indicating this fact and instructing [other] drivers not to use it. His answer was nothing short of amazing. ‘It is his responsibility to know it, and besides, what do you want us to do, put up a sign here and let some anti-Semitic reporter or journalist take a photo so that can show the world apartheid exists here?’

Part of the appeal of the apartheid comparison is that apartheid is a recognized name for an ideology and practice of separation. There is no similar name for what Israel has done. Neither the pre-state Zionist movement nor the state of Israel has ever spelled out an official policy of discrimination against the Palestinians, and Israel did not institute discriminatory practices in one fell swoop. Instead, it has worked in a piecemeal fashion to constrain Palestinian rights and access to resources. In other words, separation in the Occupied Territories has been a process whose legal contours are harder to discern and whose name has yet to circulate abroad.

A corollary assumption underlying the comparison is that Israeli practices cannot be condemned as discriminatory in and of themselves. They cannot stand on their own, partly because they are difficult to understand unless they are seen up close. Most people understand that Zionism, as an ideology and a project, calls for Jewish communal security, and due to centuries of pogroms and the Holocaust, this project commands considerable sympathy. But many people do not understand that Zionism, as put into practice, calls for an exclusivist state that leads to policies characteristic of apartheid, as defined by the UN.

Zionism retains a significant body of supporters in the West, particularly among Jews and evangelical Christians, but also the public at large. For numerous historical, cultural and political reasons, the American public in particular “stands with Israel,” a fact demonstrated by poll after poll and not lost on successive US administrations. Israel and its backers work constantly to cement this support, in part by equating criticism of Israel, the “Jewish state,” with anti-Semitism. Thus, drawing attention to the parallels between Israel’s occupation and apartheid has been one way to turn the tables, framing the occupation (and not criticism of Israel) as inherently racist. But the introduction of race into the conversation heats it up to the boiling point: As the Jews of Europe suffered from persecution and genocidal racism, and Jews comprised a large percentage of the white Americans who put their bodies on the line for civil rights, equating the practices of Zionism with racism is, for many, inconceivable. Rational debate shuts down.

It may be time to develop a new language. “Apartheid” cannot thoroughly explain Zionist ideology or Israeli practices. It can simply offer broad points of comparison, a framing in an already powerful concept. Yet the Afrikaans term does have a Hebrew counterpart in the term *hafrada*, meaning separation from and putting distance between oneself and others, in this case, the Palestinians. In Hebrew, the wall is often referred to as the “*hafrada* barrier.”

**Components of Comparison**

The similarities between South African apartheid and Israel’s control over Palestinians, indeed, are best appreciated in terms of the most prominent difference—that of demography. In apartheid South Africa, whites (English and Afrikaners) were a small minority of the population—around 16 percent. Black labor was pivotal to economic development and thus policy was designed to keep blacks impotent and docile, but in the country. Blacks and whites were socially and politically separated but economically integrated, though unequally. In Palestine, the early Zionists also came face to face with the reality of an overwhelmingly Arab population. At first, there were attempts to integrate the Arabs as workers, but as more Jews arrived and Palestinian nationalism grew in potency, the Zionists decided upon a policy of population thinning. The result is that, within the internationally recognized borders of Israel today, Jews are an estimated 78 percent of the population. If the Occupied Territories are included, the Jewish population is 48–49 percent of the total. These figures make for a markedly different colonial dynamic than what obtained in South Africa.

So where do the grounds for comparison lie? At the level of description, in apartheid South Africa, as in Israel-Palestine today, there was a striking gap between the rulers and the ruled. Israel is a First World nation, as was white-ruled South Africa, and the Palestinian population, especially in Gaza, suffers high poverty rates, as South African blacks still do. As colonial entities premised on separation and dominance, both ruling systems have forcibly expropriated natural resources, contained the native population and worked to ensure their economic dependency. Both states have pursued policies toward the local population out of step with modern, secular, democratic ways of organizing the social order (though they were hardly alone in doing so). Both states have used violent repression to squelch dissent and induce compliance. Opponents of apartheid in South Africa were labeled communists and often legally
charged as such and Palestinian militants have been deemed terrorists. Apartheid South Africa routinely used torture and engaged in mass detention of militant opponents, as does Israel. Israel is a nuclear power in a region where its neighbors do not have the bomb, as was apartheid South Africa.

Both states also developed elaborate ideological justifications for how they acted. White-ruled South Africa and Israel took root, to varying degrees, with the assistance and in the service of the prerogatives of Western powers. The early Zionists and white settlers in South Africa both claimed to have found a Promised Land that was also “a land without a people” (though, in fact, both lands were densely populated). Each state assiduously defined itself as Western and thus distinct from its immediate surroundings. Thus both countries attempted to fashion, against the will and interests of the local population, ostensibly Western spaces in the heart of the Arab and African worlds.

Both states went on to draw distinctions among the population in domestic law, along racial lines in South Africa and ethno-religious lines in Israel. In South Africa, the legal system promoted, protected and reproduced white privilege over blacks. Beginning in 1913, laws were passed to deprive blacks of their resources and rights, and confine them in the “reserves” that later became bantustans. Especially after the National Party came to power after World War II, laws compelled black Africans to move to bantustans and allowed for their deportation there, forcing them to become migrant laborers. And, concomitantly, a law was passed that made resistance to deportations illegal.6

Israel has also enshrined privilege in law, either with the purpose of excluding Palestinians or assuming minimal responsibility for them, in line with the different colonial dynamic. The Basic Law—there is still no constitution—establishes a “Jewish state” and states that Jews across the world are eligible for citizenship. This right is denied to those Palestinians who were born in what is now Israel and became refugees in 1948, to the refugees’ descendants and to Palestinians born in the areas under occupation since 1967.
In the Occupied Territories, two legal systems are operative: Israeli civil law, which applies extra-territorially to Jewish settlers, and military courts for the Palestinians. The South African Human Sciences Research Council said of these courts that their procedures “violate international standards for the prosecution of justice.” The 1993 Oslo accords spawned still a third legal system that, together with the second, bears some resemblance to what obtained in the bantustans. The PA built a court system with nominal jurisdiction over Area A—Gaza and the main West Bank towns—while in Area B, authority is shared with the Israeli army and in Area C the military holds unfettered sway. Palestinian jurisdiction over Area A is nominal, because the Israeli army moves into these districts at will to arrest and extrajudicially execute Palestinians. From 1967 to the present day, settlements, checkpoints, barriers and bypass roads have been erected in breach of international law, and occasionally overriding Israeli civil law. In 2004, the International Court of Justice called upon Israel to “cease forthwith the works of construction” upon the wall, while the Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly ordered the wall rerouted so as to infringe less upon Palestinian lands and livelihoods. At the same time, Israel is spared the mundane tasks of law enforcement in Area A; the PA stops motorists for speeding and collects the garbage.

Land and Space

The most striking parallel between white rule in South Africa and Israeli rule over the Palestinians is land policy. Both of these settler-colonial formations sought to transfer land ownership to members of the dominant society and then prevent its alienation. Over time, blacks and Palestinians were dispossessed and confined to smaller and smaller areas. Blacks could not own land in white areas. Until very recently in Israel, once the Jewish National Fund owned a plot of land, it could not revert to Arab ownership, and Palestinians who are citizens of the state still face various restrictions on building. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories cannot buy land in a Jewish settlement.

But the different demographics required different means of physically separating the dominant and dominated populations.
Blacks in South Africa were forcibly removed to the bantustans, assigned on the basis of an official tribal classification. In the white imagination, each bantustan correlated with a cultural identity such that Swaziland, for example, was home to the Swazi, Ndebele to the Ndebele and KwaZulu to the Xhosa. Most significantly, with the bantustans classified as “independent” by the state, their residents were no longer citizens of South Africa. Yet control over defense, security, economic policy and activity and the monetary system was in the hands of the South African government. Interestingly, on the diplomatic front, only Israel and South Africa recognized the bantustans. The bantustans tended to be located in resource-poor rural areas that could not support sustained agriculture. Thus did the white rulers maintain a pool of readily available labor.

The Zionist movement did not desire to integrate the indigenous population into a new political entity. Thus expulsion became a mode of dealing with demography. In 1948, the fledgling state of Israel expelled or engineered the flight of the bulk of the Palestinian population, with many of the refugees and native Gazans and West Bankers winding up under the rule of Egypt or Jordan. In 1967, Israel conquered the areas occupied by Egypt and Jordan, and since then it has tried in various ways to compel voluntary migration. The interlocking system of permits, bypass roads, the wall, checkpoints and settlements is a policy of territorial control but also one of immiseration.

After 1993, the resemblance of the Occupied Territories to apartheid South Africa increased. Officially, the Oslo accords fragmented the West Bank and Gaza into Areas A, B and C, which already rendered the Palestinian polity non-contiguous and subject to varying systems of law. The PA was accorded control over civilian functions in the areas under its nominal control. Israel continues to control the borders, trade and the civil registry. In effect, the PA has limited jurisdiction over the population and little over the bulk of the land. Security is in the hands of the Israel military as well as joint Palestinian-Israeli committees in which Israel retains overall control. Unofficially, but intentionally, the zones allotted to the Palestinians have been further disaggregated by settlements, bypass roads and checkpoints. Three main settlement blocs jut eastward into the West Bank, effectively chopping this zone into three parts. But the lattice of settlements and roads means the three parts are really an archipelago of enclaves corresponding loosely to Palestinian towns or regions: Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron and South Hebron. After 2003, the wall sliced the land into still more pieces.

The West Bank enclaves are self-contained to varying degrees, with Qalqilya at the extreme end being surrounded on three sides by the wall with only a narrow aperture on the fourth. Whereas the bantustans were legislated and named, in the West Bank the spaces of confinement are still emergent and unnamed. People have not been assigned to them. As Israel has circulated no plan to carve out enclaves, they constitute a sort of gray area, with ambiguous and shifting borders in contrast to the tidiness, as it were, of the bantustans. But they also correspond to Area A—the districts given over to PA administration under Oslo and intended to be the kernels of an eventual Palestinian state. Thus Israeli leaders can speak about Palestinian independence and statehood while at the same time building settlements and further obstructing any possibility that this state could be contiguous.

And then there is Gaza, the enclave that, in the post-Oslo era, probably comes closest to resembling an actual bantustan. Like the bantustans, Gaza has scant hope of economic growth, with its population reduced to penury and, despite the coastal strip’s “takeover” by Hamas in 2007, near total dependence on Israel for everything from hard currency to electricity. There is little pretense in Israeli discourse today that Gaza—“Hamastan” in the parlance of Israeli wags—is part of a proto-state for the Palestinians. Its main function, like the bantustans, is to enforce segregation and contain the dislocated. And yet there is a key difference, again resulting from Israel’s demographic imperative: Palestinians in Gaza resemble a surplus population, abandoned because they no longer provide labor and are no longer a major market for Israeli goods.

In the era of apartheid, black and white South Africans lived and worked in some proximity. Blacks worked the mines and factories, labored on farms, cleaned white houses and reared white children. With an economy highly dependent on black labor, black-white interaction was hardly uncommon. Indeed, it was so common that it had to be strictly regulated by law lest apartheid be corroded from within. For example, mixed marriages were outlawed and blacks could not reside in white areas. It has been decades since Jews and Palestinians had such interaction, with poignant exceptions like anti-wall activist groups and Palestinian work gangs in settlements proving the rule. Israeli Jews are increasingly so distant from the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories that laws prohibiting meaningful contact may not be needed.

