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Editorial

Critical marxist evaluation of women's situation in the Middle East is almost non-existent. Women have been relegated, much as they are everywhere else, to an oblivion somewhere between the private realm of the home and the bottom end of the labour market, while in a growing profusion of material which purports to subject the region to political, historical, economic and social scrutiny, the question of women has been all but ignored by bourgeois and revolutionary writers alike.

In attempting to reflect, express and participate in the struggles for national and social liberation, revolutionary socialists often forget that the struggles of the Palestinian people, of the anti-zionist forces inside Israel, and of the labouring classes in all the countries of the Middle East are not merely the struggles of men who happen to have mothers, sisters, wives and daughters in tow.

In this issue of *Khamsin* we make an attempt to remedy these deficiencies. The rudimentary character of our attempt implies not a belated afterthought but rather the opening of a discussion of the position of half the popular masses in the region. On the other hand, we do not wish to write a token feminist history of women in the Middle East. Articles about Israeli women or about Palestinian women in Israel or Arab countries tell as much about the nature of zionism and of Arab reaction as they do about women themselves.

In addition to the material on women in the Middle East, we have included in this issue three articles dealing with topics which are also of central importance to revolutionary socialist thinking on the Middle East.

Zionist propaganda has erected a number of scarecrows to deter attack by the left. One of the most effective of these is the bogus identification of anti-zionism with anti-semitism. The article on **Zionism and its scarecrows** will, we hope, arm the left in the struggle against zionist ideology and propaganda. This article was originally published in German in *Probleme des Klassenkampfes* (West Berlin, October 1975). The need for an English translation became especially evident recently during the debates on zionism in the British students' movement. In the present translation we have omitted a passage dealing with the current zionist propaganda concerning Soviet Jews, since this topic is covered in greater detail in an article by one of the two authors in *Critique 9*.

The article on **National formation in the Arab region** is intended as

a contribution to the task of laying down the historical and theoretical foundations upon which a marxist evaluation of Arab nationalism should be based. The first step must be a demystified account of the historical origin of the Arab national formation. This article launches the discussion, which will be resumed in one of our forthcoming issues whose central theme will be *nationalism in the Middle East*.

Events in the Middle East move so fast that by the time the present issue of *Khamsin* is published, much in the article on **Israel and the new order in the Middle East** will have almost certainly been overtaken by fresh developments. However, we decided to include this article in the belief that if the analysis contained in it is correct, it may help to throw some light not only on previous events, but also on new developments which will have taken place between the time of writing (May 1978) and the time of publication.

Khamsin 7

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What is Khamsin?

A general meeting of the Khamsin collective was held on 3–4 June 1978. The following text was adopted as expressing the political consensus of the collective and the basis for its work.

Khamsin is a journal published by revolutionary socialists of the Middle East. It is also for them, and for socialists in other countries who are interested in that part of the world.

Khamsin is a committed journal. It aims not merely to reflect and express, but also to be part of the struggles for social liberation and against nationalist and religious mystifications.

All these struggles:

That of the Arab popular masses against imperialism, zionism and the Arab ruling classes;

That of the Palestinian people, the most direct victims of zionism, against their national and social oppression;

That of the anti-zionist forces inside Israel;

That of the labouring classes in all the countries of the Middle East against 'their own' exploiters, and against oppressive class regimes throughout the region;

That of women throughout the region against their oppression and exploitation as women;

All these are inseparable aspects of one struggle, whose goals can be achieved only through the revolutionary overthrow of imperialist domination, the zionist power-structure and all the existing regimes in the region, and the establishment of a united socialist Arab world, within which the non-Arab nationalities will also enjoy, by right and in fact, full social equality, individual liberty and national freedom.

The members of the *Khamsin* collective, from various countries of the region and belonging to different political tendencies, are united round this aim. However, *Khamsin* is not a party organ but a forum in which the aims themselves, as well as the strategy for achieving them, can be debated and discussed among the various shades of revolutionary left opinion.

The general meeting elected the following editorial board:

Avishai Ehrlich, Dina Hecht, Mohammad Ja'far, Leila Kadi, Eli Lobel, Moshe Machover, Khalil To'ama.

Religion in the Middle East

is the topic of the central theme of *Khamsin* 8. Contributions on the following topics would be especially welcome:

– Religious confessionalism as a divisive element in different countries in the area. (General and case studies).

– The role of Islam in the legitimation of the existing regimes in the area.

