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ISRAEL AND THE BANTUSTANIZATION OF PALESTINE

ABSTRACT

Contrary to repeated statements that Israel is a ‘democratic state,’ the author argues that it is an ethnocratic state. From its inception it has established a system of legal, political, residential and economic segregation of its Palestinian citizens. Since Israel has occupied the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967, these were subjected to a systematic Jewish colonization and Judaization, which were met with Palestinian resistance. Both created a spiral of political violence. Israel’s ‘industrial’ state terror is now confronted with ‘artisan’s’ terror of frustrated Palestinian groups. The author is of the opinion that a highly defective ‘peace’ deal offered by the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon would have transformed the Palestinian state entity in a Bantustan-like cluster of would-be ‘autonomous areas’.

We had often heard or read the assertion, even from reputed scholars, that Israel is a democratic state, the ‘most democratic’ in the Middle East. Indeed, its citizens can freely chose between different programs, political parties and candidates, in regular intervals, at competitive and fair elections. Even the Israeli Arab community is represented in the Knesset. The government is accountable to the electorate. The system of check and balance between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government works efficiently. Political and economic power is diffused. Trade unions are active. There is a free press, a lively civil society, etc.

All this is true, yet it is a democracy only for those who had been recognized as Jews, not for the Israeli citizens of Arab stock, and even less so

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for those Palestinians who had been forcibly expelled from their homeland. Palestinians living in territories occupied by Israel in 1967, have not seen any benefit from the Israeli would-be 'democracy'; only brutality, oppression and misery.

The political system that exists in Israel is better described as an ethnocracy. Israeli ethnocracy, combined with political pluralism, produces an one-dimensional polity, from which those not belonging to the dominant ethnic group are excluded. Some among the atypical Israeli authors, recognize that the variety of 'democracy' existing in Israel is rather flawed, and describe it as 'ethnic democracy',² or, more critically, as '*Herrenvolk* democracy'.³

If a parallel has to be established with any other political system existing in the Middle East then the closest would be the Iranian theocracy. Iran is a Farsi-centered state in which members of ethnic minorities, the Azeri Turks, Kurds, Arab and other minorities, are culturally discriminated (they were discriminated by the previous Pahlavi regime as well). Today's Iran has competitive elections in which reformers and conservatives confront each other, a lively civil society, and a relatively free press. The level of achieved 'democracy' is more advanced than in any neighboring Arab state, or in Pakistan. Yet it is a highly deficient 'democracy,' controlled from above by a supreme religious leader and a council of Shi'ite clerics, supported by a system of quasi-religious courts, who decide what is permitted by the official religion and what is prohibited, which candidate may run for the elections and which one is disqualified, which newspaper has to be closed, etc.

This type of direct religious control cannot be found in the Israeli system. Yet Israeli politics and the whole society are heavily influenced by religious dogmas and considerations, and exposed to pressures from orthodox Jewish groups, whose religious parties play an important role on the Israeli political seesaw. These groups are actually at the forefront of the colonization drive in the Occupied Territories. Repeated surveys show the religiously-minded Jewish citizens (about 20% of the Jewish population) are the most intransigent in their opposition to granting civil equality to Israel's Arab citizens.⁴ The common aim of all these orthodox religious groups and parties is to add a Jewish theocratic superstructure to the already existing ethnocratic state.

I

The Israeli ethnocracy is closer to the ethnocratic regimes that have been recently shaped in the spaces of former Yugoslavia and in the Southern Caucasus. The latter share the following common traits:

2 Shafir, G., and Y. Peled, "Citizenship and Stratification in an Ethnic Democracy," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1998, pp. 408-427.

3 Kimmerling, Baruch, "Israeli' Democracy Decline," *International Herald Tribune*, 26 April 2002.

4 Yiftachel, Oren, "'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine," author's e-mail copy, originally published in *Constellation*, Vol. 6, 1999, p. 13.

- The newly established states have been explicitly or implicitly defined and set up as ethnic states; ethnic minorities are *de iure* (constitutional nationalism) and/or *de facto* excluded from the system. They are typically victims of state-sponsored terror, ethnic cleansing and discrimination; they are denied effective political representation.

- There is a state-sponsored nationalist 'mentality' rather than a full-blown totalitarian nationalist ideology.

- One-dimensional political pluralism: large electoral movements, or fluctuating parliamentary coalitions dominate the political stage. The leaders of these movements and coalitions manipulate with the electorate, and day-to-day politics is reduced to elite bargaining above the heads of the electorate.

- The state leadership is operating within ill-defined but often predictable limits; strong autocratic tendencies, but no total control over all aspects of public life.

- State manipulation of and through the mass media, especially TV, Radio and large circulation printed press, typically controlled by pro-regime coteries.

- The legitimacy of the state is weak, but the regime is oppressive and appears internally 'strong'.⁵

Those were the main characteristics of the regimes in Tadjman's Croatia and Milošević's Serbia (FR of Yugoslavia) that were established in the 1990s during the process of fragmentation of the SFR of Yugoslavia, and in Armenia and Azerbaijan, during the collapse of the USSR.

The Israeli political system and state's policy are strikingly similar: (1) the state is constitutionally defined as an exclusive Jewish state; (2) the Palestinian minority that remained in that state is *de iure* and *de facto* discriminated; the Israeli Palestinians are second class citizens; (3) ethnic cleansing and terror against the Palestinians was from the very beginning, the official policy of the state; (4) the Zionist ideology that provided the justification for the establishment of the Israeli state, which still dominates its political life, is an ethno-nationally exclusive ideology; although in the interpretation of some Israeli political parties and religious groups it is certainly a totalitarian ideology, different interpretations of its essential common tenets co-exist, and ultimately produce a dominant Zionist 'mentality,' rather than a full-blown totalitarian nationalist ideology.

