CONFERENCE REPORT

"QUO VADIS ISRAEL?" THE SECOND IPS–MANSOUR ARMALY MESA CONFERENCE PANEL, BOSTON, 24 NOVEMBER 2009

This November, the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS) was privileged to host the second IPS–Mansour Armaly panel on Palestine at the annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) held in Boston. Dr. Armaly (1927–2005) was a world renowned pioneer in the treatment of glaucoma; according to the Archives of Ophthalmology, he "substantially changed the way glaucoma is conceptualized, evaluated and treated," with his contributions having become "such an integral part of medical practice that their revolutionary nature may no longer be apparent." Though the recipient of the medical field's highest honors, he never forgot his roots in Shafa 'Amr, Palestine. In the last few years of his life, he was the chairman of the Friends of the Institute for Palestine Studies. Dr. Armaly's family decided to honor his commitment to Palestine through these panels.

This year's panel, planned in the wake of Israel's December 2008–January 2009 Operation Cast Lead against the Gaza Strip, elected to look at Israel from various perspectives at what appears to be a pivotal moment in its history. More specifically, the panel proposed to explore various aspects of the Israeli society and polity, and their intersection with recent developments, in order to shed light on future directions. Though the topics addressed by the four panelists were diverse—Israeli political and legal discourse, its national security doctrine, the Palestinian factor in Israeli decision making, and the Jewish question at the current juncture—all revealed to a greater or lesser extent the existence of a deep crisis simmering below the surface of Israeli society.

The panel was chaired by Nadim Rouhana, professor of international negotiation and conflict studies at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. The following are summaries of the four presentations.

A. "THE PERSISTENCE OF THE ETHNOS: A READING OF ISRAELI POLITICAL-LEGAL DISCOURSE," RAEF ZREIK, VISITING PROFESSOR OF LAW, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL.

Raef Zreik's presentation identified and explored a fundamental contradiction built into Israel's very creation, and whose nonresolution is at the heart of the country's current situation. Manifestations of this contradiction include the demographic question, recent legal measures undermining the status of the Palestinian citizens, the unilateral disengagement from the peace process, the response to the second intifada, construction of the separation wall, the Lebanon and Gaza wars, and so on.

The contradiction in question is the one between the *ethnos* and the *demos*, or between the exclusively *national* (ethnic) project of the Jewish state as envisaged by Zionism and the *civic* logic of the state as it was actualized.

Israel was created in 1948 by Jewish bodies (the Jewish Agency, the Zionist Organization) for the Jewish people, most of whom lived outside the boundaries of the state. But for the state to be operative, the Jewish provisional national council (representing the Jewish people the world over and responsible solely to them) had to transfer its powers to the newly created state organs (e.g., the Knesset), which were responsible to all the citizens of the state, including Palestinians. The move from provisional national body to state organs in principle should represent the transition from a pure national logic to a civic logic, from the expansionist dynamic of the Zionist revolution (the Zionist settler project for the Land of Israel) to the normative, bounded constraints of a state. But although the provisional national council had *voluntarily* transferred its powers to the constituted bodies it had *itself* created, in fact it never fully accepted the move from the ethnos to the demos. This has created a tension between Zionism's original concept of the state on the one hand and the "compromised" state that was established on the other—in other words, between the Jewish ethnos "we" and its creation, the civic demos. (Another way of seeing the tension, Zreik suggested, is in reverse Oedipal terms, with the father wanting to kill the child, or the movement the state.) This fundamental contradiction has been an underlying current—sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, but always present—in the Israeli polity.

The 1967 war, paradoxically, gave a certain meaning to Israeli citizenship and boundedness. With UN Security Council Resolution 242, the provisional 1949 armistice lines became internationally recognized political borders; in a sense, Israel was normalized/legitimized within those borders through displacement of the site of contestation to the occupied territories. At the same time, by making citizenship the main differential between Israel and the territories, the dialogue about "citizenship" became possible. Another landmark was the 1977 election that ended a half century of Labor party domination of the state: the smooth transition to the Likud showed that the state was an autonomous entity and distinct from Labor. Other developments included the signing of the Oslo accords, which seemed to portend Israel's agreement to define permanent borders (limiting the Zionist permanent revolution/expansionist ethos).

At the deeper level, however, the power structure remained unchanged, with the ethnos retaining full control of the most crucial areas: immigration and citizenship, land policy and settlement, capital flow, security and the army, the legal system, and public culture.