**Labor**

The realm of labor illustrates some of the most significant differences between South African apartheid and Israeli practices. White South Africans envisioned an integrated economy but one oriented toward white ownership and low-wage black labor. That South Africa’s economy was sustained by cheap black labor seems inevitable given the lopsided demography. Work in the industrial and agricultural sectors, as well as the mines, compelled black workers to spend months away from their families living in dormitories.

From the beginnings of the Zionist project in Palestine, the quest for separation—for exclusive Jewish land and labor—was paramount. Jewish farmers weaned themselves of the Arab helpers who knew how to grow crops in the dry climate, and the pre-state Zionist movement made a priority of acquiring the most fertile land. Massive Jewish immigration after World War II meant that Israel could easily staff its
nascent industrial and service sectors with Jews. Palestinian labor was appealing, however, because it was available and less expensive than Jewish labor. After 1967, Israel began to import cheap Palestinian labor across the Green Line. It was a colonial measure, because Israel simultaneously stymied the growth of Palestinian agriculture and industry through land expropriation and structural obstacles. Thus was labor freed for work in Israel and the settlements; passage into Israel was regulated by the state, through the permit system. Palestinians were made “dependent on Israeli demand and regulations.” In the mid-1980s, 45 percent of the Gaza labor force and 32 percent of West Bank workers were employed in Israel. By the mid-1990s, Israel was replacing the Palestinians with Thais, Filipinos, Romanians and Russians. At the same time, the Israeli economy began a discernible shift toward the high-tech security industry and exporting on a global scale.

In short, “security” aside, black and Palestinian mobility beyond their bantustans or enclaves has been largely a function of the dominant economy’s demand, or lack of it, for their labor. South Africans spoke openly about the surplus population, that is, those not working in the white-dominated economy. They were to be confined to the bantustans. In Israel-Palestine, those still needed for work are given permits to move about and those not needed find themselves increasingly cooped up in their cantons. Again, Gaza is the most powerful case in point.

Mobility

Colonial regimes impose controls upon mobility in order to organize labor, to maintain designated spaces free of the colonized, to the extent of literally preventing their visibility, and to obstruct political organizing. Apartheid in South Africa mandated that blacks carry on their persons at all times a passbook containing a photograph, fingerprints and employment history. The passbook made it easy to classify each black person and allow him to move from one place to another—or not.

Comparisons to South Africa’s notorious passbooks sprung up in Israel-Palestine after the Oslo accords, which lent a veneer of legality to draconian controls over Palestinian mobility. Until the early 1990s, human movement across the Green Line was fairly open. In the late 1980s, Israel began to issue permits to workers from Gaza. After Oslo, the permit system was extended...
and gradually tightened to where it is today, such that one needs a permit to enter Israel but also to move from place to place in the West Bank, often to reside in one’s own village or town, and to enter Jerusalem. Palestinian farmers living near the wall often need permits to go to their fields on the “Israeli” side of the barrier, which cuts through the hinterlands of their villages. The permit system not only regulates the movement of labor, it also acts as a form of punishment and disciplining of the native population. In this regard, it appears analogous to the South African passbook system. The permits also serve as a mechanism for depriving Palestinians of access to their land. If one’s land is left uncultivated because a gate in the wall is closed, the land can be more easily expropriated.

With replacement workers from abroad, there was no longer much need for a supply of Palestinian labor. A Palestinian desiring a permit to enter Israel, particularly a man, was increasingly seen as a potential suicide bomber rather than a strong back. Thus the permit system was recast under the rubric of security, and permits became more and more difficult to acquire. Israeli controls on Palestinian mobility are arguably worse than the passbook system, because they are capricious and random. A trucker headed from Ramallah to Hebron never knows which checkpoint along the way will be backed up for hours and where on the road a “flying checkpoint”—one or two army jeeps and a cement block—will appear. The constant and arbitrary changing of the rules renders daily life for Palestinians in the West Bank unpredictable. Apartheid in South Africa was highly regulated and predictable.

Historically, South Africa and Israel have induced high levels of forced migration. The white South Africans engaged in mass deportations of blacks from one area to another, especially during the 1960s, when the government was attempting to consolidate the bantustans and draw boundaries in response to white farmers’ desire for more land. In these years, nearly 2 million blacks were removed from their homes to another area. Half the Palestinian population of about 8 million is made up of refugees, most from the fighting in 1948 and some from the war in 1967. Today Palestinians are being displaced through of a policy of immiseration designed to induce ostensibly voluntary migration from rural areas to urban areas and abroad.

**A Strategic Question**

By the terms of international law, there is apartheid in the Palestinian lands occupied by Israel in 1967. The Israeli system
of rule over Palestinians can be credibly described, and to some extent analyzed, as something akin to apartheid as it was practiced in South Africa until 1994. But as a framework for activism and advocacy, the language of apartheid is heavily freighted with history, to wit, its indelible association with one particular historical experience. The international community eventually rejected and sanctioned apartheid in South Africa, whereas it has been difficult to mobilize international support for Palestinian rights. Apartheid South Africa had little external support comparable to Israel’s and defenders of its ideology and practices were precious few.

Another critical difference is that the UN and the international community gave South African apartheid the cold shoulder; the world body and other nations (except, again, Israel) refused to recognize the bantustans as independent political entities. In Israel-Palestine, there is a long history of partition in 1947, and today every major effort to bring peace to Israel-Palestine or engender amity between its peoples is predicated upon the two-state solution. More to the point, the international community, led by the US, has thrown its weight behind the untenable two-state vision associated with the Oslo accords and their successor, the “road map” drawn up on the watch of President George W. Bush. The “Quartet” of the US, the European Union, Russia and the UN secretariat is promoting a peace process that calls for neither a complete Israeli withdrawal from all territories captured in 1967 nor the dismantlement of the bulk of the settlements built since then. The international community has given its blessing to the idea of a non-contiguous Palestinian entity.

The international community, or at least the precents of it that call the shots, also continues to view the apartheid-like practices of Israel in the Occupied Territories through the prism of security. The US harshly rejected the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice against the wall in East Jerusalem and the West Bank (and Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts, then on the presidential campaign trail, hastened to concur, lest anyone find partisan daylight between him and Bush on this score). The US sees the wall as a legitimate means of deterring Palestinian attacks on Israel, a defense it extends to checkpoints, restrictions on Palestinian freedom of movement, home demolitions, extrajudicial executions and other violations of international law. Most dramatically, the US, with the tacit backing of European and Arab allies, has eagerly enforced the years-long siege on Gaza and acquiesced in several Israeli assaults upon the territory, including the egregious Operation Cast Lead over the winter of 2008-2009. The international community appears to see no contradiction between its simultaneous support for a “viable Palestinian state” and the physical and virtual amputation of Gaza from the Palestinian body politic. The siege of Gaza is an apartheid measure, if ever there was one.

All this suggests that there is long, hard work ahead in the effort to mobilize international support for Palestinian rights. The question of what language to use in that effort is therefore strategic, not tactical. Ferreting out the parameters of the analogy to apartheid in South Africa suggests a new direction, the local language of separation. It may be time to question the use of the analogy seriously and explore the terminology used by the Israeli state to frame its own actions, just as activists adopted the word white South Africans used for their system of rule. Perhaps the Hebrew "hafrada" can one day become a rallying cry as powerful as "apartheid" was in its day.

Endnotes
7 Human Sciences Research Council, p. 17.
10 Rogers, pp. 26-27.
Blocked
Photos by Dirk-Jan Visser

A road blocked near 'Anin in the northwestern West Bank.

A fence blocking the entrance of Palestinians to al-Sahla Street in the old city of Hebron has been turned into a soccer goal.
Foregoing the usual depiction of Israel-Palestine as a site of dramatic confrontations between individuals, Dirk-Jan Visser has chosen instead to reveal a more mundane and insidious aspect of Israeli power. Photographing some of the more than 500 roadblocks throughout the West Bank in a repetitive and neutral style, without the embellishments of unusual camera angles or clever compositions, he shows how these seemingly innocuous objects add up to a typology of obstacles, attesting powerfully to an extreme disruption of Palestinian life. To see more of Visser’s photos, visit [www.dirkjanvisser.com](http://www.dirkjanvisser.com).

—Michelle Woodward
Article VI, Item 2 of the 1993 Oslo accords concluded between Israel and the Palestinians states, “After the entry into force of this Declaration of Principles and the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area, with the view to promoting economic development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, authority will be transferred to the Palestinians in the following spheres: education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism.”

The Oslo accords also established the Palestinian Authority (PA), the quasi-government that is now responsible for health, social welfare and education in the Occupied Territories, as well as “security” in enclaves thereof. But the aim of “promoting economic development” has proven elusive in the post-Oslo period. Instead, the economic conditions facing the Palestinians have become far harsher, as recorded in numerous reports by both the World Bank and the United Nations. Palestinians have experienced rapidly rising poverty rates and unprecedentedly high unemployment rates, and the only thing rescuing them from widespread hunger is the large inflow of foreign aid. Particularly after 2000, when the second intifada erupted, the situation deteriorated considerably, with poverty rates shooting up from 20 to 60 percent within the space of two years and unemployment rates rising from 14 to 31 percent. While unemployment has declined slightly—in 2005, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimated the rate at 23 percent—the economic conditions remain critical, particularly in Gaza. Unemployment estimates do not include the under-employed (those working fewer hours or under-utilizing their skills) or those who have quit looking for work. The World Bank believes that unemployment rates would be 5 percent higher if these disadvantaged workers were counted.

While this economic hardship is well documented, there has been far less focus on who is bearing the brunt of it and why. One small gain of the Oslo period was the creation of the PCBS, whose data can offer a window upon this question. Examination of labor force surveys provides a detailed analysis of who works where and how employment patterns have changed from 1996, when the Oslo accords were still being implemented (and the first year for which PCBS data are available) and ten years later, when all hope that Oslo could succeed had died.

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Locked In, Locked Out of Work

Jennifer Olmsted

Fishermen pull their nets from the Mediterranean in Gaza City.

ADEL HANA/AP
In Decline

In the 1980s and 1990s, most Palestinians worked in the construction, agriculture, sales or manufacturing sectors. Tens of thousands of Palestinian men earned their livelihoods in construction, mostly inside Israel and in Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. But PCBS statistics show that, between 1996 and 2006, the percentage of Palestinian men who identified their occupation as construction declined from 24 to 18. Furthermore, in 2006 32 percent of all construction workers reported being unemployed (as compared to 23 percent in 1996). As a result, by 2006 construction work was providing jobs to only 14 percent of Palestinian men. There has been a similar decline in manufacturing, particularly in the apparel industry. While just under 6 percent of Palestinians identified themselves as garment workers in 1996, that number had dropped to 2 percent by 2006, with 22 percent of those workers reporting being out of work. The decline in the construction industry has mostly affected men, but the shrinking clothing industry has mostly cost women their jobs. In 1996, almost 13 percent of women depended on this industry for their employment, but by 2006 only 6 percent did.

Less visible groups have also become more economically vulnerable. One example is fishermen. While fishermen are only 1 percent of all Palestinian workers, fishing has historically been an important source of income for a small group of families in Gaza—and fish have long been an important source of protein for Gazans. But between 1996 and 2006 the proportion of men who identified as fishermen (no women reported doing this work) fell from just over 1 percent to 0.14 percent, almost a tenfold decline, with over one quarter of all fishermen reporting being unemployed in 2006.