And it is possible to proceed in the same manner illustrating the remaining points. International powerbrokers, who had sponsored/internationally legitimized the ethnocratic regimes that have emerged in the space of former Yugoslavia, recognized at a certain point that these are not democratic, and that they are a source of permanent regional instability. Economic sanctions were subsequently imposed on Milošević's

5 Iveković, Ivan, *Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Yugoslavia and Transcaucasia, A Political Economy of Contemporary Ethnonational Mobilization*, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 2000, p. 178.

Serbia and his regime was ultimately bombed into submission. Tadjman's Croatia and the Slav-dominated Macedonia were subjected to political and economic pressures in order to be democratized. Finally the Milošević and Tadjman regimes were disavowed by their respective electorates, and the Macedonian regime was forced to open the decision-making process to its ethnic Albanian minority.

2

According to Julie Mostov, ethnocracy is a “particular type of rule in which power is concentrated in the hands of the leaders successful in promoting themselves as uniquely qualified to define and defend the national interests and in which the ruled are collectivities defined by common culture, history, religion, myths, and presumed descent. Constituting ethnocracy involves a combination of modern technology and institutions as well as historical claims and cultural symbols steeped in mythology over distant and not so-distant past. It requires a change of political and cultural landscape, including the demographic make-up of the community and the character of political subjects”.⁶

The change of political and cultural landscape cannot be achieved without political violence. As Mostov explained, the construction of ethnocracy involves five inter-related processes:

- The changing of boundaries, that is the redrawing or creation of territorial and symbolic boundaries, boundaries between different collectivities and boundaries between individuals.

- ‘Nation-building’ in which the nation is ‘recovered’ in its ultimate form, along with national ideology, vision, and ‘way of being’; the nation’s primordial links to the past are reconstructed and celebrated, giving blood ties a central place in national identity.

- ‘State-building’ in which political and cultural institutions are constructed to ensure the dominance of the ‘recovered’ nation, and to redefine the criteria for citizenship and the bearers of political rights.

- The replacement of one political subject with another, reducing the number of legitimate political subjects, and controlling access to the public arena; and

- The changing of landscape – destruction of cities and cultural makers, and the exclusion, expulsion, and movement of people.⁷

That is one of the best succinct descriptions of the methods used for the construction of contemporary Balkan and Caucasus’ ethnocracies. The same methods were used for the construction of Israeli ethnocracy and are still implemented in order to maintain it.

6 Mostov, Julie, “La formation de l’ethnocratie,” *Transeuropeennes* (Paris), No. 8, 1996, p 36.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

The Biblical myth⁸ of the Jews as ‘chosen people’ to whom God has granted the land of Palestine attracted the early Jewish settlers and provided the justification for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Here a part of the Jewish nation was finally ‘recovered’ when the Israeli state was proclaimed in 1948; it remains open to Jewish immigration and these immigrants are automatically granted Israeli citizenship. The construction of the Israeli ethnocracy implied the drawing of a symbolic *Lebensraum* (living space) for the Jewish people, whose territorial limits are intentionally kept fluid. Political and cultural institutions were constructed and a legal system introduced in order to ensure the dominance of the Jewish citizens over the Palestinian citizens of that state. The primordial links to the Biblical and more recent past (Holocaust) are constantly reconstructed, celebrated and manipulated in order to justify the day-to-day policy of that state. Even the physical landscape of the ‘recovered’ territory has been changed in order to reflect its ‘Jewish’ character.

3

“In ethnocratic regimes – writes Israeli scholar Oren Yiftachel – ethnicity, and not citizenship, is the main key for the distribution of power and resources. It differs from democratic regimes by the absence of equal citizenship, clear borders, or protection of minorities.” In the specific case of Israel, ethnocracy emerges from the “fusion of three main forces: colonialism, ethnonationalism, and the ‘ethnic logic’ of capital.” This is characterized “by structural stratification and segregation among ethno-classes (...) The case of Israel well illustrates the making of an ethnocratic regime. It has evolved around the central Zionist (and uni-ethnic) project of Judaizing Israel/Palestine. This strategy was implemented by land settlement, immigration and military policies, and (it has) created a stratified and segregated political geography”⁹.

Ethnocracy is a “non-democratic regime, which attempts to extend or preserve disproportional ethnic control over a contested multi-ethnic territory. Ethnocracy develops chiefly when control over territory is challenged, and when the dominant group is powerful enough to determine unilaterally the nature of the state. Ethnocracy is thus an unstable regime, with opposite forces of expansion and resistance in constant conflict (...) Ethnocratic regimes are usually supported by a cultural and ideological apparatus which legitimizes and reinforces uneven reality. This is achieved by constructing a historical narrative, which proclaims the dominant ethno-nation as the rightful owner of the territory in question. Such a narrative degrades all other contenders as historically non-entitled, or culturally unworthy, to control the land or achieve political equality”¹⁰. According to the same author, the following are the key features of ethnocracy:

8 Ibid., p. 36.

9 Yiftachel, op. cit., p. 1.

10 Ibid., p. 4-5.

- Despite several democratic features, ethnicity (and not territorial citizenship) determines the allocation of rights and privileges. A constant democratic-ethnocratic tension characterizes politics.

- State borders and political boundaries are fuzzy. There is no identifiable *demos*, mainly due to the role of ethnic diasporas inside the polity and the inferior position of ethnic minorities.

- A dominant 'charter' ethnic group appropriates the state apparatus, determines most public policies, and segregates itself from other groups.

- Political, residential, and economic segregation and stratification occur on two main levels: ethno-nations and ethno-classes.