– Marxism and Islam: philosophical critique; the attitude of the Communist Parties to Islam; the Arab left intelligentsia and Islam.

– Book reviews on the above and related topics.

Typed manuscripts should reach the editors by the end of January 1979.

Nigel Disney

The members of the *Khamsin* collective announce with deeply-felt grief the sudden death of Nigel Disney, a dedicated member of our collective. Nigel, born in Nottingham, died at the age of 26 on the 24 June 1978 in a London hospital.

Nigel became involved in third world struggles during his studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies. He was a member of several groups concerned with Asian politics, Indo-China, Korea and Hong Kong. During his stay in the United States, he became involved in Middle Eastern issues and the Palestinian struggle. Between 1975 and 1977 he was a staff writer and editor at the Middle East Research and Information Project in Washington DC. Upon his return to Britain last year, he worked for *Events*, an English-language Middle Eastern magazine, and devoted most of his spare time to the preparation of the publication of *Khamsin* in English. Nigel's capacity for work was far greater than his frail physical appearance revealed.

His death leaves us all bereaved. We have lost a dear comrade and a tireless and resolute worker for our cause. His memory is with us.

Women and politics in Lebanon

Yolla Polity Sharara

Mothers build homes and sons build countries

The mother who rocks her newborn son with her right hand does not shake the world with her left hand

(Arab sayings)

I think I experienced my relationship with politics as the transgression of a taboo. Of course, in the 1960s we were no longer living in the era of the veil. Lebanese society, despite its reputation for Westernisation and modernism, was nonetheless still carefully partitioned: boys' schools and girls' schools, girls' games and boys' games, motherhood and homemaking for women, professional work for men . . . This division of roles and behaviour, seldom transgressed in practice, was instilled very early on within the family. Boys were openly preferred to girls, and girls were intensively prepared for their role as wives and mothers. Housekeeping skills and docility were the qualities most appreciated in a young girl ready for marriage. Women and politics were two opposite poles, or two spheres which never intersected. Politics was 'public', 'outside activity', 'history'. A woman was everything that was most private, most eternal and 'ahistoric'; the 'within', the 'at-home' that everyone, boy or girl, found in the home, the mother.

Politics was the preserve of men. We had obtained equal civic and political rights in 1953, we could vote and we could be elected. But it was good form not to make too much use of these rights. We would go and vote with our fathers or husbands, and we would vote the same way they did. Was it worth stirring up trouble in the family to vote for or against people we did not know from Adam or Eve, men foreign to our family? Was it worth the ridicule to stand as a candidate, as two women had done just after we had obtained the right to vote? Political questions were settled for us at the level of what is 'done' and what is 'not done', of what was or was not suitable for a woman. Although legally citizens, we continued to be ruled by our families and we had few, if any official relations with the state.

To engage in politics, or to 'enter politics' as we put it, was not the done thing for young women. We entered despite the opposition of our frightened parents. We joined as though we were joining a religion, eager to learn, to catch up on secular backwardness, serious and hardworking, obeying all the bizarre rules which governed

meetings and demonstrations. The world of politics had the taste of forbidden fruit. We were proud to have been admitted, proud to meet celebrated leaders in the corridors, and especially proud finally to be taken seriously. Men, our comrades, listened carefully and with respect, and we were at ease discussing economic, historic or international problems with them. We were flying high, far from the kitchens of our mothers, and far from the embroidery work destined for our trousseaus.

It is necessary to have lived in these closed societies, where roles are rigidly defined from infancy, to understand our euphoria and also our blindness. We thought we had escaped the usual fate of women. We had slipped through a breach into the world of men. We tried to acclimatise ourselves to that world, always thinking our setbacks were due to our own ignorance. We were not yet ready to bring men and their values into question, and still less to question 'politics'.

Our elders who, like us, could not bear their situation, did not have the same opportunities as we did. In their time, political parties did not admit women, and no woman dared to meet men publicly who were not known to her family. So they founded women's charitable and social associations. For a long time they denied that they were involved in politics. When they took a position on a political or national problem, they took great care to show why, as mothers, they could not accept this and why, as wives, they demanded that. They led a campaign for political rights, and from 1953, they tried vainly to bring women into political life.