Another industry that is in decline is tourism. It is difficult to pinpoint who is dependent on tourism by examining labor force data, since employment data are coded by industry (e.g., manufacturing) or occupation (e.g., manager) and someone involved in manufacturing or retail, for example, could be servicing tourists or locals, but one sector that relies heavily on tourism is the hotel industry. There has never been a large cohort of Palestinians working in hotels—in 1996, about 3 percent of all workers, mostly men, were so employed. But ten years later that number had dropped to 1.8 percent. And hotel workers are only a small slice of the labor force associated with the tourist industry. A 2004 UN report states that before 2000 18 percent of Bethlehem-area residents were employed in tourism-related jobs.

Following the Oslo accords, and as excitement mounted for the millennium, many Palestinians anticipated that tourism would fuel significant economic growth, particularly in cities with resonance for the world's Christians, like Bethlehem and Jericho. These high hopes led to a flurry of hotel construction. While the millennium did indeed bring a spike in tourism-related employment, UN data suggest a rapid decline since then. In 2000 the average number of visitors to Bethlehem was over 90,000 per month, while in 2004 just over 7,000 tourists per month were coming. Today, those few tourists who do come to Bethlehem typically arrive in large, guarded buses that unload only briefly at the Church of the Nativity and other holy sites before crossing back over the Green Line, whereas in the 1980s and 1990s the thousands of tourists who came were likely to wander the streets of Bethlehem for hours if not days. The earlier tourists were far more likely to stay in Bethlehem hotels and stop at the array of shops and restaurants dotting the road leading to Jerusalem. After the millennium, the hotel occupancy rate, already low at 22 percent, plummeted to 1.2 percent in 2003, rising only one percentage point in the following year. The number of visitors to Jericho has bottomed out as well. So few people visit the ancient site that in 2006 I had to hunt down the caretaker to request that the site be opened. In the late 1980s this archaeological site was teeming with tourists.

Cut Off

What caused this endemic job loss, and were there compensatory gains in employment of other types? How are the Palestinians who formerly worked in the dying sectors making a living today?

A number of analysts have shown that the loss of construction sector jobs was closely linked to the Israeli policy of restricting Palestinian access to Israel. In the 1980s and 1990s, Israel relied heavily on Palestinians to work not only in construction, but also in agriculture and the service sector. But in the post-Oslo period both Gaza and the West Bank have been subject to increasingly stringent closures, with Israel arguing that such steps are necessary to maintain security. As a result, Israel turned to importing Southeast Asians and Eastern Europeans to fill the jobs that had previously been filled by Palestinians.

The falling numbers of Gazan fishermen also correspond to a series of Israeli policy changes that have nearly cut off Palestinian access to the Mediterranean Sea. The Oslo accords stated that Palestinians could fish up to 20 miles offshore, but according to the UN, Israel reduced the range to 12 miles in 2002, to six miles in 2007 and down to a mere three miles in 2009. The impact of such restrictions on total employment is not large, but the sudden loss of their livelihoods has hit fishing families in Gaza extremely hard, at a time when few economic alternatives exist. (In addition, there have been numerous reports of fishermen being attacked and either killed or injured by the Israeli military.)

As for tourism, Israeli checkpoints and, more recently, enormous “border” terminals have strongly discouraged foreign visitors from traveling to the West Bank. According to the UN, a total of “78 physical obstacles” surrounded Bethlehem in 2004. The obstacles make travel difficult even in quiet times, but during Israeli military operations in the West Bank they are a means of shutting off the influx of tourists entirely, as Palestinian towns
are declared “closed military zones.” Gaza is almost completely closed off to tourism, as Israel requires all visitors to undergo a bureaucratic process of applying to enter and these permits are often denied. Since 2005, the practice has been to deny entry to anyone who cannot demonstrate to Israel’s satisfaction that they work for a humanitarian or news organization. And there have been extended periods, such as during Israel’s Operation Cast Lead, when no visitor is allowed in for any reason.

The disappearance of garment work is a more complicated story. Many apparel jobs were subcontracted work carried out by Palestinian women in their homes for Israeli companies. Although they were very poorly paid for such piecework, many less educated Palestinian women had few other options for earning money. The system of roadblocks and checkpoints may have been one factor that discouraged Israeli capitalists from utilizing cheap Palestinian labor in the post-Oslo period, since moving the raw and finished products back and forth became more costly. But another important reason why the Palestinian manufacturing sector has shrunk is the policies of Washington. As a carrot to the Jordanian and Egyptian governments for participating in the peace process, the United States granted these nations preferred trading status on products made in cooperation with Israeli capital. Between 1999 and 2003, Jordanian exports to the US rose from $2 million to $367 million, with much of the increase being exports in clothing. US imports of apparel from Egypt have also increased substantially in recent years. At the same time, garment jobs began disappearing from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, suggesting that Israeli firms that previously found it appealing to subcontract to Palestinian women now prefer workers further afield. This shift in investment has brought considerable foreign exchange into Jordan and Egypt, and, no doubt, hefty profits to an Israeli, Jordanian and Egyptian elite, but otherwise its economic benefits to those countries are unclear. It certainly has not meant much increased employment for Jordanians (or Palestinians in Jordan), since the rising export-oriented apparel industry in Jordan has imported many of its workers from places such as Bangladesh and then subjected them to atrocious working conditions. In addition, the Palestinians have been pushed to open up their borders to imports, and have been flooded with Chinese imports, further eroding the local textile and apparel manufacturers’ base.

What, if any, jobs have replaced those that were lost? The data suggest that the sectors that have grown since 1996 are transportation, agriculture and services. The transportation sector nonetheless remains fairly small, making up only 6 percent of all jobs for men (and almost none for women). Jobs in transportation have multiplied primarily because Israel has erected so many new checkpoints and roadblocks—according to the World Bank, the number in the West Bank rose from
The growth in service jobs has taken place primarily in the public sector, as the PA has rapidly expanded its payroll to staunch the hemorrhaging of the Palestinian economy. The PA is now the largest employer in the Occupied Territories. Ninety-five percent of all PA jobs are in public administration, education and health, and the public sector accounts for most employment in all three of these fields. In 1996 public administration consisted of 5 percent of all jobs, but by 2006 that number had risen to 15 percent. About 5 percent of all working women are in this field, a number that has barely changed in ten years, but the proportion of men in such positions has risen considerably, from 5 to 17 percent. Similarly, whereas education jobs represented about 6 percent of total employment in the 1990s, by the mid-2000s, almost 10 percent of all workers were in education, with the proportion of both women’s and men’s employment in this sector increasing over time (from 21 to 27 percent among women and from 4 to 7 percent among men).

A large public sector is not necessarily a bad thing, but in the Palestinian case its size is clearly linked to chronic economic crisis. It is a stopgap measure that is unsustainable without the continued generosity of the international community to the PA, and so is hostage to political events, such as the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, which generated threats of non-payment of salaries to PA employees in Gaza. Also noteworthy is which individuals are benefiting most from this public-sector job growth. The average education level in the fields of education and public administration is 14.6 and 12 years, respectively, suggesting that many of the newly created public-sector jobs are going to highly educated Palestinians, while those losing jobs have less formal schooling. The average education level among all working women is 10.1 years, while the average among female apparel workers is 7.8. Although the gap is less stark among men, male construction workers also tend to be less educated than most male workers—9.2 versus 10.4 years, respectively. Fishermen have some of the lowest levels of education among male workers, averaging only 7.6 years of schooling.

So how are Palestinians surviving? Foreign aid is one factor keeping them from starving. According to the World Bank, in 2000 14 percent of national income was made up of aid, but by 2005 that figure had risen to 25 percent. Remittances are also indispensable for many Palestinians, with about 18 percent of national income coming from relatives living abroad in 2000. Despite the inflow of these two forms of aid, malnutrition rates have risen in recent years, and school attendance rates have dropped, both signs of the increase in economic hardship facing Palestinians.

It is also important to point out the stark difference in economic wellbeing between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The ongoing siege of Gaza, enforced by Israel and Egypt, and with the complicity of the US government and the PA presidential office in Ramallah, has crippled an already very weak economy and illustrates, again, how vulnerable Palestinians are to the whims of external forces. The differential treatment of the Gaza Strip and West Bank has also widened the gaps between the Palestinian haves, have-littles and have-nots, since poverty rates were already higher in Gaza than in the West Bank, even before the siege was tightened in 2006. It is Gazans who have suffered the most acutely from the slow strangulation of the Palestinian economy in the post-Oslo years, but the PCBS numbers also show that across the Occupied Territories, less educated men and women, as well as educated youth, have watched their economic horizons grow ever dimmer.

Endnotes
3 A report by PalTrade, the Palestine Trade Center, titled *The Palestinian Agricultural Sector: Cash Crops Sector Brief 2006*, for example, states that agricultural exports were on average at less than 60 percent of capacity due to Israeli restrictions, even before the current blockade.
The authority to plan and order physical space is among the most significant powers a government possesses. Spatial planning can be a force for reform and emancipation or a mechanism of control and subordination. In Israel, national planning goals are rooted in Zionism’s agenda of nation building and “Judaization” of territory. In the southern desert, known in Arabic as the Naqab and in Hebrew as the Negev, those priorities have led to the expropriation of more than 90 percent of the historical lands of the Palestinian Bedouin for the establishment of Jewish towns. The result is one of the clearest examples of apartheid in Israel.

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Planning Apartheid in the Naqab
Monica Tarazi

Since 1948, the state of Israel has expropriated nearly all of the historical lands of the Bedouin in order to build Jewish towns in the southern desert. Through forced relocation of Bedouin, discriminatory planning and lopsided budgeting, Israel has created a system there that deserves the name apartheid.

The unrecognized village of Wadi Nam has no electricity, despite lying below high-tension power cables.

ROBIN HAMMOND/PANOS PICTURES
Expropriation of Bedouin Land

The approximately 150,000 Palestinian Bedouin who reside in the Naqab today are descendants of the pastoral nomads who have migrated throughout the region from time immemorial. Historically, the Bedouin moved freely in search of water and grazing land. The end of the Ottoman era coincided with their gradual sedentarization, however, and by 1948 the Bedouin in the Naqab were settled pastoralists and farmers. Most lived in distinct villages and had well-defined traditional systems of communal and individual land ownership. Collectively, Bedouin tribes owned approximately two million dunams, or 500,000 acres, of land.

During the nakba (or catastrophe, as Palestinians call the 1948 war), up to 84,000 Bedouin were expelled from their villages or fled in fear of the ongoing violence; by 1953 only 11,000 remained. In 1951, 11 of the 19 tribes remaining in the Naqab were forcibly removed from their traditional lands and transferred into a reservation in the northeast of the Naqab called the “Enclosed Zone” or “Siyag.” (The other eight tribes already lived within the Siyag area.) The Siyag is 386 square miles in size and comprises about 10 percent of the Bedouins’ ancestral lands. Restrictions on Bedouin movement both within and outside the Siyag during the period of Israeli military rule from 1948–1966 prevented them from migrating seasonally with their herds and cultivating their lands, forcing them into a new form of sedentarization that virtually ended their traditional way of life. Moreover, almost all the land outside the Siyag and more than half the land inside it was declared “state land” and thus effectively reserved for the exclusive use of Jews.

The Israeli legal system facilitated and legitimized this expropriation of Bedouin land to the Jewish state. Pursuant to the Law of the Acquisition of Absentees’ Property (1950), for example, the property of all “absentees,” a classification that could be applied to any Palestinians who had left their towns or villages for any reason, was confiscated and transferred to a “Custodian.” The Custodian was then permitted to “sell” absentee properties to a “Development Authority” that was forbidden from transferring the property to any party other than the state, the Jewish National Fund, an institution authorized by the government to settle “landless Arabs,” or a local authority. The Jewish National Fund was granted first option on the purchase of any lands the Development Authority offered for sale. The Land Acquisition Law (1953) went further, giving the state the right to take the land of any property owner who did not meet certain conditions, including the condition that the owner was in possession of the land on April 1, 1952. The vast majority of Bedouin had already been expelled to Jordan or Egypt or enclosed in the Siyag by this date. They therefore lost the legal rights to their lands, even when they had documented proof of ownership. The result was that pre-1948 Palestinian Bedouin lost more than 90 percent of their landed property. Judicial challenges to these laws proved futile. Consequently, not one of the more than 3,000 land claims brought by Bedouin citizens of Israel in Israeli courts has resulted in an award of full ownership rights.