- The constitutive logic of ethno-national segregation is diffused, enhancing a process of political ethnicization among sub-groups within each ethno-nation.¹¹

Those are obviously the characteristic traits of the socio-political system established in Israel. Yiftachel also describes the systematic policy of Judaization and de-Arabization adopted by Israel's ethnocracy:

"The Judaization program was premised on a hegemonic myth cultivated since the rise of Zionism, namely the 'land' (*Haaretz*) belongs the Jewish people, and only to the Jewish people. An exclusive form of settlers' ethnonationalism developed in order to quickly 'indigenize' immigrant Jews, and to conceal, trivialize, or marginalize the Palestinian past".¹²

Ilan Pappé, professor at the Haifa University, concluded that:

"(T)he Jewish state was built on the ruins of the indigenous people of Palestine, whose livelihood, houses, culture and land has been systematically destroyed".¹³

4

The Judaization of the territory that used to be Palestine deserves a short reminder.

To begin with, approximately 750,000 Palestinians were expelled, today we would say that they were ethnically cleansed, from the territories on which the state of Israel was established during the 1948 war. These represented 78% of the original British mandated territory. The Knesset adopted a law prohibiting the return of those who have 'departed.' Houses and land belonging to the expelled Palestinians were unilaterally confiscated by the Israeli state, without compensation. Land was then allocated/sold to Jewish settlers (through the *kibbutzim* system, 'development' towns, 'community' villages and private settlements) who massively immigrated during the late 1940s and early 1950s. These settlements were and are still

11 Ibid., p. 5.

12 Ibid., p. 7.

13 Pappé, Ilan, "Demons of the Nakbah", *Al-Ahram Weekly/Special*, 16-22 May 2002, p. 2.

financed directly by the Israeli state, or by various international Jewish/Zionist agencies, and by the generous aid coming from the United States. US taxpayers alone provide about \$5 billion a year, of this \$1.8bl in military aid, no strings attached, plus some yearly \$2 billion in federal loan guarantees (according to the Washington Report on the Middle East cited in Curtiss¹⁴).

About two thirds of the land belonging to the Palestinians who remained Israeli citizens was appropriated as well, and these citizens are currently prevented by a discriminatory legislation from purchasing, leasing or using land in around 80% of Israeli territory.¹⁵ Any Jew, including those who are not Israeli citizens, could buy the same land. It was a collective *nakhbah* (catastrophe) for the Palestinians.

Another but not so massive wave of expulsion of the Palestinians followed the war of 1967, when Israel occupied 22% of the remaining British mandated territory, plus the Syrian Golan Heights. Since then, Jewish immigrants were mainly directed toward these newly acquired territories. Settlements and entire towns were established beyond the Green Line (the border of the Israeli state prior to 1967), on usurped land, including in East Jerusalem and in the Golan Heights. By 1999 about 340,000 such immigrants were given homes in settlements that are located outside Israeli territory.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 displaced to the north practically all the Palestinian refugees who were previously settled south of the Lebanese capital. In fact, many of the refugees who fled their homes in 1948 were expelled again and again, not only from southern Lebanon, but in 1967 from the West Bank, and in 1970 from Jordan.

With the 1993 Oslo Agreement, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) *de facto* renounced 78% of territory of historical Palestine and legitimized the Israeli state within its 1948 borders. It accepted to establish its authority and later a Palestinian state entity on the territories Israel occupied in 1967, but the Agreement did not mention when the Israeli occupation is supposed to end.

The problem of the Palestinian refugees was not addressed by the Agreement. The 3.5 million Palestinians, residing in Lebanon and Syria, and many of those settled in Jordan, remained stateless refugees. On the other hand, the Agreement did not slow down the state-sponsored process of expansion of Jewish exclaves in Occupied Territories. In fact, the speed of

14 Curtiss, Richard H., "The Cost of Israel to US Taxpayers", Middle East Times, Vol. IX, No. 29, 20-26 July 2002.

15 See the researches on the status/condition of Israeli Arab citizens, most notably: Nadim Ruhana (Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict, Yale University Press, 2002), Ian Lustick (Arabs in the Jewish State: Israeli Control of a National Minority, University of Texas Press, 1980), Sam Mari (Arab Education in Israel, Syracuse University Press, 1978), and Elia Zureick (The Palestinians in Israel, Routledge, 1978).

this expansion increased and it culminated in 2000 under Labor Prime-Minister Barak. Since Sharon came to power in February 2001, 34 new settlements have been set up. Actually about half of the West Bank's land mass (and most water resources) has been appropriated by Israeli settlements and about a third of Gaza's territory has suffered the same faith. Unilaterally and in contravention to international law, the Israeli state has extended its jurisdiction over these extraterritorial Jewish settlements/territories. Their inhabitants are full Israeli citizens with all the privileges and protection that such a status entails (unlike the Israeli Palestinians who reside in Israel). They are armed by the Israeli state. Settlers' militias and vigilantes have been responsible for some of the most abominable crimes against Palestinian civilians.¹⁶ Vulnerable, because settled in the midst of three million of Arabs, on usurped land, they began to play, together with the Likud Right-wing and religious parties, a growing role on the Israeli political seesaw, tipping the balance in favor of the hardliners in the state establishment.

It is mainly for the defense of these offensive extra-territorial settlements that the Sharon administration has launched the massive assault on the Palestinian autonomous areas under the would-be jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority (Bethlehem, Hebron, Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarm and Qalqiya were targeted by Summer 2002).

5

Similarly to restrictions imposed by the Israeli state on its Palestinian citizens, the ethnic Albanians were second-class citizens in Milošević's Serbia. They were legally discriminated, had no equal access to public offices, jobs, education, housing, or land in their native province of Kosovo. However, it should be reminded that Kosovo, from the point of view of International Law, is part of Serbia; unlike the Palestinian Occupied Territories that were never internationally recognized as integral part of Israel.