The ethnos returned full force after October 2000, when at the outbreak of the new intifada Israel's Palestinian minority massively demonstrated in support of their fellow Palestinians. Israel returned to a zero-sum game, as manifested in the rise and

legitimization of demographic discourse, new discriminatory laws, a loosening of restraints on domestic surveillance targeting Arab citizens, Hebrew-only road signs, the rightist victory in the 2009 elections, and so on. The result is a state of simmering crisis that shows no sign of abating.

B. "Perceptions of Jewish National Security in Israel," Amal Jamal, Professor of Political Science, Tel Aviv University.

Amal Jamal's presentation began with a discussion of Israeli reactions to the wars in Lebanon and Gaza in 2006 and 2008–09. Though most Israelis whole-heartedly supported the interventions, critical assessments emanated from the military establishment and others, who saw the results as indicative of weaknesses in the national security and military doctrine as well as a crisis of the deterrence theory. The critiques of the war in turn can be divided into two streams: the great majority (and the dominant view of the military and political establishment) aimed at identifying the problems so as to fix them and improve the war machine's effectiveness, and a small minority worried more broadly about the dangers of the growing trend in Israeli society and leadership to view national security solely in military terms.

Israel's national security doctrine is based mainly on a combination of military and diplomatic components: (1) unquestioned military superiority over any combination of foes based on deterrence, and (2) exploitation of regional divisions and fragmentation to form useful regional alliances, covert or otherwise. Both areas have been undermined since 2006, the first by changes in warfare conditions (including, inter alia, the prominence of nonstate actors such as Hizballah and Hamas, relatively immune to the considerations guiding state actors), and the second by breakdowns in "alliances" (e.g., Morocco, Qatar, Turkey) under the pressure of their public opinions. Given that Israel's national security has always been perceived in ethno-national rather than civic terms, Israeli national security also has a strong demographic component, leading to a growing preoccupation with the "internal threat" of the Palestinian citizens.

These developments in recent years have been feeding and exacerbating Israel's "ghetto mentality," which translates into the "bunker mentality." While the Israeli majority sees the "bunker" as inevitable, imposed on Israel by external forces, Jamal sees it as the fruit of long-standing Israeli choices and processes, as well as of the state's selective manipulation of Jewish history.

The choice that continues to face Israel is the following: (1) to open up and achieve durable peace agreements with its neighbors through serious territorial compromise in exchange for normalizing Israel's presence in the Middle East, or (2) to maintain the status quo of no peace, which requires closing Israel and building up physical and psychological fences—that is, a bunker state living in a constant physical and psychological state of emergency.

The demographic factor (which clearly played a role in Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza) would appear to favor the first choice, which involves divestment of the occupied territories. But for most Israeli governments, the cost of evacuating settlements in the West Bank is seen as greater than the risks of the no-peace status quo. The result is the perpetuation of the stalemate and a vicious circle: the more frightened the Israelis are by the inconclusive war in Gaza, the growing demographic threat, the increasingly negative public opinion in Western states (if not governments), increased isolation internationally and in the UN, and worries about the ultimate direction of the Obama administration, the more extreme their positions. While there are voices of

restraint within Israel, all these factors heighten the dominant chauvinist ethno-national discourse and increase the risk of further military action.

C. "THE PALESTINIAN FACTOR IN ISRAELI DECISION MAKING," CAMILLE MANSOUR, FORMER PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, THE SORBONNE; FOUNDER OF BIRZEIT LAW INSTITUTE.

Camille Mansour began by discussing the factors determining Israel's policy and behavior toward the Palestinians, emphasizing in particular ideology (i.e., Zionism) and the political role of the army. Both of these were greatly strengthened by the 1967 victory (the Zionist ideology by the spectacular growth of religious Zionism, the army by enhanced prestige), which also changed the balance of power and the U.S./ European role.

From these factors flowed the components of Israel's post-1967 policies, mainly (1) territorial/security control at the macro and micro levels, (2) incremental territorial appropriation/settlements, and (3) population control through a policy of containment via micromanagement of daily life. Although the capture of the West Bank and Gaza Strip exacerbated outbidding between Israel's political parties, it is noteworthy that they did not diverge on the macro dimensions but rather on the micro aspects such as the pace and location of settlements.

After discussing these components, Mansour showed how they evolved under the impact of developments on the ground. These include most notably: (1) the first inti- fada, which demonstrated the limits of the containment policy and ultimately led to Oslo (withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from urban centers, with control main- tained via direct control of the road network and movement of people); (2) the Rabin assassination, which triggered a steady/consistent shift to the right by all parties, which in turn spawned determined efforts to stop any dynamic that might lead to Palestinian independence (steadily escalating demands on the Palestinians; limiting the Palestinian territoriality recognized by Oslo); and (3) the second intifada and its rapid militariza- tion, showing Palestinian nonacquiescence in the scaled-back state concept, and the inevitable response to which was the separation wall.

