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THE BINATIONALIZATION OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

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Meron Benvinisti, the former advisor on Arab affairs to Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, created quite a stir two years ago when he concluded in his report on the West Bank that settlement in Judea and Samaria had reached a point of no return—that the annexation of those areas was only a question of time and a matter of overcoming legal technicalities.¹ He based his conclusions not so much on the number of settlers residing beyond the former border—they hardly numbered more than twenty thousand at the time—but rather on the geographical dispersion of the over one hundred Jewish settlements and on the extent of government commitment to infrastructure projects facilitating future Jewish settlement. Yet Jews are not the only actors in this eradication of the Green Line (the former border between Jordan and Israel). Israeli and West Bank Arabs are also playing an increasing role in the annexationist process. Jews and Arabs are each, for different motives, contributing to the binationalization of the Land of Israel.

The eradication of the Green Line by local Arabs is manifested in three areas: in the creation of nationalist institutions on both sides of the former border and the beginnings of cooperation between them; in the creation of mutual channels of communication; and in the crystallization of common political stances and symbols.

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THE SETTING

The Six-Day War

It all began with the Six-Day War. The ascendance of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the international scene, which roughly complemented the immediate post-1967 period and the beginning of Israeli administration in the territories, provided local Arabs with a force with which many could identify. Many in the territories turned their backs on King Hussein, and redirected their allegiance to the PLO. Among Israeli Arabs—a community that had for nineteen years, since the establishment of the State of Israel, lived as an isolated, small minority within the larger Jewish society—the reunion with their kin in the territories under one government, and the increase of the Arab component in Israeli-administered territory from 14 to 37 percent of the total population made a substantial impact.

The Growth of Education

To understand how the creation of nationalist institutions came about, one must first realize the impact of the growth of education in Arab society in the past fifteen years. Education has spurred political awareness and spawned political activities and institutions both among Israeli Arabs and among Arabs in Judea and Samaria.

Today, high school and college students are no longer a marginal group in West Bank and Israeli Arab society. They now comprise the fastest growing population group on both sides of the former border. A number of indicators will suffice to show the extent of this boom in the West Bank and among Israeli Arabs.

- The high school population in the territories increased in the years 1967-1982 by 108 percent, whereas the general population increased by only 23 percent.
- There are nearly half as many matriculation students in the territories as there are in the whole of Israel. In Israel, 32,000 students pass the *bagrut*. In the territories, nearly 8,000 pass the Jordanian *tawjih* and over 5,000 pass the Egyptian matriculations. The Israeli population, though, is three times larger than the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip combined.
- In 1967, there were a few hundred students in post-secondary education programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; in 1982 there were 12,000; and this year, with the growth of junior colleges in the West Bank, there will be nearly 20,000—a student population almost as large, proportionately, as Israel's, higher than that of France or England, and the highest in the Arab Middle East.
- In 1967, there were nine institutions in the West Bank at the post-secondary level, only one of which, Birzeit, offered college-level courses. Most of the other institutions of higher education were teacher training colleges. Today, there are 19 institutions, many of them recognized by the West Bank Committee for Higher Education.
- Under Jordanian rule there were no universities; today there are six: Birzeit, which became a university in 1973 and currently enrolls over 2,400 students; Al-Najah National University in Nablus, with an enrollment of over 3,000; the religious Al-Quds University within Jerusalem's city limits; Bethlehem University, founded in 1973, with over 1,200 students; the Islamic University in Hebron, with over 2,400 students; and the Islamic University in Gaza, founded in 1979, enrolling 1,600 students.

Among Israeli Arabs, the quest for education is no less. In 1970, only 8,050 high school students, or less than 30 percent of that age group, attended high school. Today nearly thirty thousand, or over half of that population group, do so.

The high school and college students and the institutions in which they learn provide fertile ground for political activity. Such political activity not only increases the sense of solidarity with the PLO and its various factions; it also provides a meeting ground between Israeli and West Bank Arabs.

STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY: THE TERRITORIES

To be sure, student political activity is more rooted in the territories, where the institutions of higher learning define themselves as national institutions and perceive themselves as the vanguard in the creation of a national Palestinian infrastructure. The two most prominent institutions in the territories in this regard are Birzeit University, near the suburban town of Ramallah, ten miles north of Jerusalem, and Al-Najah National University in Nablus. Israeli Arab students, on the other hand, operate within Israeli educational institutions, where they are only a small minority of the student body. Nevertheless, political activity is intense on both sides of the former border.