The Israeli occupier actually behaves in the Occupied Territories more brutally than the treatment that the Milošević ethnocracy had imposed on the Albanians of Kosovo before the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia. This 'milder' attitude was essentially due to the fact that the Kosovo Albanians had chosen the strategy of passive resistance against Serbian rule, until the day a previously unknown Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) began low-scale guerrilla operations. This insurgency, together with the counter-insurgency operations of the regime, escalated during NATO bombing

16 I am aware of the fact that many of these Jewish immigrants were victimized in the countries of their origin. Most of those who came from Arab countries were dispossessed of all of their belongings.

campaign, sending into exile nearly half of the Albanian population of Kosovo. The official justification of NATO's policymakers was that they had intervened in order to 'stop this humanitarian catastrophe'.¹⁷

We do not see any similar reaction from the international powerbrokers against the current Israeli onslaught on Palestinian territories, although the Palestinians are certainly confronted with a humanitarian catastrophe. Similar to the Kosovo Albanians, the daily harassment and humiliation of the Palestinians triggered ultimately the Second *Intifada*. It was a grass root revolt against the brutality of Israeli occupation, which no Palestinian political group, including the Fatah of Yasser Arafat, could ignore.

Prime-Minister Ariel Sharon, who personally contributed to the eruption of the *Intifada* while he was still the leader of the opposition Likud (by 'visiting' Al-Quds in the company of 1000 Israeli soldiers in September 2000), used the opportunity to impose his 'solution' (supported by his coalition partners, most notably by his Labor defense and foreign affairs ministers, Ben Eliezer and Peres).

The terrorist attack of September 11th, against the United States provided what Sharon believed to be a favorable international framework for his crackdown on 'terrorism.' He was partly right, because his American ally shows an incredible level of 'understanding' for Israel's 'security concerns,' conveniently ignoring that the Palestinians are resisting occupation. According to this American administration – terrorism could be found only in Palestinian ranks. Ariel Sharon, with a well-documented and bloody personal record of war crimes against Arab civilians dating back as far as 1953, is not a terrorist according to this view. To the difference with Milošević, who is indicted for objective (command) responsibility only, Sharon was at his time not only the decision-maker but an executioner as well.

Well-known Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery described Sharon's current campaign against the Palestinians as follows:

"If Sharon really intended to 'destroy the infrastructure of terrorism,' he would have acted very differently. He would have given the Palestinian masses hope of achieving their national freedom in the near future. He would have fortified the position of Yasser Arafat, the only effective partner for peace. He would have strengthened the Palestinian security forces and radically improved economic conditions. But destroying the 'infrastructure of terrorism' is not Ariel Sharon's aim. His program is far more radical: to break the backbone of the Palestinian people, crush their government institutions, turn the people into human wreckage that can be dealt as he wishes. This may entail shutting them up in several enclaves or even driving them out of the country altogether".¹⁸

17 The exodus/expulsion of ethnic Albanians from their native province took massive proportions only after the launching of the bombing campaign.

18 Avnery, Uri, "The Real Aim," Znet/Mideast, 27 April 2002.

Even the usually pro-Israeli Western opinion-makers recognize today that Israel's assault has left the Palestinian Authority powerless.¹⁹ Yasser Arafat, the head of PA, is virtually prisoner in his nearly-destroyed Ramallah office. His security apparatus in the West Bank has been effectively shattered. The files, records, civil service and land registers of his administration - have been systematically destroyed. Palestinian banks have been robbed and Palestinian accounts, including those of the Palestinian Authority in Israeli banks, frozen. Palestinian post offices, hospitals, schools, mosques and churches have been bombed. 750,000 Palestinians have been subjected to endless curfews, unable to circulate in order to get food supplies, attend workplaces, schools and hospitals. Transport means belonging to the PA, as well as to individual Palestinians, have been destroyed, or taken away. Electricity and water supplies were cut. Palestinian NGOs have been hit and their offices devastated. All this in addition to previously regular collective punishments and targeted assassinations of alleged Palestinian 'terrorists.' Asking Arafat "to do more to curb Palestinian terrorism," as the American administration is relentlessly demanding, is not only cynical but is absurd.

To defend themselves, the Palestinians use the meager means that are at their disposal, including acts of individual terror against Israeli settlers and civilians. It is artisan's terror of the weak and desperate, against massive industrial state terror. This is David against Goliath. There cannot be any excuse for Palestinian suicide bombers who target innocent Israeli civilians, but it is equally impossible to morally justify the Israeli razing of thousands of Palestinian homes, entire villages and refugee camps. There is no symmetry between the two, a fact that is confirmed by the number of victims on each side. Israel is the major military power in the Middle East, armed with the most sophisticated weaponry provided by the United States. The Palestinian Hamas, Jihad and Arafat's Fatah are poorly armed and have to smuggle their equipment from abroad. Lev Grinberg, from the Ben Gurion University, described this asymmetry as follows:

"Suicide bombs killing innocent citizens must be unequivocally condemned; they are immoral acts, and their perpetrators should be sent to jail. But they cannot be compared to state terrorism carried out by the Israeli government. The former are individual acts of despair of a people that sees no future, vastly ignored by an unfair and distorted international public opinion. The latter are cold and 'rational' decisions of a state and a military apparatus of occupation, well equipped, financed and backed up by the only superpower in the world. Yet in the public debate (in the US and Israel – my remark), state terrorism and individual suicide bombs are not even considered as compatible cases of terrorism. The state terror and war crimes perpetrated by the Israeli government are legitimized as 'self-defense, while Arafat, even under siege, is demanded to arrest 'terrorists'".²⁰

19 See, for example, *The Economist*, April 27-May 3, 2002, p. 13.

20 Grinberg, Lev, "Israel's State Terrorism," Independent Media Center (Israel), 19 April 2002 (www.indymedia.org.il).

In their current crackdown against the alleged 'terrorist infrastructure,' as it was demonstrated in Jenin and more recently in Gaza, the Israeli Defense Forces do not discriminate between military and civilian targets. All male civilians are labeled 'terrorists'; killed children and women are considered 'collateral damage.'