These women's organisations saw the problem as being solely at the level of national power. Politics was the world of deputies and ministers. Women were excluded, and that was unfair. Several unsuccessful attempts to get themselves elected to the legislature were occasions for diatribes by these organisations against backward voters, and against women who did not understand their own interests, were traitors to their own sex and lacked confidence in the ability of women to represent them. There were diatribes also, and especially, against the power of money, electoral fraud and the manoeuvres of politicians whose victims were women candidates. Pure and innocent women mounting an assault on a corrupt electoral system were defeated by the forces of Evil (Men) and corruption. [There is an untranslatable pun in the last sentence - *Mal - evil, Male - Men*]. All of which said to the most indulgent 'they can't make the grade' and to others 'It's a good thing; they shouldn't mix in matters which don't concern them.'

Although disgusted by these defeats, the women did not give up their project. During a meeting before the last legislative elections one woman speaker made an apologia for the Syrian and Egyptian regimes, which had allowed women into the body of deputies. Conceding that these women had not been elected but designated on

the lists of single parties or simply nominated by the executive, this speaker, warmly applauded by the audience, demanded that in Lebanon as well, a certain number of seats be reserved *ex officio* for women nominated by the *Conseil General des Femmes* and the president of the republic. This support for a system of nomination was astonishing on the part of women who otherwise swore by democracy in Lebanon, and criticised the absence of freedoms in neighbouring Arab countries. But the advantages they saw in this system led them to gloss over everything which accompanied it.

Thus, they said 'the woman would remain dignified, would not be obliged to have her photo on the walls of the town, nor be confronted with the base material considerations of an election campaign. She would not lose her femininity, nor run the risk of a humiliating defeat and would gain power.' Alas, all this required an amendment of the constitution and the electoral law, a difficult process in Lebanon.

Perhaps the dream of gaining power could be achieved more easily and more quickly at the level of ministerial posts? Every time there was a change of cabinet (which was frequent during these troubled years) we saw these same women's organisations rushing to the newly-nominated head of the government during his consultations: 'women are underrepresented, you must give us a portfolio . . .' The same thing happened every time: the prime minister received them courteously while they were served titbits to eat and the press, in ironic mood, noted the visit; meanwhile everyone waited for the women to finish their activities so that serious matters could be dealt with.

In fact it was pathetic. These women took their sex literally as the reason for their exclusion from power, and presented themselves as women, without any consideration of political tendencies, religions, parties, programmes, international or Arab affiliations – the essence of the political game. It was also pathetic because it took the authorities, who presented themselves as democratic, at their word: representative of all citizens, without distinction of sex, class or religion, a just and egalitarian power. It was as though the right to something was sufficient to obtain it; as though the exclusion of women resulted from an oversight, which would be rectified on the spot once it was realised.

The women who joined political parties were less naive. They regarded politics as something requiring time and work. They had transferred their ambitions for power to the party. The majority thought that the conditions of women would change if they joined political parties. They expected that political and social transformations would make reforms possible. According to which party they belonged to, they struggled for Arab unity, the Lebanese nation, or socialism, but very little for the cause of women. It was very important for them to be recognised as full members of the party. They disliked being assigned to the women's section and wanted to prove that they were as capable as men at dealing with any problem. Thus

they avoided talking about women, a minor subject, in order not to be put down. Within the many parties which, while admitting women, kept them in separate groups, the women met among themselves, waited for instructions from a party leader and were mobilised particularly when the party had to show its strength in demonstrations and especially in electoral campaigns. In these situations, women were all of a sudden necessary and even indispensable.

In 1975, as part of the activities of International Women's Year, the Democratic Party invited representatives of Lebanese political parties to a meeting to draw up a balance sheet of the participation of women in political parties and to consider the possibility of agreeing on a platform of demands and common action. Women from the Phalangist Party, the National Bloc, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Ba'ath Party, the Communist Party, as well as other women belonging to small groups, all met together; distrustful, rivals, convinced in advance that no agreement was possible.

However, agreement was possible. It was sufficient to point to the one or more paragraphs in each party's programme devoted to women, to realise that all the parties – at least in principle – were for equality between men and women, for optional civil marriage, for the application of the law on equal pay, for the generalisation of education for girls, for better professional training for girls, for an extension of creches etc . . . That this preparatory meeting was not followed by others, was officially because of the war: the leftist parties ordered a boycott of the Phalangist Party, so women from the left-wing parties could not sit down at the same table with Phalangists. In fact, it was because of the anguish provoked by the agenda.