At the same time, and from another perspective, Mansour pointed out that despite the strangulation of Palestinian population centers and further land grab that accom- panied the separation wall, its construction also indicates an unintended change in the ideology dominant in 1967, when the West Bank for Israelis was a "here" to be settled and redeemed, whereas today the West Bank (or its remnants) is a "there," the territory of another people. The redeployment from Gaza can be seen in the same light.

More generally, modifications in the dominant ideology since 1967 under the impact of changed realities include the following: Israel has admitted the presence of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as a fact; it has accepted Palestinian territorial control over Gaza (even while maintaining the siege) and some kind of Palestinian territorial control over fractionalized cantons in the West Bank; and it has no desire to send back the army to these territorial islands or have the army micromanage the Palestinian population. On the other hand, macro territorial and security control in any area under Palestinian jurisdiction in the West Bank, control of security, continuing settlement, and denial of Palestinian rights (e.g., self-determination) remain key to the reigning ideology, perhaps even more than in the 1990s.

The changes that have occurred were forced by changing realities, and nothing at present offers hope for further change: there is no real pressure from the outside world,

the United States remains permissive, the military maintains control of decision making, and military action is still seen as the solution to political problems. The absence of external factors to reverse the dynamics points to a continuation and reproduction of Israeli domination over Palestine and the Palestinians, with Palestinian challenges to that domination varying in keeping with their possibilities.

D. "THE JEWISH QUESTION IN CRISIS," AMNON RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY.

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's paper (which was read) began by minimizing the differences between the Israeli Right and Left. While acknowledging the threat to the entire region posed by the current right-wing coalition, his critique focuses more on the "Left," which he holds responsible for the perpetual crisis that began in 2000, when the Barak government's adventurist policy brought about the final collapse of the peace process and whose blaming of the Palestinians generated the hatred and incitement against them that led to the al-Aqsa intifada. The commonly held distinction between the peace camp and the "national" (i.e., rightist) camp is not only misleading but also dangerous, in that it blinds us to the actual meaning of peace as envisaged by its architects, and consequently prevents us from thinking of other options.

The Israeli concept of peace as embodied in Oslo did not mean mutual recognition or equal coexistence; it was based not on a recognition of Palestinian national rights but on their denial (e.g., demanding the renunciation of the Palestinian right of return while refusing to recognize responsibility for their enduring exile). In essence, this peace is a vision of separation explicitly intended to protect Jewish demographic superiority so as to maintain the self-perception of Israel as a democratic state.

According to Raz, Israeli society is in a state of deep crisis and profound self-doubt. Its very dynamism and arrogance mask malaise and anxiety, indeed are attempts to suppress the anxieties stemming from the perceived encirclement by existential threats and the unending prospect of more walls and weaponry. These perceptions justify the continual use of violence against civilians, bringing not stability but more anxieties leading to more violence.

One of the arguments raised by the Israeli Left in favor of the peace process was the specter of binationalism, deeply feared by the Israeli Jewish public to a large extent because of the equality embedded in the very term, and because denial of the refugee issue is essential for Israel's self-perception as a national state. But while recognizing that binationalism as a political solution is at present as illusory as a viable and genuine two-state solution, Raz suggested that binationalism as a *framework of discussion* served as a lens through which to examine/deconstruct Israel's reality, a concept crucial for any process of decolonization.

The obvious starting point for any binationalist thinking is recognition of Palestinian national rights (in all its constituent parts—Israel, the occupied territories, the diaspora refugees), since it is Palestinian rights that are being violated. But recognition of Palestinian rights is also a precondition for recognizing the national rights of the Jews. Paradoxically, though massively violated, Palestinian rights are well known, delineated in countless resolutions and international law. Jewish rights in Palestine, on the other hand, have not been spelled out and need to be examined. It is impossible to ignore the existence of an Israeli-Jewish community in Israel, and its boundaries need to be discussed. It is obvious that the rights Jews currently enjoy (total) need to be limited, but in limiting them they are recognized. Those

who support Palestinian demands should also ask about the collective rights of the Jews in Palestine.

In order to reach even such a framework of discussion, a real transformation of Jewish consciousness is required. At present, it would seem that only a serious disaster will force Israelis to consider such an approach. Yet this is the only option, and without it we will continue to face the results of the policy of separation and ghettoization, a future of nationalistic militarism or even apocalyptic messianism.