Since 1948, Israel has breached more United Nations' resolutions than any other single member of that organization.²¹ It has ignored the recent call of the Security Council withdraw without delay its troops from the territories allocated to the Palestinian Authority. It has accepted and after second thought repudiated the projected UN fact-finding mission that was mandated to investigate the massacre in the Jenin refugee camp. How many more resolutions of the UN Israel has to breach/ignore/repudiate to be finally put on the American list of 'rogue' states?

And what are in the view of the Washington administration the legitimate means of resistance that an occupied population, such as the Palestinian, is supposed to use against foreign occupiers? What the US citizens would do if their country was to be occupied by a foreign power? Would the Washington decision makers label the resistance of their own people as 'terrorism'?

6

Instrumental violence against other ethnic groups is characteristic for such political systems as the Israeli ethnocracy. In fact, the whole system was built on, and is maintained by violence, directed permanently against the Palestinians and occasionally against Arab neighbors. The *Ashkenazim* elite needs violence in order to perpetuate its monopoly of political power, regardless of the party that actually dominates/controls the government. Whether it is Likud or Labor, only the style and the degrees of violence vary.

True, some of the Labor leaders believed at one moment that an elite settlement is possible with Arafat and his group. This led to the Oslo Agreement and to the 'peace process,' which is presently in full jeopardy. This elite settlement, in which the two partners were pursuing divergent agendas, was challenged by the hardliners in both camps as 'betrayal of the holy national cause.' Prime-Minister Rabin paid this 'betrayal' with his life in 1995. During the negotiations he had initiated, later taken over by his successors, it became evident that the Israeli 'peacemakers' were trying to persuade Arafat to accept the *Bantustanization* of the future Palestinian state entity. Only such a dependent Palestinian state could be tolerated on the side of Israel.

In the same time, they were vigorously pursuing the old program of Judaization of Arab territories and of establishing/expanding of Jewish

21 According to Professor Stephen Zunes of the San Francisco University, USA, who has reviewed some 1,500 UN Security Council resolution, Israel continuously violates/ignores 32 resolutions. Turkey is in second place, with 24 violations, and Morocco is third, with 17 resolutions it ignored. See the full list of violations in Foreign Policy in Focus (www.fpif.org), 2 October 2002.

exclaves. In their view, these exclaves are in principle non-negotiable territories, but they were willing, as it was with the Clinton-Barak proposal at Camp David in Summer 2000, to offer some territorial 'compensations' (desert land around the Gaza Strip for substantial territorial gains and prime agricultural land in the West Bank). It was said that they had offered to Arafat 91% of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 but a number of analysts claim it was propaganda masking reality. The West Bank was to be amputated of all significant water resources, of the road network that connects the existing and projected Jewish settlements, and of pre-selected 'strategic' locations. The Palestinian state entity that was supposed to emerge from such a 'peace plan' would have consisted of five separated cantons, four of which would be located in the West Bank (including a small part of the territory of East Jerusalem, but not the city itself) and one in the Gaza Strip. Security matters, water resources, air space, airwaves, import-export, border control, customs, etc., were to remain within Israel's jurisdiction. "Such a state would have resembled the Bantustans of formerly white South Africa, or perhaps American Indian reservations, a series of enclaves still dependent on the colonial power."²² It would have been a state entity with a severely curtailed sovereignty.

Arafat for his part believed that he would be gradually authorized to establish his state entity on most of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. As the negotiations on their transfer were dragging on and as the situation on the ground was changing on a daily basis (because of the uninterrupted building/expansion of Jewish settlements), he realized that he was being offered less and less territories, and that these were to be scattered and disconnected from each other, devoid of arable land, water and electricity. Still he was willing to negotiate, but not as a supplicant, not as the representative of "a defeated nation grateful for whatever scraps are thrown our way".²³ He ultimately refused the scraps he was offered. The projected amputation of East Jerusalem was probably decisive. Accepting the Clinton-Barak proposal was tantamount to a final capitulation.

As for Sharon, he is definitely not interested in peace and for the time being he is offering nothing. He saw Oslo as "the greatest catastrophe in the history of Israel." He undermined the recommendations both of the Mitchell Commission and of the Tenet Plan. He has arrogantly dismissed the Saudi Peace Plan, which got at the Beirut Summit the unanimous endorsement of the Arab governments, and the previous tacit support of Washington. He has dismissed Arafat as a negotiating partner (he has aired a nebulous idea of a Middle East Peace Conference, from which Arafat would be excluded). His agenda as prime-minister, as asserted Jewish journalist Ellen Cantarow "is permanent colonization of the territories, permanent expansion of Israel's borders, permanent retention and expansion of the settlements.

22 Faruqi, Ahmed, "Worse than no Deal," 22 April 2002 (www.tompaine.com), p. 1.

23 Ibid., p. 2.

It is clear that this project not only destroys Palestinian society, but also Israel's economy and its political and moral fabric; as well as the stability of the entire region. As a Jew old enough to remember a childhood just after World War II, I am filled with a mixture of grief, helplessness, and anger as Israel, pretending to act in my name and using the Holocaust to exonerate its crimes, proceeds with a clear effort to obliterate the economy, the social and cultural institutions, and the entire infrastructure of the Palestinian people.

Those who do not speak out against these abominations and horrors are complicit by their silence. Those who exonerate Israel for committing them are guilty by association".²⁴

I quoted extensively Cantarow and previously Yiftachel, Avnery, Pappé and Ggrinberg, because such individuals are unfortunately rare on the Israeli/Jewish side of the divide line. Unfortunately also, the majority of the Israeli public supports Sharon's militaristic colonial policy and his popularity reached an unprecedented height during the current onslaught on the Palestinians.