Having forcibly settled the Bedouin in the Siyag and expropriated their ancestral lands, the Israeli government began discussing options for the future. Proposals varied, but all shared the objective of reducing the area of Bedouin settlement in the Siyag to a minimum. Then-Minister of Agriculture Moshe Dayan proposed transferring the Bedouin from the Siyag to the center of the country, where they could become laborers in mixed Arab-Jewish cities. Yigal Alon, the military governor of the Naqab, suggested concentrating the Bedouin in a handful of townships inside the Siyag to free up land for Jewish settlement and army bases and to remove the Bedouin from key Naqab routes.

Alon’s proposal ultimately prevailed and, in March 1962, the government established an inter-ministerial committee to “examine possible sites for residential construction in the Negev, including housing for the Bedouin population.” The committee’s report, which remained secret for many years, recommended establishing seven Bedouin townships at set locations in the Siyag; the remaining lands would be transferred to the state. These recommendations became the basis for government planning in the Naqab from that point onward.

Planning in Israel

Israeli planning is highly centralized in the national government and the Palestinian citizens of Israel have been systematically marginalized in the planning process. The 1965 Planning and Building Law governs all aspects of land planning. Land use is nearly always conditioned on obtaining permission from planning authorities and permission is only granted when the intended use of the property conforms to government plans drawn up in accordance with the statute. The law allows expropriation of land for public purposes and provides that unlicensed buildings cannot be connected to utilities such as water, electricity or telephone networks. It also permits the demolition of homes built without planning permission and provides no protection, such as alternative shelter or compensation, to those made homeless by the state’s destruction of their house.

Pursuant to the Planning and Building Law, the minister of the interior is responsible for appointing many of the members of the national and district planning boards, including the National Council for Planning and Building that prepares both planning legislation and national Master Plans covering land use, transportation infrastructure, electricity grids, water networks and industrial development planning. The public has no right to preview or submit objections to national Master Plans because of the state’s view that the “public interest should override local or private opposition.” The obvious problem from the perspective of the Bedouin, and other Palestinians in Israel, is that the “public interest” is defined by a
Zionist ideology that privileges the needs of the Jewish majority. With respect to planning, the “public interest” has manifested itself in plans to “Judaize” space through the dispersal of Jews into areas of strategic importance while minimizing the amount of land available to Palestinians.

Implementing the national Master Plans are District and Local Planning and Building Commissions. The interior minister decides which communities will be granted local planning commissions and the resulting ability to influence policy locally, which, particularly in the absence of mechanisms for community participation, is tremendously important. Only 6 percent of Arab localities in Israel, compared with 55 percent of Jewish ones, have a local planning commission. Moreover, while affected parties can raise objections to local land plans if they have standing, this standing is limited. The first, and only, Arab organization to obtain standing was granted this status in 2004 and all other organizations with standing are Jewish-Zionist entities.

Although Palestinians make up 20 percent of the population of Israel, only three of the 32 members of the National Board are Arab. Attempts by Bedouin and other Palestinian planners to ensure proportional representation of Palestinians in local and national planning bodies have failed. In 2001, the Israeli High Court rejected a petition seeking the appointment of more than two Palestinians to the 17-member Planning and Building Commission in the Northern District, a region in which more than 50 percent of the citizens are Palestinian.

**Discriminatory Planning**

In 1966, almost two decades after the Bedouin in the Naqab were forced into the Siyag, the Israeli government issued its first Master Plan for the region. The Plan’s goals included the exploitation of natural resources, expansion of cultivated land, development of transportation, increase of Jewish population density and establishment of planned Bedouin settlements. Significantly, the plan denied recognition to dozens of existing Bedouin villages, rendering them invisible for planning purposes. A 1976 Master Plan added specificity to the 1966 Plan, consolidating Israeli efforts to confine the Bedouin to seven towns and open the Naqab for Jewish settlement. In particular, the 1976 Plan authorized 100 new Jewish agricultural settlements in the Naqab, the establishment of a national industrial area around Dimona, and the building of an airport between Arad and Beersheva in an area heavily populated by Bedouin tribes.

The most recently promulgated national Master Plan, TAMA 35, was approved in 2003. Hailed as the first comprehensive statutory national plan, TAMA 35 encompasses the entire state and addresses the purposes and uses of land, industrial zones, the demarcation of primary road networks, the location of railway lines, national supply lines, ports, power plants and facilities of the electrical grid. It includes directives pertaining to recreation areas, forestry and land preservation; directives on preserving antiquities, holy places, landscape and natural areas; sites for factories and public use at the national level; a projection of changes in the state’s population distribution, the stages of development and desired timing of each stage; and plans for six new Jewish settlements in the Naqab. It completely ignores the presence of the unrecognized villages, however, and the needs of the tens of thousands of Palestinian Bedouin citizens of Israel who live in them.

Regional planning initiatives have mirrored these national plans. Ex-premier Ariel Sharon approved the most recent—and most ambitious—plan for the Naqab in 2003. The Sharon Plan, as it is known, is a five-year plan that involves the establishment of seven new Bedouin townships and 14 new Jewish towns. The plan allocates approximately $265 million to the Naqab—close to 40 percent of it to home demolitions and the transfer of Bedouin out of the unrecognized villages. Although the Israel Land Administration (ILA) has claimed that Bedouin representatives on the Abu Basma Regional Council, the regional council established by the Interior Ministry to administer the townships, “will be democratically elected” at some undefined future point, current members of the Council were selected by the Ministry of the Interior or other state agencies and not by the Bedouin communities affected by the Council’s planning decisions. An Israeli official explained that Bedouin community organizations “do not represent the residents,” whereas the state agents “make recommendations based on their knowledge of the structure of the tribe, the family, the influential persons of the community, and they know them all very well.”

Alternative reasoning was implied by Ehud Olmert, then minister of industry and trade, who was quoted as saying, “We are talking about evacuating [the Bedouin] to the new seven towns.... I assume they will absolutely oppose [the plan].... If [this issue] was up to an agreement, it will never be given.” A Ministry-appointed Jewish mayor who works out of an office in Jerusalem heads the Council.

Other plans have consolidated national efforts to “Judaize” the Naqab. In 2003, for example, the government announced plans to construct 30 new Jewish villages on state land in the Galilee and Naqab. Several of the planned new towns are situated very close to existing Palestinian towns and villages, apparently to restrict the latter’s growth. In radio interviews, representatives of the prime minister’s office explicitly emphasized that the new settlements were intended solely for Jewish citizens. Similarly, the 2004 “Wine Route” plans, presented as a means of drawing tourists to the Naqab, involved the further allocations of state land for exclusive Jewish use. In this case, the land involved was allocated to individual Jewish farmers who, in the late 1990s, began establishing private farms on parcels of state land given to them by the ILA and regional councils. In a stunning display of its discriminatory approach to planning, rather than ejecting these settlers, the National Council for Planning and Building retroactively approved these farms despite the fact that they were built in contravention of the 1965 Building and Planning Law. In all, some 80,000
dunams of land was allocated to the individual Jewish farms in this process.10

Finally, the absence of official attention to the needs of the Bedouin extends beyond macro-level planning to include the interior planning of the townships. The township planners did not consult with the Bedouin communities when planning the townships and they did not take the cultural specificity of the Bedouin into account. Consequently, planning inside the townships ignored the Bedouin need for visual privacy and separate spaces for men and women, as well as the high birth rates among the Bedouin. Initially, planners also made no provision for traditional residential patterns, which involve clusters of extended families.11

**Desert Apartheid**

Israel has created shockingly different worlds for Bedouin and Jews in the Naqab and the physical separation achieved by land expropriation and planning is codified by laws, upheld by the Israeli High Court in 1988, that prohibit Bedouins from leasing land in Jewish towns and Jews from leasing land in Bedouin townships.

Shocking disparities exist between Bedouin and Jewish localities in the Naqab today. Although they represent almost 30 percent of the population in the area, Bedouin occupy only 3 percent of the region’s land. Bedouin townships place at the bottom of Israel’s rankings for nearly all socio-economic indices. According to Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, the five poorest localities in Israel are all Bedouin townships. Tax revenues in these localities are paltry and assistance from the national government is insufficient to fill the gap between them and neighboring Jewish towns. In 2004, the total regular budget of local authorities in Bedouin localities was $838 per capita, compared with $1,315 in the local Jewish towns Omer, Lehavim and Meitar.12 Exacerbating the situation is the high level of unemployment in Bedouin townships: Unemployment rates for Bedouin men in the townships topped 34 percent in 2003 (compared to 11.6 percent for local Jewish men).13 Moreover, aside from the provision of basic services, planning for the townships omitted essential characteristics of a modern urban area. Townships lack intra- and inter-city public transportation services, banks, public libraries, public parking lots, recreation and cultural centers; as recently as 2002, not one of the townships had a completed sewage system.14 Unlike the local Jewish towns, Bedouin townships are not classified as “development towns,” and so are not entitled to entice investors with tax and other incentives. Additionally, the territorial jurisdiction of townships gave no land reserve to the municipalities, meaning that they were not able to plan land use so as to encourage economic development. This dismal picture contrasts starkly with that of the more than 100 planned Jewish towns built in the Naqab since 1948. While the Bedouin rank among the poorest localities in Israel, with the exception of Dimona, Jewish towns are all in the top half of the table and three, Metar, Lehavim and Omer, rank among the top five localities for socioeconomic indicators in Israel.

Considering the characteristics of the Jewish town of Omer and the Bedouin township of Tel Sheva side by side reveals two completely different realities separated by less than a mile. Ranked second in Israel for socio-economic indicators, Omer is a development town founded in 1975. It has a population of 6,000 and is built on 17,000 dunams of land, 2.8 dunams per capita. More than 90 percent of its students graduate from high school. The town abuts a high-tech industrial zone and its municipal website boasts of its “spectacular landscape of forest green vegetation and blooming flowers against the background of the deserts’ dunes, the mild and dry climate and the pure fresh air. All of these contribute to turn Omer into a green oasis in which living is both pleasant and healthy.” Unlike most municipalities of its size, Omer has its own Local Planning Commission. When Omer decided it wanted to expand, the commission simply annexed an area of 7,000 dunams of land from the neighboring unrecognized Bedouin village of T’arabin al-Sana’. Rather than permit the 5,000 Bedouin residents of T’arabin al-Sana’ to move into Omer, the Omer authorities are trying to force them into a specially created township. In 2007, Omer planning officials issued 75 demolition orders to all the remaining Bedouin homes in the T’arabin al-Sana’.15

Tel Sheva, by contrast, has 10,000 residents and is built on 4,000 dunams, 0.4 dunams per capita. It has been accorded no territorial expansion despite its considerably higher population density. It is the poorest locality in Israel and has little in the way of a “spectacular landscape.” Less than 5 percent of students graduate from high school and Tel Sheva has no industrial zone to provide jobs and no economic infrastructure. It has no sewage system or paved roads, substandard municipal services and has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Israel.