The first question was strictly political: 'What is the position of your party on women's questions?' Everybody, both on the left and on the right, was doubtful whether they would agree. How would a communist look if she had nothing either to criticise in, or to add to, what was proposed by a Phalangist? How was it possible to end up with only differences of detail in demands over women, starting from so many different and antagonistic ideologies representing the whole organised Lebanese political spectrum? Was it sufficient to attribute the agreement to the demagogy of the right, which in its programmes made promises to women which it had no intention of keeping? This was not a serious approach, and one felt that it revealed a grave problem, that of an inadequate analysis of the exploitation and oppression experienced by women in Lebanese society.

The second question, although also political, was of a more existential nature: 'In your party, what is the number of women members, and the number of women who are in leading positions? What problems do they have because they are women?' Of all those present, only the Democratic Party could point to women in its politburo. No women representative would agree to give figures or even a rough estimate of the proportion of women members in

relation to the total membership of the party. There was great reticence in admitting there were problems at all. Thus, if there were few women in the party, this was because women lacked consciousness; if they did not hold responsible positions, this was because they were not sufficiently competent – the party itself did not discriminate. Women found themselves using standard male modes of thought in regard to other women: they talked like men. The same mechanism which makes women loathe to complain of their lot in front of women they do not know, especially if they are rivals, was at work there. These women militants, when they were conscious of the discrimination which they and their comrades were victim of, when they were not themselves token women in the party, preferred to wash their dirty linen at home. They refused to question publicly the men from their own party, to recognise that their party, their men, were not the most advanced, the most egalitarian, or the most revolutionary. Alienated, and preferring their hard-won identity as members of the party to the less prestigious identity of committed women, they left without having really met, without having talked, or listened.

The possibility of politicising the women's question, ie applying the same criteria applied to any other question, analysing it in terms of relations of power, of positions through which one group of people (in this case men) control another group (women), seems to be a long way off for at least the majority of Lebanese women. But some women began to do this. They had been militants for several years in the left parties. They had lived with and undergone subtle or brutal discrimination from society, from militants of other parties – but especially from their own comrades. They had been confronted with the disastrous consequences of the etiquette of principal and secondary contradictions, the contradiction between the sexes being, of course, always secondary. They had realised the futility of any revolution which kept intact the basic unity of exploitation and oppression, that of one sex over the other, of masculine over feminine. They had also lived through the laceration of the war, in which, although perhaps in different forms according to the side, the male order had been the sole victor.

It is this reflection, still embryonic, which I want to account for. To try to see in the present political situation in Lebanon an antagonism of class and of religious communities, but also an antagonism between the sexes, to try to see the war through, and starting from, the feminine universe (cf Mao and also M.-A. Macciocchi 'les Femmes et la traversée du fascisme' in *Elements pour une analyse du fascisme*, Paris, 1976, p128).

It is hardly astonishing that in Lebanon more than in other places women experience politics as something foreign in their daily lives, since their lives are ruled by community laws and not national ones.

The principal moments of their lives are punctuated by the intervention of men from their communities and religious authorities, rarely from the state. It is essential to understand that in Lebanon all matters relating to personal status depend on confessional laws and tribunals. There is no civil marriage. There are as many different laws for women as there are religions. Marriage, divorce or separation, relationships, guardianship of minors, inheritance, all these problems have different solutions according to whether one is a Maronite Christian, a Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, or a Sunnite or Shia' Muslim. Of course the state also intervenes: education policy, employment policy, wages, prices . . . But these problems are secondary, or rather experienced as secondary by most women, with the exception of politicised women who are interested in them.

In 1975 the women's organisations held a congress to discuss the laws relating to personal status, and demanded optional and non-compulsory civil marriage. A law forbidding discrimination against women in the family was presented by women from the Democratic Party and adopted by the congress. All the parties which declare themselves opposed to confessionalism talk about the necessity of having unified and secular laws in all spheres of life, especially that of personal status. The left parties add that this reform is all the more necessary because the present laws are disadvantageous to women, but their declarations remain at the level of principles, and everyone carefully avoids entering into details.

However, at the moment of civil war, the question of women became the central point of negotiations between the right and the left, and it is not irrelevant that it also became the point of rupture.