7

American policy that actually exonerates Israeli state terrorism and crimes -- to paraphrase Cantarow -- is definitely guilty by association. The Bush administration has up to now not only exonerated Sharon's crimes, but is leaving the impression that its own Middle Eastern political agenda is not home-made but dictated by Israel. According to the European Union External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten, "Israel has hijacked the campaign against terrorism".²⁵

The maximum President Bush and his collaborators were able to utter is that they are trying to contribute to the building of an 'independent' Palestinian state, which would peacefully coexist with Israel. Clinton was not able to say something similar (except on one unnoticed occasion), but his pro-Israeli administration has at least attempted to mediate between the Israelis and Palestinians.

This administration has given up mediation for the time being. President Bush personally and publicly gave the green light for Sharon's war campaign and called him "man of peace." Here is his clumsy but clear enough message:

"That country has the right to defend herself. And as she does so, I urge that their government, the Israeli government, make sure that there is a path to peace as she secures her homeland. But they've got to keep in mind the need that there's got to be a peaceful solution at some point."²⁶

In other words, the American president, who ignores the fact that the current crackdown is launched into territories that were illegally occupied by

24 Cantarow, Ellen, "Israel is Traveling the Road of Self-Destruction," Middle East Times 20-26 April 2002, p. 4. Originally published in Jewish Peace Now.
25 Cited in Middle East Times, 27 April-3 May 2002, p. 12.
26 Speech delivered at Crawford, Texas, 30 March, 2002.

Israel in 1967 against the Palestinians who are trying to resist this occupation, says to Sharon – go ahead, but remember that once you have achieved your aim you will have to sit at the negotiation table... but, as it became evident later, not with the actual but with a ‘reformed’ Palestinian Authority.

Former Israeli prime-minister Netanyahu, lobbying for Sharon in the United States, did not exaggerate when he asserted that “there has never been a greater friend of Israel in the White House than President George W. Bush”.²⁷ Such a pro-Israeli orientation is fully supported by the American Congress. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed motions expressing solidarity with Israel. Even four of the five members of the two houses who are of Arab descent - voted for these motions.²⁸ More recently President Bush signed the document by which the United States officially recognize Jerusalem as capital of Israel. The document makes no reference to the fact that East Jerusalem was illegally occupied in 1967.

Bush endorsed the idea of the Israeli prime-minister of a ‘peace conference’ from which Arafat would be excluded. In the same time, both Sharon and Bush insist that the Palestinian Authority and its security services ought to be ‘radically restructured’ before the conference. The head of the CIA has traveled to the Occupied Territories to ‘reorganize’ the security apparatus of the Palestinian Authority with the aim of making it ‘more transparent’ and ‘accountable.’ In other words, the Palestinian interlocutor to be present at the conference is to be tailored according to Israeli-American desires. All this because, according to Bush, Arafat has ‘betrayed the Palestinian people’ and has ‘disappointed’ the American president. Sharon in fact wants a *capo* for his Palestinian concentration camp and it is with such a puppet that he intends to sit at the negotiation table, but only after the Palestinians ‘stop violence.’

More recently, the American president went further in supporting Sharon’s agenda, saying that there cannot be peace in the Middle East as long as Arafat and his aides lead the Palestinian people. According to him, the Palestinians have to “elect a new and different leadership,” adopt a new constitution with a fully empowered parliament, local level governments and independent judiciary. Once this is done, an interim Palestinian state could be created, for which the “borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty would be provisional.” The boundaries of a permanent Palestinian state, and the future of Jerusalem and of the Palestinian refugees would be left for future negotiations.²⁹

No wonder that the Palestinian and Arab public opinion sees the United States as totally aligned with Israel. US Vice-President Dick Cheney, touring earlier the Middle East and pursuing in fact another agenda, bluntly refused to meet Arafat, but got Sharon’s enthusiastic support for an attack on Iraq.

27 Cited in Al-Ahram Weekly, 2-8 May 2002, p. 13.

28 Middle East Times, 18-24 May 2002, p. 2.

29 Borger, Julian, “Bush Says Arafat Must Go,” Guardian Unlimited, 25 June 2002.

When the brutality of the current anti-Palestinian campaign provoked a massive anti-American backlash among the Arabs, endangering US plans for an attack on Iraq, Washington dispatched to the region the secretary of state, Collin Powell. The latter is probably the most sophisticated among the 'unilateralist' officials of the current administration, but he came empty-handed and returned home empty-handed. He had nothing to propose. However, after initial hesitation, he visited Arafat twice in the latter's confinement. To do so he had to ask permission from Prime-Minister Sharon, who reluctantly acquiesced (but previously refused the same 'favor' to the delegation of the European Union and to the UN Commissioner for Refugees). The most absurd aspect of this visit was that Powell repeated the old American demand that Arafat has to 'do more' in order to 'curb Palestinian terrorism,' although he could have seen personally that the Palestinian leader was practically Sharon's prisoner and he certainly knew that the whole apparatus of the Palestinian Authority has been destroyed.

The parallel US demand, repeated by President Bush, that the Israeli Defense Forces have to 'withdrew without delay' from Palestinian territories was conveniently forgotten. Powell went back to Washington satisfied with a vague promise that the Israeli forces will withdraw 'in a week or so.'

8

A group of prominent intellectuals and writers from 25 countries, among them many with a Jewish background, have addressed on April 23rd, 2002, an open letter to Kofi Anan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, explaining the urgent necessity of creating and internationally recognizing an independent Palestinian state within the borders that existed before June 4, 1967, including East Jerusalem. They rightfully argue that "only a sovereign State can be held responsible for the actions of its citizens, within and across its borders. Only a sovereign Palestinian State, therefore, can guarantee the security of the Israeli people, which is itself their absolute right.