The situation is even more dire in the unrecognized villages that are home to almost 100,000 Bedouin citizens of Israel. Excluded from the maps that accompanied the 1966 Master Plan, the unrecognized villages have not appeared on any official map since. For the past 40 years, they have been excluded from all government planning and denied virtually all government services; they therefore lack basic infrastructure such as paved roads and sewage facilities and are not connected to national electricity, water or telephone networks. All structures in them, including homes, are considered illegal and are therefore candidates for demolition under the Building and Planning Law. There are currently up to 46 “unrecognized” villages in the Naqab, including both historical Bedouin villages and villages built after 1948 by Bedouins forced into the Siyag, with around 45,000 structures that are potentially subject to destruction at the hands of the state.16 Areas within ten additional “unrecognized” villages were formally acknowledged in 2000 but still lack detailed plans.

Since the 1970s, Israeli authorities have demolished thousands of Bedouin homes in the Naqab. Human Rights Watch reports that at least 759 Bedouin homes were demolished pursuant to the
1965 Planning and Building Law from 2004–2007. Demolitions have been carried out against individual dwellings and even whole villages. In June 2007, for example, the ILA, accompanied by police and soldiers, demolished dozens of homes in the unrecognized Bedouin villages Umm al-Hiran and al-Tir, both of which were created in the early 1950s by Bedouin forced into the Siyag. According to Haaretz, the ILA destroyed the village and evacuated its inhabitants so that a Jewish community named ‘Hiran’ could be established in the area; at least fourteen shacks, 17 Bedouin were treated in a local health clinic for exposure

MIDDLE EAST REPORT

Conservation Agency and directed almost exclusively at the Palestinian Bedouin in the Naqab have been systematically excluded from Israeli planning decisions that, to date, have been motivated more by Zionism’s “Judaization” agenda than the needs of local citizens. This ideological approach to the organization of land and space results in a spatial segregation that excludes and marginalizes Bedouin citizens while reserving state resources for the exclusive use of Jewish citizens. Thus, land use planning in the Naqab tangibly reflects the broader political and cultural exclusion of Israel’s Palestinian citizens and the subjugation of Palestinian citizens’ rights and needs to those of Jewish citizens.

Remedying more than six decades of dispossession and exclusion in the Naqab requires a comprehensive shift in Israel’s approach to its Palestinian citizens. At a practical level, the government must engage in serious efforts to close the socio-economic gaps between Bedouins and Jews in the Naqab. It must also recognize the unrecognized villages. Indeed, formal recognition of some of the unrecognized villages was a key recommendation of a 2008 government report by a committee charged with considering their fate as such recognition would improve their “unbearable situation.”

The report, authored by retired High Court Justice Eliezer Goldberg, also recommended providing retroactive permits for some buildings built illegally because of the impossibility of obtaining permits. Significantly, however, civil rights and Bedouin community groups have criticized the report for failing to recognize the Bedouins’ historical land ownership rights and for proposing recognition only where such recognition would not contradict an existing regional plan. Given that regional planning over the past four decades has been geared toward minimizing Bedouin land use, this limitation is a serious one.

More fundamentally, however, consideration of the plight of the Bedouin in the Naqab draws attention to the serious need for a meaningful Palestinian role in Israeli decision-making on issues relating to land use and planning. To date, Palestinians have been treated as second-class citizens denied both their historical rights and adequate representation on the planning commissions and other bodies responsible for decision-making. Even the eight-member Goldberg Commission failed to include a representative of the unrecognized villages. Without the meaningful participation of Palestinian citizens in Israeli’s decision-making, much-needed improvements in socio-economic and quality of life indicators would provide inadequate protection of Bedouin rights and no guarantee of spatial or political equality in the future.

The very definition of citizenship in Israel is at stake and the time for democratic reforms is long overdue.

Endnotes
9 Adalah, p. 11.
10 Ibid., p. 6.
12 Shlomo Swirski, Current Plans for Developing the Negev (Beersheva: Advah Center, 2007), p. 5.
13 Swirski and Hasson, p. 87.
15 Human Rights Watch, p. 61.
16 Human Rights Watch, pp. 56-57.
17 Haaretz, June 24, 2007.
18 Swirski and Hasson, p. 37.

From Apartheid to Democracy

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strives to prevent mixing of “black” and “colored,” as with the 2008 restriction on marriage between Palestinians from the Occupied Territories and those from Israel. Most boundaries, not least the Green Line, apply to Palestinians only.

In contrast, the “white spaces” where most Jews reside come in a variety of shapes and forms. Importantly, though, they are all situated within contiguous, “smooth” Jewish territory precisely because the state effectively Judaizes all spaces where Jews settle. They enjoy freedom of movement and similar rights. It is the uniform legal and geographical status of Jewish space between the river and the sea that effectively connects the variegated Arab spaces under the one regime. Jewish localities generate their boundaries from within, mainly for preventing the entry of Palestinians and, in some cases, “undesirable” Jews, such as working-class Mizrahim or the ultra-Orthodox. By law and practice, and with the backing of the army, Jews can reside and purchase land anywhere in Israel-Palestine. This geography is the backdrop against which statements in support of Palestinian statehood appear particularly empty.

…and Beyond

In theory, the change of the political discourse to support Palestinian statehood has potential to move the political geography of Israel-Palestine toward peace and reconciliation. Close examination, however, reveals that Israel has so far acted to lend legitimacy to its strategy of consolidating control over the Palestinians. Jewish expansion appears to be ending, but in its place the confinement of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line in ghettos proceeds. The ensemble of new discourses and regulations has combined to create an order best described as creeping apartheid. This highly oppressive and internationally illegal order is, needless to say, replete with suffering and prone to outbursts of violence.

This predicament necessitates new thinking. How long, for example, can Israel stick to its legal argument that the occupation is “temporary,” without being declared an apartheid regime by the international community? This question is paramount.

There is a need as well to investigate the various types of apartheid regimes that deviate in detail, but not in principle, from what obtained in South Africa. It appears that the creeping apartheid in Israel-Palestine is based on ethnic, national and religious, but not “racial,” or skin color, categories. What political and moral difference does this entail? Does Israel resemble a Serbian model of apartheid more than the multi-racial South African one? And what difference does the existence of the state of Israel with its legitimate UN standing make for resolution of the conflict?

In addition, the intersection of identity and class is critical: What is the connection between apartheid-like forced sepa-

ration and accelerating privatization and globalization of the economy in Israel-Palestine? What roles do the US and European economies and military industries play in this process? What are the consequences of Israel’s systematic import of foreign labor to replace Palestinians? How does the apartheid process feed on rapid accumulation of capital among small national elites? And, finally, is the ghettoization of the Palestinians effecting a parallel economic and political ghettoization of Israel itself in the Middle East?

One can imagine several visions that might resolve the predicament. The best appears to be an old one that was abandoned far too easily—socially progressive binationalism. There could be an Israeli-Palestinian confederation (based on two sovereign spaces, possibly leading to a federation) with an integrated economy, a joint capital city, open borders and fair accommodation of the Palestinian refugees. Discussions about these options have already begun in several arenas and are likely to pick up steam. They may sow the intellectual and political seeds of a genuinely just and peaceful future for this strife-torn land.

Endnotes
3 See Oren Yiftachel and Asad Ghanem, “Understanding Ethnocratic Regimes: The Politics of Creeping Colored and Jewish Spaces” (Middle East Report 4:2 [December 2004]).
4 See Uri Ram, The Globalization of Israel (Tel Aviv: Rehzing, 2008).

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On September 23, Farouq Husni lost a close vote for the post of head of the UN cultural and educational body, UNESCO, to the Bulgarian Irina Bokova. Husni, the sitting minister of culture in Egypt, had become the “controversial” contender for the position, his candidacy marred by accusations of anti-Semitism. His narrow defeat came after months of high-level negotiations, sparring in the international press and an intense debate in Egypt and the Arab world over the emotionally loaded subject of “normalization” with Israel.

UNESCO was founded in 1945 to “build peace in the minds of men” by raising educational levels and supporting cultural and intellectual exchange among UN member states. The organization is perhaps best known for its efforts to catalogue and save World Heritage sites—its most famous effort, in Egypt, is the dramatic relocation of the Pharaonic temples at Abu Simbel, threatened by the creation of Lake Nasser behind the Aswan High Dam. Farouq Husni has been culture minister for 22 years, and as such has collaborated with UNESCO on many projects, such as the Nubian Museum in Aswan, and the Museum of National Egyptian Civilization under construction in one of Cairo’s oldest districts.

Husni’s campaign to lead UNESCO was proceeding smoothly until the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Israeli Foreign Ministry expressed grave concern over statements he had made in the past. These remarks were highlighted in an open letter published by Le Monde on May 21, penned by film director Claude Lanzmann, intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy and Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel. The letter quotes Husni as saying that “Israel has never contributed to civilization in any era, for it has only appropriated the contributions of others,” and that Israel has been “aided” by “the infiltration of Jews into the international media.” It also references an exchange that took place in the Egyptian parliament in 2008, in which an MP claimed there were Israeli books in the Alexandria Library and Husni reportedly countered: “Burn those books; if there are any there, I will burn them myself in front of you.” The letter averred that “Mr. Farouk Hosny is the opposite of a man of peace, dialogue and culture; Mr. Farouk Hosny is a dangerous man, an inciter of hearts and minds” and called on “all countries dedicated to liberty and culture to take the initiatives necessary to avert this threat and avoid the disaster that would be his nomination.”

Husni responded with a letter of his own, defending himself and focusing in particular on the exchange in Parliament. “I was expressing angry feelings at what is happening to an entire population [the Palestinians] deprived of its land and rights,” he wrote. “Although the words themselves are charged with extreme cruelty, they should be seen in context.” Nonetheless, Husni continued that he regretted what he had said. “Nothing is more abhorrent...
to me than racism, rejection of the other or a desire to discredit any human culture, including the Jewish culture.” The discussion in the world press centered around Husni’s vow to burn Israeli books. In interviews, Husni offered several justifications: that the remark was taken out of context; that it was entirely rhetorical (he did not really mean to follow through); and that it escaped his lips when he was provoked by an affiliate of the Muslim Brothers. (Skirmishes between the Ministry of Culture and Islamist elements are standard in Egyptian political life, and Husni is a bête noire of the Islamist bloc in Parliament.)

Yet while trying to assuage the international community’s fears regarding anti-Semitism, Husni also had to allay the very different anxieties of Egyptian artists and intellectuals, who feared that in his UNESCO bid, the minister was compromising what has become a near fundamental principle of Egyptian cultural life: boycott of Israel and avoidance of anything smacking of “normal” relations with the Jewish state or its citizens. Husni’s remark about book burning has been widely condemned in Egypt—everyone can see that it was, to say the least, an embarrassing choice of words for a minister of culture. But the words are not as shocking here as they are abroad, because almost everyone agrees that there should not, in fact, be Israeli books in Egyptian libraries.

A Political Stance

When President Anwar al-Sadat made peace with Israel in 1979, he flew in the face of domestic public opinion. Opposition among the country’s cultural elite quickly crystallized in the form of the Committee for the Defense of National Culture, established by the author Latifa al-Zayyat. Professional associations and syndicates passed boycott resolutions, proscribing their members—journalists, filmmakers, authors—from traveling to Israel or participating in any events with Israeli counterparts. For the cultural class (muthaqaffin) of Egypt, this refusal of “normalization” is one way they can register this refusal of “normalization” is one way they can register their anger at Sadat’s conclusion of a peace that excluded the Palestinians and other Arabs and, more so, at the violence and intransigence of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands.