The 'Committee for National Dialogue', laboriously created during one of the many cease-fires that marked the war, attempted to list points of disagreement and bring together different points of view. It broke down over the question of secularisation. The left demanded total secularisation, as did the Christian right. The Muslims wanted political and administrative secularisation, but refused secularisation of personal status, considering it a matter of private and non-political problems. Since the beginning of the war the left had been a prisoner of its Muslim allies. Its leader, Kamal Jumblatt, known for his misogyny and political opportunism, declared that since the 'Muslim and national side' was not ready for such a reform, they could put the question of civil marriage to one side. One could not open a breach in alliance over such secondary problems! The important thing was to remain united in the face of the enemy and to deal with 'political' and military problems. It should be noted that this abandonment by the left of the women's cause went almost totally unnoticed.

The Christian right affirmed that for its part it wanted civil marriage. Assured of a Muslim rejection, it could allow itself all sorts of proposals to give itself a modern and Western image. In a recent interview with *Le Monde*, Beshir Gemayel stated: 'Alone, we achieved

secularisation a long time ago.' Describing the federal structure he supported, he said: 'Each community should rule itself according to its own laws, and no one should impose their views on others.' But isn't this precisely what happened before the war? As for secularisation, that is a trap-word for women. For the Napoleonic code was a secular code, as was the Rocco Code, drawn up by Mussolini in fascist Italy. What sort of code then, are the Phalangists and the Guardians of the Cedar, allied to the Lebanese monks, preparing for us?

Here we touch on a very important aspect of intercommunal relations. We are dealing with two communities struggling for power, for leadership. Within each community, masculine domination over women takes place under different conditions and according to different laws, but it is nonetheless implacable. It is a matter of keeping the women for the men of the community. However, Muslim men have legal access to Christian women; the reverse is not true. A Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim without at least converting and in that case losing her inheritance. Marriages are very common between Lebanese Christians and foreign Christians. Mixed marriages are very rare between Christian men and Muslim women, and often in these cases the man converts to Islam.

When civil marriage is discussed, traditional Muslim men immediately imagine a cohort of young women, their daughters and sisters, rushing into the arms of Christian men the minute the law is passed. This threat is absolutely untenable. One exasperated Muslim said to me: 'When we discuss secularisation with Christians they ask me: will you give us your daughter in marriage? Would that they would leave our women alone!'

For centuries, these communities have lived side by side with myths concerning the women of the other community. In the Muslims, the Christians see the East with all its seduction, its sensuality, and its docility, in short – the harem. The Muslims imagine Christian women as being more advanced, more educated, and more modern than their women. To join them is a promotion. But as intercommunal relations remained relatively rare, because of the fear of reprisals from jealous fathers and brothers (sometimes leading to crimes, qualified as 'crimes of honour') negative myths grew up, helping to make frustration tolerable: 'Bunch of whores' said Muslims of Christians who rejected them; 'stupid and ignorant women' said the Christians of Muslim women they lusted after, but who were inaccessible.

A kind of rule operated in peace time, an implicit understanding between the males of the two communities, recognising the mutual right of each over the women of their respective communities. This entente, based mainly on fear of reprisals, protected women of the two camps in the first stages of the war. Few women were kidnapped, and if they were arrested they were quickly released. They could move around more easily than men; militiamen on barricades did not ask

them for identity papers. One got the impression that if one side broke this agreement and started to seize women, it would be terrible. If the walls, which held back repressed and aggressive desires, suddenly broke, the consequences would be uncontrollable.

These walls were effectively broken at times, when the war reached extremes of violence: Quarantina, Damour, Clemenceau, Tel El Za'atar. These were points of no return, where through the association of sexuality with power, by the rape of women and young girls, the aggressors signified their absolute (but momentary) domination over the other camp. In all the random shelling, houses in flames, banks looted, hotels destroyed, factories sacked, some elements of the patriarchal order – religious, political and military leaders and women's property – were spared. This 'gentlemen's agreement', based on a cult of authority and hierarchy, and on an extraordinary respect for force and violence, as much in their own camp as within the enemy camp, led to some aberrations: Hawi, military leader of the Phalangist militias, was captured by the Palestinian resistance and released several hours later. When people wanted to hit Chamoun, they executed his nephew; and as a reprisal, it was Jumblatt's sister that was assassinated.

If certain of the leaderships were hit during this war, those who survived emerged even more ingrained with authoritarianism and violence. Both sides attributed their previous 'defeats' to the softness of their leaders; they wanted the strongest leaders, the best armed militias, the most organised – that is the most easily controllable – population. Any questioning of authority had to be fought, any criticism or reservations were put down to laxity; politics was no longer a citizen's right, only guns talked. These were phallic values *par excellence*.