Only such a State can develop democratic institutions, which would allow itself and its citizens to take a new historic path, and overcome the grievances and traumas of the past.

Only such a sovereign state can legitimately enter into negotiations with its neighbors – Israel first of all – to settle the lasting problems of population, natural resources, mutual safety, compensations, administration of the Holy Places."³⁰

Laudable intentions. The letter, in fact, repeats in its own words what was already stipulated in the Saudi Peace Plan, endorsed by the last Arab League summit. And the latter repeated the terms enunciated in the draft of a UN Security Council Resolution of January 1976, which called for a political

30 The full text of the letter was published in Al-Ahram Weekly, 2-8 May 2002, p. 21.

settlement on the internationally-recognized borders “with appropriate arrangements... to guarantee... the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of all states in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders.” This was vetoed by the United States (relevantly, the United States blocked as recently as December 2001 a Security Council Resolution calling for the implementation of the Mitchell Plan and dispatch of international monitors to oversee reduction of violence).

Indeed, the Israeli-Palestinian imbroglio cannot be solved without the creation of a Palestinian state, but not by the kind of the Bantustan-like cluster of homelands that was envisioned by the Clinton-Barak proposal of Summer 2000, and even less what Sharon might have in mind. It is not clear what type of state is in the mind of the Bush administration, but most likely it is no more ‘generous’ to the Palestinians than was the Clinton-Barak project; most probably much less, because Bush tries to accommodate Sharon.

The authentic maps of the territorial demarcation between the Palestinians territories and Israel that were discussed at Camp David in Summer 2000 are kept secret. We have instead old maps that were suggested previously and new would-be maps suggested/deciphered by various well-informed academics and journalists. All of them resemble to leopard skins, but the older ones have bigger patches representing the territories to be ceded to the Palestinian Authority. The Allon Plan, for example, was supposed to allocate to the Palestinians three such disconnected territories. As time was progressing, the Palestinian dots grew smaller and their number multiplied. The Palestinians of the West Bank live today in over 200 scattered municipalities that are separated by Israeli military bases and checkpoints, ‘strategic’ roads controlled by the Israelis and/or surrounded with Israeli settlements. The Clinton-Barak proposal was said to be ‘generous,’ because it offered to create in the West Bank four disconnected and substantially reduced Palestinian homelands nicely called ‘cantons’ (as in Dayton’s Bosnia and Herzegovina!). The Gaza Strip, amputated of major Jewish settlement, but aggrandized by desert land from the Negev, was to be the fifth homeland. This ‘compensation’ was particularly tricky, because by accepting the exchange of territories that are actually located within Israel’s borders for West Bank Palestinian territories, Arafat would have practically renounced the Oslo Agreement by the virtue of which the Green Line was supposed to be the border between the two states. He would have renounced to Eastern Jerusalem (the old city) the Palestinians have declared as their capital.

Noam Chomsky is right when he asserts that this proposed patchwork “does not rise to the level of South Africa 40 years ago when the Apartheid regime actually implemented the ‘vision’ of Black-run states that were at least as viable as the neocolonial dependency that the US and Israel have been planning for the Occupied Territories”.³¹

31 Chomsky, Noam, “US-Israel-Palestine,” 11 April 2002 (www.zmag.org), p. 3.

It is said that Arafat hesitated and was about to sign the deal, but ultimately changed his mind. He probably realized that his signature would have legalized the Israeli territorial expansion into what remained of historical Palestine. After the Oslo 'compromise,' by which he legalized the territories Israel had acquired before 1967 -- that would have been too much. He tried to justify the Oslo compromise with *Realpolitik* and he succeeded to convince most his followers, but few of those outside Fatah's ranks, and none of the Palestinian refugees who are prevented to return home. He could not have used the same justification once again.

If the Israeli ethnocrats were less greedy and farther sighting, and if they have had offered all the territories they had conquered in 1967, they could have had their Palestinian Bantustan. Arafat would have signed the transfer without hesitation and he would have got a nominally independent, but de facto client state, an economically non-viable state entity and a permanent reserve of cheap manpower for the Israelis. It would have been a subservient ethnic homeland, or dependent ethnocracy, vegetating in the shadow of Israel. The other alternative would have been a client state depending on international charity.

Meanwhile the tandem Sharon-Ben Eliezer is trying to bomb the Palestinians into submission, but time is not working in their favor, because the Palestinian masses are more and more radicalized. If the Israeli ethnocrats ever negotiate with Arafat again, which is for the time being doubtful, they would offer him even less than was on the table in Summer 2000. That is a recipe that can lead to a collective catastrophe that would not involve the Israelis and Palestinians only, but the whole region. Is anybody in the American administration aware of it?

The Likud Central Committee delivered a fresh blow to prospects for easing the actual tensions in the Middle East by voting a resolution "never to accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza".³² Netanyahu, Sharon's rival for the leadership of the party, tabled the resolution and a big majority adopted it. Voices demanding the expulsion of all the Israeli citizens of Palestinian origin to neighboring Arab countries or to Palestinian-held territories also became louder. Pressed by the hard-liners of his own party, whose leader he was until recently, Sharon paradoxically appears as a 'moderate.'

On the brighter side of the political spectrum, some 60,000-100,000 Israelis have taken to the streets of Tel-Aviv to demand the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli army and settlers from Palestinian territories. The protests, organized by the Peace Now movement, also called on the Israeli Government to pursue the Saudi peace plan, which specifies a full withdrawal in return for full peace with Arab countries.³³ This, together with the protests of hundred of Israeli reservists, who refused to serve in the Occupied Territories, because they do not want to support an immoral war,

32 BBC News, 13 May 2002.

33 BBC News, 12 May 2002.

points to possible new and more positive developments within the Israeli civil society. Although less articulated, such a differentiation is gradually reaching the ranks of the Jewish Diaspora.