Students usually first engage in political activity while in high school. In the West Bank, a student can choose to operate within three frameworks: (1) the Youth Committees for Social Work which is a youth movement aligned with the Fatah mainstream in the PLO, or in branches of the Scout movement which are also under Fatah's control; (2) the Federation of Secondary School Students, organized by the Palestinian Communist Party and its Youth Committees for Voluntary Work; and (3) the similarly structured organizations controlled by the radical leftist factions in the PLO, such as Naif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or Habash's Popular Front. The Muslim youth organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood are outside the pale, given their opposition to Palestinian nationalism, though they too compete with the other organizations for the hearts and minds of the high school students.

Since political organizations are illegal under the Jordanian law that still prevails in the territories, these organizations combine social activities with political socialization, publicizing the former while downplaying the latter. The innocuous names of these organizations show the care they take to remain legal and avoid entanglement with the authorities.

Involvement in politics is even more intense on campus. There powerful student committees and unions of academicians and university workers control many domains of student life, including the awarding of scholarships funded by the joint PLO-Jordanian Joint Committee in Amman. The very existence of free elections that take place in these institutions is a powerful incentive for students to take a more active role in student politics. For residents of the territories, these elections are practically the only opportunity they have to express themselves.

The politics that go on are a microcosm of what goes on in the Palestinian national movement in the diaspora. All the factions, with the exception of the Muslim youth organizations, are directly affiliated with factions within the PLO, and the same conflicts that are rife in the highly splintered PLO abroad are visible on the campuses in the territories. The activists in the student movements are frequently the leaders of the youth movements and high school organizations described above.

NATIONALIST ACTIVITIES AMONG ISRAELI ARAB STUDENTS

Nationalist activities are also taking root among the Israeli Arab student population. The oldest youth movement involved is the Communist Youth Federation, the official youth movement of Rakah (the New Communist List), the veteran party in the Arab sector of Israel. Unlike the situation in the territories, neither political activities nor Communism is outlawed within Israel, and thus their name proclaims their substance.

Operating at the grass roots level, their primary accomplishment in recent years has been the staging of volunteer youth camps week, first on behalf of Nazareth, where the Communists have controlled the municipality for over nine years, and then in the Arab sections of the mixed city of Acre. These events are the prime meeting ground for Israeli Arabs and West Bank youth affiliated with the Communist organizations on the West Bank. Although the authorities set up roadblocks to prevent the participation of West Bank youth, these are hardly effective. At least several hundred youth from the territories aided "steadfast"² Nazareth last year on special public works projects undertaken during the week-long Communist Jamboree.

Yet, despite such activities, the Communists are still somewhat reticent to promote too much mutual activity, in large part for ideological reasons. The official party line, in accordance with the Soviet position, is that Israel remain a predominantly Jewish state and that a Palestinian state be created in the territories. The emergence of a binational polity would complicate resolution of the Palestinian problem as they conceive it.

The other student organizations in Israel's Arab high schools and universities have fewer qualms about promoting mutual activities between Israeli Arabs and West Bank youth. The Sons of the Land and the National Progressive movements in the Israeli Arab Student Union have strong links to counterpart student organizations in Judea and Samaria. Both the Sons of the Land and National Progressive movements can be described as being on the left of the spectrum in nationalist circles but are not formally linked to factions in the PLO as are the leftist student organizations in the West Bank.

The recent Palestinian week held by Arab students of Hebrew University illustrates the kind of interaction that occurs. The festivities that took place were, in format, almost exactly what takes place in the universities and colleges in Judea and Samaria. Significantly, the climactic event, the by now traditional enactment of the Palestinian wedding,³ was staged by a student theater group formed by leftist students from the West Bank.

THE EAST JERUSALEM PRESS—A VITAL COMMUNICATION LINK

The cementing of ties between the Israeli Arabs and Arabs across the former border requires adequate channels of communication, a service increasingly provided by the highly mobilized East Jerusalem Arab press which consists of seventeen dailies, weekly newspapers, and magazines.

Ironically, the Israeli civilian administration in the past frequently encouraged these publications in this role. Occasionally they forbade the distribution of these newspapers and periodicals in the territories, forcing the publishers to find substitute markets among Israeli Arabs. The territories, it should be recalled, are under Jordanian and military law; however, in Israel these publications cannot be restricted any more than can the Hebrew press. Over the years, then, these newspapers have devoted increasing space to Israeli Arab affairs. The *Al-Quds* (pro-Jordanian) and *Al-Fajr* (affiliated with the

PLO mainstream) dailies and two popular weeklies (also PLO affiliated) are sold in Haifa, Nazareth, and in the villages of the Arab triangle.⁴

INTERACTION REFLECTED IN 1984 ELECTIONS

The events surrounding the recent elections also reflected the growing interaction between Arabs on both sides of the former border, and point to the growth of a common Palestinian national identity. For one thing, Yasser Arafat appeared in Rakah campaign advertisements on Israeli television (on a station owned and operated by the Israeli government). Furthermore, there arose among the Arab population as a whole—both in the territories and within Israel—the controversy over the question of whom the Fatah leader sincerely supported, Rakah's Democratic Front for Peace or the recently formed Progressive List for Peace.