This blanket ban on cultural contact with Israel has survived nearly intact to this day—even as many Arab countries, including Egypt, have moved toward greater political and commercial normalization. Egypt is at one with Israel on security issues such as the containment of Hamas in Gaza. Egyptian businessmen have no problem doing business with Israel, whether in the Qualified Industrial Zones in Egypt churning out products with a mandated percentage of Israeli input or through the call centers where young Egyptians take calls (in Hebrew) from Israeli customers.1 In fact, as Wassim Al-Adel argues, the Arab world has moved, over the decades, from adamant rejection of Israel to a “growing culture of numbness and complicity,” particularly on the economic level. “Arab governments can no longer be, if ever they were, considered reliable champions of the boycott.”2

Meanwhile, attempts to organize widespread boycotts of global brands such as Coca-Cola or McDonald’s that do business in Israel tend to peak at times of general indignation—during the first and second intifadas, for example—and then fizzle over time. Such efforts are weakened by the lack of a single coordinating body, the long list of possible targets and the counter-argument that boycotts hurt Egyptian workers more than anyone else. Direct activism is severely curtailed, with convoys of aid to Gaza, for example, often blocked or tightly monitored. But Egyptian muthaqaffin have clung to the language and practice of anti-normalization, with a vehemence that often seems directly proportional to their powerlessness to affect government policy.

As minister of culture, Husni has supported—or at least gone along with—the cultural boycott of Israel. In an interview, he said: “Normalization isn’t a decision of the minister. It’s a global, collective decision on the part of all intellectuals and creators. I personally am not against cultural normalization. I’m against choosing the current time to start. It has to be after the establishment of peace between Israel and Palestine.”3 In fact, much of the international criticism of Husni stems from his adherence to the anti-normalization stance. Ha’aretz has described Husni as “an extreme anti-Israel Egyptian official”; as Mona Anis wrote in al-Ahram Weekly, “Israel and its friends have decided to consider him the prime instigator against Arab-Israeli cultural cooperation.”4 (In fact, after meeting Egyptian President Husni Mubarak in May, and no doubt as part of an unknown quid pro quo, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would no longer oppose Husni’s nomination.)

Several of Husni’s critics have found it convenient to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, conflating support for a boycott with anti-Jewish prejudice. This elision is accomplished in an article in Foreign Policy that argues—without a single supporting quote—that Husni’s statements exemplify the “rampant Judeophobia” of Egypt’s cultural elite, while dismissing solidarity for the Palestinian people as a factor in attitudes toward Israel here.5 Similarly, a September New York Times article opened with the flat assertion that “Egyptians generally do not make the distinction between Jewish people and Israelis. Israelis are the enemy, so Jews are, too.”6 While there is certainly anti-Semitism in Egypt—and that anti-Semitism may be exacerbated by the lack of interaction with Jews and Jewish culture to which the boycott contributes—many Egyptians are perfectly able, and eager, to articulate the difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

The focus on anti-Semitism (Husni’s or otherwise) obscures the fact that the cultural boycott of Israel is a political stance, one of the only avenues available to Egyptian intellectuals for expressing disapproval of Israeli actions in the Occupied Territories. Supporters of Israel argue that the boycott is a form of censorship or bigotry. But the Israeli state itself has injected politics into its cultural initiatives. It reportedly requires the artists it funds to sign a statement committing them to “promote the
policy interests of the state of Israel via culture and art, including contributing to creating a positive image for Israel.” Israeli officials have been prominently quoted saying they will launch a cultural public relations campaign, to “show Israel’s prettier face, so we are not thought of purely in the context of war.”

Brouhaha

Husni's support for the boycott has been one of the few issues on which he has seen eye to eye with Egyptian intellectuals and artists—even though, like many of his positions, it seems dictated as much by political expediency as by personal conviction. Although, for example, Hosni tends to present himself as a champion of a free speech and a bulwark against Islamists and their attacks on “immoral” culture, he has quite often acquiesced to their demands—when not engaging in censorship on his own initiative, arguing, “Sometimes creativity surpasses all limits, so who's supposed to guard the people? There are agreed-upon limits of freedom, and the artist must abide by the limits of society.” The minister’s long history of political opportunism is one reason why many in Egypt became concerned that in the process of campaigning for UNESCO, as Anis put it, he was preparing to “hand over the last card in his possession” to Israel. Egyptian intellectuals feared the principle of anti-normalization would be sacrificed to appease the minister’s Western critics and advance his UNESCO aspirations.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2009, the Egyptian press was in a tizzy over signs that Husni was softening toward Israel. First there was the invitation of the Israeli Daniel Barenboim to conduct at the Cairo Opera House in April. (Barenboim supports a Palestinian state and founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra with the late Edward Said.) Then, in June, Agence France Presse reported that the National Translation Center would be translating works by the Israeli historian Benny Morris and novelists David Grossman and Amos Oz, a story that was quickly and angrily picked up by the local press. The head of the center, the
critic Gabir ‘Asfour, explained that the works would be translated from English or French editions, rather than the original Hebrew versions, so as to pay no royalties to Israeli publishers and authors. But this did not pacify critics such as Sabri Hafiz, who wrote in the literary weekly Akhbar al-Adab: “Does changing the nationality of the agent, by making it a European publisher, justify forming a contract with… a Zionist writer who chose to settle the land of another through force?” There were also reports that Husni was pressuring the organizers of the Red Sea Festival (held in Suez in July) to invite Israeli participants. In the end, Israel did not participate, and the festival’s coordinator—who had been quoted pledging not to bow to ministerial pressure—“resigned.”

Husni’s damage control agenda was clear—officials from his ministry even held a press conference highlighting the restoration of ancient synagogues in Cairo. But none of the above examples necessarily portend a move toward normalization. The brouhaha, however, is typical. Boycotts have to be maintained and enforced, and a great amount of energy in Egypt goes into shaming and attacking those who are perceived to have betrayed a shared principle. All too often, this self-policing can seem petty. In the summer of 2007, the young actor ‘Amr Wakid was threatened with expulsion from the actors’ syndicate—thus being banned from ever working in Egypt again—because of his participation in an international TV production, “House of Saddam” by HBO Films, that also featured an Israeli actor. In August, a mini-scandal erupted when the famed cartoonist Bahgouri travelled to Ramallah with other artists for an initiative called “Cartoons for Peace,” and also spent a day in Tel Aviv. The debate over whether the cartoonist had engaged in normalization came to hinge on whether he had stepped out of the tour bus or not.

Anxiety over possible moves toward normalization is a constant of Egyptian cultural life. In 2008, Nadia Kamal began screening her documentary Salata Baladi (House Salad) around Cairo, and quickly caused a furor. The film was an exploration of Kamal’s far-flung, heterogeneous family and focused...
on her mother—an Italian-Egyptian Jew who married an Egyptian Muslim, converted to Islam, and was a Communist and pro-Palestinian activist, serving jail time for her political beliefs. In the film, Naila Kamal decides—after much agonized deliberation, and with the encouragement of a Palestinian friend and of her daughter—to visit a Jewish cousin who left Cairo when they were both teenagers and now lives in Tel Aviv. The Kamal family's trip to Israel led to charges that the film was “pro-normalization” and to Kamal being attacked in the press and convoked by the filmmakers' syndicate for an investigation. She refused the summons.

In an interview in 2008, Kamal said: “I think the reason most of the people are accusing me of pro-normalization is that they just didn’t think about it a lot. They don’t have a definition of normalization. They don’t have a definition of boycott. They think they are two opposite sides: If you normalize, you don’t boycott; if you boycott, then you’re not normalizing. Boycott is a way of resistance. It’s a tool. You can boycott, you can make war, you can make a demonstration, you can sign a petition. It’s a tool, not a principle, not a lifestyle, not an attitude…. Normalizing is when you see injustice happening and you just give a cold shoulder to the victim or a blind eye to the whole process. When you just agree to go on with business as usual. Engaging with the Israelis or with the Jews or with the Zionists—engaging in a war or in a discussion—is not normalization.”

Kamal is in the minority, but is not entirely alone in suggesting that Egypt's three-decade cultural boycott of Israel is in need of reevaluation. Asked about Bahgouri's trip to Israel and the Occupied Territories, several Egyptian colleagues defended him, pointing out that his trip was part of an internal initiative to promote peace and that the content of the works he presented was critical of Israel. Gamal al-Ghitani, the novelist and editor of Akhbar al-Adab, has defended the effort to translate Israeli books, pointing out that it was undertaken in the 1960s (as part of a series entitled “Know Your Enemy”) and that the likes of Ghassan Kanafani and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Massiri had compiled scholarly works on Hebrew literature and Judaism, respectively. Regarding the tumult surrounding Husni's alleged moves toward normalization, al-Ghitani wrote of “an unprecedented atmosphere of demagoguery, which makes necessary an objective stance from the cultural community, to define the ideas and foundations on which anti-normalization is based.” He has also said: “We need to discuss normalization again—our position has become unclear. There is something like a Palestinian country in Ramallah and Gaza—what is the position of Arab intellectuals toward travel to these regions? What about dealing with Arab Israelis?”

**Sorts of Boycott**

The boycott, as currently articulated, bars Egyptians from visiting the Occupied Territories (a self-restriction that quite suits the Egyptian security services, which is loath to allow such travel in any case). As Elliott Colla has pointed out in these pages, the boycott strategy has “cut off links between Egyptians and the very Palestinians whose cause they champion.” Not only do Egyptian activists and intellectuals have few opportunities to coordinate with their Palestinian counterparts, the discussion of boycott strategy among Egyptians is also quite narrowly delimited. In Egypt today there is not so much a discussion of the boycott as a constant reiteration of a fixed position. Articles on the subject all seem to have the same headline, a simple declaration: “Normalization is rejected.” Colla has also pointed out how “most of anti-normalization's successes are counted negatively”—in trips not taken, invitations rejected. Adhering to the boycott—maintaining one's ideological purity—is often seen as enough. This is in great part because other forms of solidarity—setting up aid convoys to Gaza, organizing widespread commercial boycotts, picketing a Qualified Industrial Zone—would entail great effort and attract the hostile attention of the authorities, who are showing less and less tolerance for any form of active solidarity with the Palestinians. In fact, the boycott—which is mainly maintained through state-licensed professional syndicates—operates in a tightly constrained political space, tolerated and even championed by government officials because it is a cost-free way of paying lip service to the Palestinian cause. It suffers from the same atrophy that has infected Egyptian political life at large.

More is the pity, since an international, Palestinian-led academic and cultural boycott movement has been gaining momentum. Launched in April 2004, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) calls upon intellectuals and academics worldwide to “comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation, colonization and system of apartheid.” In July 2005, almost 200 Palestinian associations and organizations signed the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. The movement has been involved in a number of high-profile actions, from pressuring international artists not to perform in Israel to targeting particular events organized by Israeli institutions. Over the summer, PACBI supported a protest of the Toronto International Film Festival’s decision to spotlight the city of Tel Aviv in its program. The many well-known signatories to the “Toronto Declaration: No Celebration of Occupation” wrote that the Festival “whether intentionally or not, has become complicit in the Israeli propaganda machine.”

PACBI issues (and occasionally revises) its own boycott guidelines; it currently suggests, for example, that all events or works funded by official Israeli institutions and ones that “promote false symmetry or ‘balance’” be eschewed. The guidelines can be debated—and, in fact, one suspects that the main achievement of PACBI for some time to come will be simply to start debates—but the important point is that the boycott as articulated here is context-specific, taking into consideration the funding, aims, framework and content of

Continued on page 48.
“Angela” came to Jordan to work as a housekeeper because she is a single mother and needs to save for her children’s schooling. She paid a recruiter in the Philippines 11,000 pesos, about $234, “for the processing of my papers.” An hour before she went to the airport, she says, she signed a contract written in Arabic, a language she does not read. She did not see an English-language copy. Her recruiter told her she would receive $150 per month.