9

Is there a solution? Theoretically yes, but it belongs, for the time being, to the domain of wishful thinking. This solution would necessitate the dismantling of the Israeli ethnocracy and the creation of a bi-national common democratic and secular state in which all its citizens, Jews and Palestinians, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender and political creed, would be equal. The idea of a bi-national state, advocated by few free-lance intellectuals, such as Edward Said³⁴ (Said 1999), is of course utopian. The overwhelming majority of the Jews, both from Israel and the Diaspora, would oppose such a solution. It would be equally opposed by the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories and those who are living as refugees in neighboring countries. Not a single Arab government espoused the bi-national formula. But if a lasting solution of the Middle Eastern imbroglio is to be found one day - it could not be by-passed.

A mid-term scenario would imply an elite settlement, provided that the Israeli ethnocrats dig up a Palestinian *Quisling*, or a group of them, with whom they would negotiate a Bantustan-like arrangement. This could temporarily ease the current tensions but could not secure lasting peace. A *Quisling* team at the helm of the Palestinian Authority would be certainly met with fierce resistance, opening the Palestinian political arena to its most intransigent elements (Hamas and Jihad movements). On the other side, the Israeli ethnocracy, which was built on the expulsion/oppression/discrimination of the Palestinians, cannot survive without violence, and it will use violence and coercion in order to control any emerging Palestinian state entity. As long as it exists, it will remain a source of regional instability.

To make things worse, pressures for the restructuring of the Palestinian Authority (PA) are not coming only from the Israeli-American side, but also from influential Arab quarters and from within Palestinian ranks. Arafat's autocratic methods of rule, mismanagement and the endemic corruption of his administration have undermined his authority both as head of the PA and chairman of the PLO. Although his recent personal ordeal has enhanced his faltering popularity with the Palestinian masses, his authority is contested even by some of his allies. The Hamas and other Palestinian extremist groups never recognized him as legitimate Palestinian leader. They would like to remove him from his actual position. Although their motivations are very different, they are Sharon's objective allies in this specific case.

It seems that the struggle for Arafat's succession has already started. Sensing the danger for his personal position, the Head of the PA, has promised reform, transparency and elections. But without strong Palestinian

34 Said, Edward, "The One State Solution," The New York Time Magazine, 10 January, 1999.

backing his capacity of resisting external pressures has been considerably reduced.

The Bush administration, as said previously, would give its support to the above mid-term scenario but, guided by typical American pragmatism, it is actually engaged in an open-ended 'conflict management' exercise. Its goal is to gradually reduce the actual Israeli-Palestinian confrontation to a 'low intensity conflict' that would allow the renewal of the 'peace process,' but definitely with a new team of Palestinian interlocutors. Arafat, who has proved malleable, is still kept as a kind reserve if the above scenario proves unworkable. By extracting from Sharon certain 'concessions,' such as Arafat's temporary liberation or the postponement of the Israeli offensive on this or that town, Washington hopes to pacify both the Palestinians and their crucial Arab supporters. Unfortunately, this is not comprehensive strategy; it is tactics only.

Original in English

Prof. Ivan IVEKOVIĆ

IZRAEL I BANTUSTANIZACIJA PALESTINE

REZIME

Suprotno ponavljanim tvrdnjama da je Izrael 'demokratska država', autor dokazuje da je Izrael zapravo etnokratska tvorevina, u mnogočemu slična etnokracijama koje su oblikovane devedesetih godina na prostorima bivše Jugoslavije i južnog Kavkaza. Na unutrašnjem planu, ta etnokracija diskriminira i ugnjetava vlastite državljane arapskog porijekla. Etnicitet, a ne teritorijalno državljanstvo, određuje dodjeljivanje prava i privilegija. Izraelska je država sagradjena na ruševinama palestinskog društva. Od svog osnutka uspostavila je sustav pravne, političke, rezidencijalne i ekonomske segregacije svojih palestinskih državljana.

Na vanjskom planu, Izrael je okupaciona sila palestinskih teritorija osvojenih 1967, gdje se sukobljava sa otporom svojoj ilegalnoj vladavini. Od tada su Zapadna obala i Jeruzalem, kao i oblast Gaze, podvrgnuti sustavnoj jevrejskoj kolonizaciji i judaizaciji, što dokazuje stalno rastući broj ilegalnih izraelskih eksklava. Ti suvremeni kolonizatori uživaju sve privilegije izraelskog državljanstva, iako su njihova naselja locirana na okupiranom teritorijama. Tu činjenicu priznaje i mali ali reprezentativan broj nezavisnih izraelskih znanstvenika i mirovnih aktivista.

Kolonizacija i judaizacija su naišli na palestinski otpor, što je pokrenulo sadašnju spiralu političkog nasilja. Izraelskom 'industrijskom' državnom teroru se suprostavlja 'zanatlijski' teror frustriranih palestinskih grupa i pojedinaca, kojega vođa Palestinske samouprave Jaser Arafat nije u stanju kontrolirati. Arafat je bio izložen najgrubljem pristisku da potpiše kapitulantski mirovni ugovor, kojemu je namjera bila pretvoriti palestinski državni entitet u konglomerat autonomnih zona sličnih nekadašnjim južnoafričkim bantustanima, što je on na kraju odbio. Zbog toga je 'otpisan' i sada praktično sveden na status političkog zarobljenika. Sadašnjoj izraelskoj vladi, na čijem je čelu Areil Sharon, namjera je da Arafata i njegovu ekipu zamjeni s poslušnijim palestinskim rukovodstvom koje će prihvatiti izraelski diktat. Možda i nije iznenađenje da američka administracija predsjednika Buša podržava takvu politiku, zaključuje autor.