Both Rakah and the Progressive List for Peace invested heavily in arousing support for their respective groups in Judea and Samaria, despite the fact that inhabitants in the territories do not vote in Israeli elections. The Progressive List for Peace went so far as to use the East Jerusalem *Al-Fajr* daily (the unofficial organ of the PLO mainstream) in the territories as its campaign tool. For two weeks prior to elections, the newspaper published page-long articles by the founders of the party. Up to that point, the new list was handicapped with a local newsheet only, while their Communist competitors had the oldest Arab press organ in Israel, *Al-Itihad*, published in Haifa, at their disposal. The use of *Al-Fajr* minimized Rakah's advantage. However, the Communists could also count on the Communist *Al-Talia*, a weekly published in East Jerusalem, to malign the opposition. Another daily, *Al-Mithaq*, the unofficial organ of George Habash's extremist Popular Front, likewise attacked the Progressive List for Peace with the encouragement of the Israeli Arab Sons of the Land movement that boycotted the Israeli elections on ideological grounds.

The formation of the Progressive List for Peace established a major new force in promoting interaction between Israeli Arabs and West Bankers. That political party not only broke Rakah's monopoly of the nationalist vote in the Israeli Arab sector in the recent Knesset elections—it also went on to win two seats. The winners celebrated their victory by convoking a Palestinian folklore event in the village of Taibeh where a Palestinian folklore institute was set up by some of the founding members of the Progressive List for Peace. No less than six theater and dance groups performed in the festivities. They were all formed by the Youth Committees for Social Work, the Fatah-directed youth groups from the West Bank.

BOTH SIDES REACT TO SEVENTEENTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF PLO

Arabs on both sides of the Green Line again took sides over the convocation of the Seventeenth National Assembly of the PLO which was held three months after the Israeli elections. As the convocation was opposed by all the leftist factions—both those controlled by Syria and those under Soviet influence—it was natural that their organizations in Judea and Samaria would condemn the right-wing move to convene the Assembly. The novelty was the Israeli Arab reaction. The small, radical Sons of the Land and the university-based National Progressive movements affixed their signatures to condemnations that appeared in the leftist East Jerusalem press together with their counterpart organizations in Judea and Samaria. At the same time, *Al-Fajr* did its utmost to rally Galilee Arabs' support behind the decision to convene the Assembly, through polls rostering the man in the street.

CONCLUSION

Most Jewish Israelis sense the problems that are likely to emerge given the blurring of the Green Line, the former border which in the past so effectively kept the two Palestinian populations apart. For those who advocate some form of partition, the binationalization of the local society will only complicate any peaceful resolution of the Palestinian problem. On the other hand, those advocating continued settlement in Judea and Samaria are likely to meet Arab countrywide opposition to their goals.

But if this phenomenon irks Israeli Jews, it also worries nationalist Palestinians. Political binationalization undermines the rationale behind the formation of a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. The Arabs also face another problem. The growing Palestinization of Israeli Arabs is accompanied by increasing discord, a feature all too common in Arabic political culture. Internal divisiveness and violence will become that much more prevalent as Israeli Arabs continue to "Palestinize," just as that strife has already spread in the West Bank.

Notes

1. Meron Benvenisti, *The West Bank Data Project: A Survey of Israel's Policies* (Washington, D. C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1984).
2. In Arabic, *sumud*. The term denotes an active, non-violent stance against the judaization of Arab areas. The activities focus on national institution building. Violence/terrorist acts are the antithesis of this approach, as they can lead to expulsion and are therefore self-defeating. The idea is to remain in place and build a Palestinian national infrastructure.
3. The "bride" is draped in the PLO flag and the "groom" is formally escorted to her. It is an effective set piece representing commitment to the nationalist Palestinian cause.
4. The Arab triangle is an area in Israel proper, that is predominantly populated by Arabs. It is contiguous to the former Green Line and is roughly demarcated by the Israeli Arab towns of Arara, Um al-Fahm, and Ghrbiyye.

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