Once in Jordan, Angela found herself not only dusting and mopping, but also minding four children in a large flat. She lost weight from overwork, and her friend working downstairs told her to run away. She says her second employer was more difficult, however. “I was always crying. The house was three times bigger, and the madam very strict.” Angela moved to a recruitment agency, where she cleaned the office for room and board, but no salary.

“Vivian” worked in the same household for nine years. “Madam had cancer,” she relates. “Even in the middle of the night I changed her diaper, like a nurse. I sacrificed nine years, and she gave me nothing—not even an earring or a napkin.”

The stories of Angela and Vivian are sadly familiar in Jordan. According to Ministry of Labor figures, there are some 300,000 migrant workers in the country, the vast majority of them women, who cook, clean and care-take in private homes. Most of these women are from the Philippines, Sri Lanka or other countries in South and Southeast Asia. Tales of maltreatment—late or missing pay packets, confinement in the home, physical abuse—at the hands of employers are legion. Penniless and frequently without a passport, which their employer has confiscated, badly treated domestics may escape the house and take refuge at an agency or their embassy. It is a well-known scene in Amman, says Shatha Mahmood, formerly the UN official tasked with monitoring domestic migrants’ issues in Jordan: “A woman runs from the house, gets in a taxi and the driver will at once understand that she wants to go to the embassy, even if she cannot articulate her wish.” But, if the abused women locate a place of refuge, their problems may not end there. The state is apt to levy overstay fees upon those who cannot produce a valid visa. And the women have virtually no forum in which to seek redress of the wrongs or advocate for their rights. Jordanian law, in fact, prohibits foreigners from organizing themselves for any political purpose.

Well-intentioned non-governmental organizations in Jordan call for the empowerment of migrant domestics, to give them recourse against abusive employers, but reform can only be enacted with the cooperation of the government, for which the foreign women are hardly a priority. In partnership with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in 1996 and 2003 the Jordanian government enacted several regulations for the protection of migrant domestic workers. The new regulations are Janus-faced: They offer some measure of legal recourse, but also reinforce discriminatory social norms. Moreover, they cement the dependence of the migrant domestics upon other forces. With dim prospects in the reeling global economy, what these women need is to be empowered to act in their own collective interest, but such fundamental reform seems a long way off in Jordan.

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The Special Working Contract contains several protections of workers’ rights, for instance, an explicit prohibition of the impoundment of passports by employers and a requirement that agents obtain work permits prior to the worker’s entry, so that fewer migrant women wind up overstaying their visas and falling into debt. Enforcement of these policies is lax at best, however.

Short of taking their employers to court, workers can exert little pressure on them to uphold the terms of the contract. When a worker does take her employer to court, a decision in her favor is rare. According to a consular officer at the Philippines Embassy, in his three years in Jordan not a single woman had won her case.1 Even when a judge decides against employers, they do not always comply. Several women interviewed in 2007 at the Philippines Embassy safe house, whose cases had been decided in their favor, were still waiting for their employers to pay their back salaries, overstay penalties or return tickets home. Another issue of concern is inadequate monitoring of licensed recruitment agencies. As of August 2007 the Ministry of Labor had registered 95 recruitment agencies, making it difficult to track all of them. Unwatched, the agencies simply choose which regulations to tell the employers about—and which to disregard.

Despite the Ministry’s distribution of the Special Working Contract, employers and recruitment agents continue to ignore some of its provisions. Agents may even violate regulations, for example, encouraging employers to withhold passports. One agent at the Ashraf Abu Talab Company for Manpower stated that he told employers to keep their employees’ passports, residency and work permits, and cellular phones to prevent them from running away. In some cases, migrant workers sign contracts detailing rights and salary in the home country, but find upon arrival that the agreement will not be honored.2 A Sri Lankan embassy official said this problem is common.3 While the Special Working Contract prohibits employers from deducting expenses they incur in bringing workers to Jordan from the workers’ salaries, they do this routinely, especially to Filipinas, who travel the longest distance.

“My madam wanted to deduct four months’ salary—$1,500,” says “Jessica.” “And for her my work is always too slow. She slaps me, pulls my hair, says bad words to me and threatens me. I want to go back to the Philippines.” But for now, she is stuck. In many cases like Jessica’s, workers end up with no salary for a year.

Implicit in the Jordanian policies on migrant domestics is the concept of obedience; the government places the employer and agent in charge of the worker, in exchange for her obedience to both the agent and the employer. Not surprisingly, this bargain is to the detriment of the migrant workers who, as non-citizens, are not entitled to ordinary personal rights. The Special Working Contract, for instance, requires the worker to obtain permission from the employer to leave the house on her day off or to absent herself from work.4 The contract also provides for the immediate dismissal and return to the home country of any worker found to be physically unfit, infected with a contagious disease or pregnant. Such unsubtle gender bias is one of many ways in which employers’ advantages over workers are preserved.

The experience of “Leny” shows the extent to which employers exploit the laxity of the law to teach employees their place in the household. Leny’s boss gave her little food and demanded that she wash herself with laundry detergent. But worse were the racist, misogynist slurs. “All you Filipinas are the same,” the employer would say. “You open your legs for five dinars.”

Leny’s plight highlights the threat of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of employers. Employers thus charged by domestics have the right to countersue for defamation. This provision is especially troubling for victims of rape, who (like Jordanian citizens) are required to produce at least two witnesses and submit to a medical exam proving that a rape occurred. If the victim presents her case without what the police consider sufficient evidence, she faces imprisonment for making a false accusation.

The Guide for Women Migrant Domestic Workers produced by the Ministry of Labor in 2006 also asserts employers’ control over workers’ freedom of movement. The section on workers’ duties goes on to enjoin workers to “respect the privacy of the house you work in” and “do the job with trustworthiness and dedication.” While the guide exhorts employers to treat workers humanely, it says nothing about respecting their privacy or honesty in dealings with them. In another section, the guide cautions, “Any worker who enters Jordan illegally or leaves the homeowner without his/her knowledge or breaks the contract without a valid reason exposes herself to deportation at her expense.” Implicit here is the message that, without an employer, migrant domestic workers have no legal right to remain in Jordan. Both of these statements remind workers of their precarious position as non-citizens. Additionally, the exclusion of domestic workers from the main labor law means that these workers cannot form or join unions. In June 2008, the Jordanian Parliament adopted amendments to the 1996 Labor Code, extending the law to cover Jordanian and foreign workers in agricultural and domestic work. Parliament approved additional amendments pertaining to trade union rights for migrant workers in July 2009. It is still unclear how these amendments will affect the rights of migrant workers, in particular, domestics.

With regard to overstay fees, the Special Working Contract holds employers and agents responsible for workers who are out of status, but immigration law and practice hold the worker accountable. Two women at the Philippines Embassy safe house in 2005 spoke of being imprisoned for several
days because of overstay penalties. The consular officer at the Philippines Embassy said he has never known Jordanian authorities to waive the overstay fees, not even for children of migrant women.

**In Loco Parentis**

Without unions or other platforms of their own, migrant women must rely upon their home-country embassies, NGOs, churches, the Jordanian government and individual Jordanians to look out for their interests. At their worst, these entities may represent exploitation and abuse as unfortunate anomalies in what is otherwise a rewarding and enriching experience for the workers. But even the institutions that exhibit genuine concern for the workers do not, by and large, push for systemic solutions.

Embassies play the most important mediating role. But not only are they powerless to enforce Jordan’s nominal labor standards, they are often more anxious to maintain good relations with the Jordanian government so as not to hurt their home country’s ability to export workers and harvest the hard currency the workers send home. The Indonesian Embassy has been especially solicitous of Jordanian feelings, to the extent that it does not allow its nationals to take refuge on the grounds. At the other end of the spectrum, the Philippines Embassy has been particularly active in improving the lot of its citizens. In January 2008, the Philippines instituted a moratorium on sending new domestic workers to Jordan because of the growing number of abused Filipinas seeking refuge at the embassy in Amman. This measure may have caused more harm than good, however, since women desperate for work may resort to illegal trafficking channels, where they are more vulnerable to ill treatment. Manila ended the ban after two months on the conditions that Filipina domestic workers’ salaries would be increased from $150 to $400 per month and that all contracts get the embassy’s approval. A number of recruitment agents, however, said it is easy to circumvent this demand. Apparently, officials at the embassy will frequently agree to contracts with a salary of $150–200, as will the migrant workers themselves. The ban also prompted the creation of a joint committee, consisting of representatives of both governments, to investigate the complaints of runaway domestic workers.

UNIFEM has gone the route of public education, producing brochures and guides for workers, Jordanians and recruitment agents. The UN body usually commissions the research and writing from a branch of the Jordanian government or an NGO called the Friends of Women Workers Association. These publications often emphasize the ways in which workers are victims. On the cover of a brochure targeting Jordanians, an Asian woman is pictured resting her head on her knees, her eyes downcast, above the text: “What if we were in their place? Would we be satisfied with duties but no rights?” Inside, the brochure sums up the responsibilities of an employer vis-à-vis a non-Jordanian domestic worker and lists the contact information of relevant organizations and government agencies.

But does it help Southeast and South Asian women in Jordan to depict them as servants and victims? Does the cover text help readers relate to these workers as human beings or, given the fact that few of the readers would find themselves working as live-in maids, does it simply reinforce their position of power vis-à-vis the workers? Does the brochure encourage readers to envision migrant women as individuals with rights or as wards of others, rather like a child who needs a parent? Jordanian readers may question why non-citizens should enjoy the same rights that they do and whether domestic work can be compared to other forms of paid employment. And since it does not link the constraints imposed on migrant women to those on Jordanian women, does this pamphlet detach the plight of migrant women from the struggle for women’s equality?

Other UNIFEM publications offer possible answers to these questions. Case in point: a study of runaway workers, authored by the Friends of Women Workers Association, with the dual purpose of identifying the “various means of empowering the status of Sri Lankan, Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers in Jordan” and providing recommendations for the Association to implement. This study draws upon interviews with embassy staff, government officials a representative of the Recruiting Agencies Association, one employer, one satisfied worker and two runaways. On the cover appear close-ups of the faces of three Asian women. There are valuable insights into the challenges facing migrant domestic workers, such as non-payment of wages and overstay fees, and the various employer exemptions.

But the author’s almost exclusive focus on the workers’ vulnerability is hardly “empowering.” It portrays the workers as needing protection, but says nothing about the racism and xenophobia among Jordanians that helps to create the need. Take the phenomenon of culture shock for the workers. Some employers, the report says, require that workers cut their hair because “long hair is perceived as dirty” by Jordanians. Employers lock Filipina domestics in the house because of stereotypes about their promiscuity. Such practices are labeled as differences in cultural norms, absolving the employer of responsibility and offering the worker no remedy whatsoever beyond hope that her employer is enlightened.

The image of the foreign domestic worker as victim is more prominent in a media campaign organized by UNIFEM and the Ministry of Labor in which cartoons by the famed ‘Imad Hajjaj appeared on billboards, posters and the pages of a calendar. In one cartoon strip, Hajjaj’s main character Abu Mahjoub is depicted showing humiliating deference to his employer, the police and his wife. Only with his maid can he exert any authority; in the final panel, he is slumped in a chair, while she serves him coffee with the same “Yes, sir!” that he has given to those above him. The cartoon is headlined: “Thank you, Sri Lanka!” Migrant domestics, the strip implies,
are at the bottom of the social hierarchy—servile and utterly impotent because they are the victims of victims.

Churches and community groups are an alternative to the government and UNIFEM programs, offering assistance and a welcome place for migrant workers to socialize with their peers. But these institutions also encourage the workers to resign themselves to hardship in the workplace. In one sermon, Father V., pastor of the Filipino Fellowship, began by acknowledging that the “greener pastures” of Jordan might not seem so green. But hard work and perseverance would pay off: He had become an engineer in Dubai though he lacked a high school diploma. The next week, Father Velasco told the biblical story of Joseph, who after being sold by his brothers into bondage in Egypt, was “a servant like some of us.” Joseph, too, was a “live-in,” but God was with him. “I want you to see the privilege of living with your employer,” the priest went on. “If God is with you then you will prosper.” Other sermons urged workers not to squander their earnings on “luxury items” (such as cell phones and jewelry), to treat employers kindly and to work hard regardless of conditions. Events sponsored by the Caritas Migrant Center, a Catholic charity, presented the workers with similar entreaties. Speakers reminded workers of their reasons for migrating to Jordan, admonishing them not to abscond even when employers were abusive and fellow workers were urging them to get out of harm’s way. At the 2004 Christmas party, a Ms. Khouri, there to represent employers, told the assembled women: “Don’t run away. Don’t listen to your friend, lest you go back to your family with a bad reputation.” A Caritas staffer offered similar lessons: Domestics, she said, should “care for the house, preserve its morals and be patient. A worker should not “run away at the first problem because when she runs away she is the loser.” Such advice may be practical, in the sense that runaways can be imprisoned and deported, but it also suppresses serious discussion of the workers’ vulnerabilities.

Migrant domestics have no formal organizations, but they do have social networks. One such network is the Migrant Workers’ Association, a group founded by Filipinas. The association offers loans to pay overstay fees, purchase airline tickets and deal with other such emergencies. Each member must pay dues of ten dinars, which are returned upon permanent return to the country of origin. While this network gives a measure of protection against unscrupulous employers and unfair immigration regulations, it is not useful for demanding rights. It remains outside of the UNIFEM umbrella, which limits its leverage.

Dilemmas of Reform

There is a final wrinkle in Jordan’s attempts to regulate the treatment of migrant domestic workers and eliminate their abuse and exploitation. The new regulations allow the government to exercise greater control over the workers’ lives. The fact that the Philippines Embassy has to approve the contract of every Philippines national who enters Jordan for domestic employment means that the Jordanian government can closely track their entry and exit. Fresh proposals for reform raise further questions about government control. A joint proposal by UNIFEM and the Ministry of Labor to require the opening of bank accounts for each worker will enable the Ministry of Labor to monitor payments made to workers. Will the Ministry have access to the earnings in these accounts or just information about deposits and withdrawals? The proposal for a migrant domestic workers’ shelter posits that an “independent committee”—selected by the state—would run the facility. Should this shelter be built, moreover, embassies might come under increased pressure to close their doors to their nationals. The Jordanian government has repeatedly called the housing of migrants by embassies illegal. According to Shatha Mahmood, the former UNIFEM official, Amman perceives the sheltering as a violation of Jordanian sovereignty. Protection of abused domestics would thus be entirely in the hands of the Jordanian government.

With improved enforcement of regulations and further public education campaigns, migrant domestics in Jordan may be spared the horrors that befell Angela, Jessica, Leny, Vivian and untold numbers of women like them. In the coming years the question will be whether these women will be empowered as individuals with rights as workers, migrants and women. In order for this to happen, it seems likely that the Jordanian government will need to address how gender norms constrain women’s roles—whether they are citizens or non-citizens—as well as the link between the status of Jordanian women and that of migrant domestic workers. Ideally, migrant domestic workers themselves would be incorporated into this process of reform. For now, there seems to be no reason to revise Mahmood’s answer to the question of how these women are to negotiate the terms of their livelihood in Jordan: “That’s why we have embassies.”

Endnotes

1 Interview with Arvic Arevalo, executive officer and head of consular section, Embassy of the Philippines, Amman, November 28, 2004.
6 Interview with Arvic Arevalo, executive officer and head of consular section, Embassy of the Philippines, Amman, November 28, 2004.
7 Jordan Times, January 24, 2008.
8 Jordan Times, April 6, 2008.
11 Interview with Samira ’Akasha, Caritas Migrant Center, Amman, August 1, 2007.
12 The association’s name has been altered to protect the identities of its members.

“T
to read Israel as itinerant is to imagine its alternative future.” With these optimistic words, Rebecca L. Stein closes the introduction to her beautifully written ethnography of Israeli tourism in the years between the 1993 Oslo agreement and the second intifada that began in the fall of 2000. What shines through in this book, indeed, is Stein’s optimism, which, far from being romantic or dreamy, emerges out of a sober and well-crafted socio-political analysis. Joining a growing body of works dedicated to the mechanisms of Zionist domination, *Itineraries in Conflict* stands out in its commitment not only to documenting the present predicaments of Israel-Palestine, but also to thinking through these predicaments and the often paradoxical possibilities they open for setting the political reality on a different trajectory.

*Itineraries in Conflict* traces the changing landscapes of Israeli tourism during the 1990s, the era of the Oslo peace negotiations. The period under examination is short, but it marks a time of profound political transition for Israel, resulting in radical shifts in what Stein calls “Israeli intelligibility.” Stein’s main argument is that touristic practices in this period did not simply reflect the shifts in the Israeli national imagination due to the prospect of peace, but that they also ought to be understood as “important site[s] of national reformation” through which “Israel was being reimagined.” Rather than simplifying matters, as many commentators on “the conflict” tend to do in their zeal to prove themselves right, Stein deploys a careful reading of Israeli tourist practices to highlight the multiple functions they serve in providing “an allegorical terrain on which fears and fantasies about regional reconfigurations could be negotiated.” While some practices and the narrative about them fortified the terms of national intelligibility, others, Stein remarks, challenged its terms in reviving repressed histories and pointing to previously unforeseen potential futures.

The book is made up of five chapters, all of which examine the ways in which the new Israeli tourist market was forged. The first is dedicated to Israeli tourism in neighboring Arab countries. It examines the central role played by Israeli media stories about these travels in generating a new understanding of the Middle East as an evolving “unified geography of leisure.” Stein’s subtle analysis reveals the manner in which this promise of regional openness and border crossing nevertheless also served the ideological purpose of consolidating Israel’s difference from surrounding countries, presenting this regional geography as devoid of history, as if the national borders drawn by the 1948 war have always been there, preceding the meeting between Jews and their “newly discovered” Arab neighbors. The second chapter examines the emergence of Israeli tourism within the Palestinian communities of the Galilee. Stein follows the growing Israeli search for “authentic” Arab experiences, itself translated into a booming market of visits to local Arab villages, which until the 1990s were considered dangerous and hostile by most Israelis.

As with all the touristic practices she examines, Stein effectively demonstrates that these visits often had conflicting effects: On the one hand, they underscored the power dynamics between Israeli Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel, for the latter were objects of consumption for the pleasure of the former. On the other hand, these visits also produced “counter-hegemonic resonances” as they disturbed the “prevailing fiction of ‘one Israeli people.’” Thus, if the commodification of Arab culture was commonly premised on dominant Israeli logics, Stein concludes that it nevertheless exhibited moments that “undermined state logic and terms of [national] inclusion.”

The following three chapters, dedicated to the production of Palestinian space by the Israeli state, restaurant tourism and what can broadly be called “coffee culture,” follow in the footsteps of the first two in paying close attention to the variegated and often internally contradictory impact of the emerging Israeli tourist market. There seems to be a subtle shift in the later chapters, however, from a focus on the potentially subversive outcomes of individual encounters toward an analysis of state power and control. Chapter 3, devoted to the Israeli production of Palestinian space, thus emphasizes the manner in which Israeli anxiety about the Oslo process generated a need to contain the Palestinian community living within Israel, fixing them in rural spaces and restricting their mobility. Chapter 4, dedicated to Israelis’ adoption of Arab cuisine and frequenting of Palestinian restaurants, similarly zeroes in on how these practices functioned primarily to transform Palestinian loyalty to the state from something doubted by Israeli Jews to something assumed. Finally, chapter 5, titled “Of Cafés and Terror,” moves ahead in time to the early years of the second Palestinian intifada, when Israeli coffeehouses turned from signs of modernism and Western leisure into sites of prospective suicide bombing. Stein rightly reads this change, expressed in the Israeli saying, “The Palestinians have emptied our cafés,” in terms of its repressed, but haunting predicate: “We Israelis have emptied their nation.”

Where, then, is the optimism in this devastating picture? Perhaps in the fact that small acts like drinking coffee translate, as Stein convincingly shows, into complex political gestures that at times have the ability to exceed the limits of the dominant national imagination.

If I have one reservation about this wonderful and compact book, it has to do with the fact that its sober optimism is not sufficiently grounded in retrospective. Indeed, today, less than a decade after the “Oslo dream” became exposed for the complete failure that it was, it seems painfully impossible to take seriously the promise articulated in Stein’s closing words: “The anticipated tourist onslaught of the Oslo era…threatened to expose the most foundational of Israeli fictions: that of a nation neither in nor of [emphasis in original] the Arab Middle East…. In the midst of this panic…a different Israeli future was becoming visible.” I would love to agree, but recent years, I am afraid, have taught us that such a “different Israeli future” is becoming harder and harder to imagine.

—Gil Z. Hochberg
B'tselem. *Foul Play: Neglect of Wastewater Treatment in the West Bank* (Jerusalem, June 2009).

Continued from Lindsey, page 42.

each event. This sort of boycott is also open to progressive Israeli participants—and has indeed been embraced by some, such as Neve Gordon, a professor at Ben Gurion University who penned an op-ed entitled “Boycott Israel.”

The Palestinian boycott is shaped by different factors from those that affect Arab neighbors such as Egypt. Palestinians have never been able to boycott Israel entirely—a fact acknowledged at the 2008 Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network conference in Ramallah, dedicated to promoting the broader boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign of which PACBI is a part. Participants agreed that Palestinians should only be asked to boycott Israeli products for which local alternatives were available, and that they could not be expected to avoid working in Israel. Many Palestinian organizations also have experience working side by side with Israelis, engaging in joint activism such as the protests against the separation wall in the West Bank village of Bil‘in.

At the same time, Palestinian civil society has been scarred by the anodyne “people-to-people” projects that proliferated after the Oslo agreements of 1993. Millions of international aid dollars were spent to promote activities that would bring Palestinians and Israelis together, to learn “dialogue” and “tolerance.” But many of these projects perpetuated the very asymmetries of power that bedeviled, and eventually killed, the “peace process” of the Oslo years. Palestinian organizations are accordingly cautious about legitimizing Israel through forms of cooperation that focus on “reconciliation” between two seemingly equal sides. Today, most of those involved in the BDS campaign insist that a prerequisite for joint activities is an explicit acknowledgement that in Israeli-Palestine there is “a situation where there is an oppressor and an oppressed, a colonizer and a colonized.”

At the meeting of the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network, it was pointed out that Palestinians have engaged in various boycotts since the 1920s. Bringing a boycott to fruition is extremely difficult, demanding constant coordination and adaptation. The concern over Farouq Husni’s suspected capitulation on the boycott issue shows how important engaging in some form of solidarity with the Palestinian people remains for the Egyptian cultural class. Joining the global conversation over what normalization consists of and how best to fight it might help Egyptian intellectuals and artists channel their anxiety in more productive directions.

Endnotes

11 Agence France Presse, June 11, 2009.
15 Lindsey, op cit.
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