The people had to be mobilised to accept the infernal life that gripped the combat areas, Beirut in particular: scarcity and sometimes total lack of water, electricity, bread, vegetables and meat, children without schools, workers without jobs, stealing and looting, destruction and death. Those responsible for the war were aware that it was the women who bore most of the burden of everyday life. They attempted to gain their support. Radio programmes were specifically directed at women from both sides. Despite references to the 'Cedar of Lebanon' – or the Arab destiny of the same Lebanon, these programmes were very similar. They talked about 'the necessary contribution of women to the national cause', and of 'the price to be paid'. They exalted the spirit of sacrifice of the mothers who had borne the heroes. Heroes, yes, but how to acknowledge their deaths, and the death of so many victims of random shelling and the bullets of snipers? 'Ommash-shahid', the mother of the martyr, became the object of endless glorification. The violence of the apparatus and ritual of funerals was useful as a means of making death unreal, and silencing the women's grievances: the profusion of guns, shots in the

air, the bodies removed to the wailing of the women, and the men accompanying the hero-martyr to his final resting place.

Pathetic as always, women from the women's organisations, corroded like everybody by the confessional evil, completely bypassed by events and not knowing what to do, took up a position against the war. One day they tried to remove the barricades of the militias and this led to kidnappings. Going from east Beirut to west Beirut, from Phalangist barricade to progressive barricade, they spoke in the name of wives, mothers and sisters. They wanted an end to the killing. They had built homes and now, contrary to the saying, the sons were destroying the country. Of course, their campaign had no success, although it reflected the feelings of many people.

Women belonging to parties, and many others who joined in during the war, organised assistance and food for both camps. Not having been able to leave the area controlled by the progressive forces and the Palestinian resistance during the whole of the war, I don't know in detail what happened in the Christian camp. However, everything leads me to believe that women from both sides ran into the same problems.

On the progressive side the disorganisation would have reached unmanageable proportions without the participation of the women. They formed aid teams, provided help for the injured, welcomed refugee families, gave food for the fighters, sewed sheets and linen for the hospitals. An incredible amount of energy was and continues to be expended. Very few men militants took part in this work unless they were overseeing it. This was considered to be women's work, and regarded with contempt; men who participated in it felt themselves diminished, and were mocked by their comrades. Everything was just the same as in the family. For women, the servile jobs, for men, the noble jobs; in war the noble jobs were carrying arms and fighting.

Women did take part in the fighting – and their presence was considered to be neither natural nor obvious. On the surface, men were proud to have women fighting in their ranks. This conformed to the scheme of 'people's war'. In actual fact, the presence of women was felt to be an intolerable blow to their virility. They defended themselves by attacking: sexual and verbal aggression or attempts to put the women down. The attitude of military instructors was full of condescension, as though they were saying: 'I'm too important to waste my time with women.' The military commanders were no better. Women fighters were always given the least prestigious arms on the excuse they had not had enough training, and the worst places on the pretext of 'protecting' them. To be treated as equals, the women had to be more courageous and more competent than the men, and at that point they became the token women, heroines. Each party and each militia had a few of them.

In addition, the women fighters had to defend themselves against the ever-present accusation of being whores. 'In the trenches, it's an

orgy', was a fantasy often expressed by men fighters talking about the enemy camp or rival militias. Women had no right to be there, they were a nuisance. Every pretext was good.

And why were we there?

Why, even by taking up arms, did we fill precisely that role given to us for all (patriarchal) eternity: that of the beautiful woman fighter, or the avenging mother defending her little ones? Why were we involved in a struggle from which we would gain nothing?

Why did we let ourselves into this sinister adventure?

CAPITAL & CLASS

Capital & Class is the journal of the CSE. Members receive three issues of *Capital & Class* a year and regular newsletters and are entitled to attend the annual conference. Working and local CSE groups meet regularly during the year.

Contents of recent and forthcoming issues of *Capital & Class* include:-
Capital & Class 3

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Capital & Class 4

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Changes in Palestinian society

Ehud Ein Gil and Aryeh Finkelstein

The Zionist settler society has been built upon the ruins of Palestinian society, destroyed by Zionist colonisation. That part of the Palestinian people which after 1948 remained inside the state of Israel, under direct Zionist rule, has in the course of time undergone deep social changes. For example, the confiscation of their lands forced the Palestinian peasants out of agriculture and into wage labour. In this article we consider the significance of these changes and their effects on the structure of Palestinian village society inside Israel, and in particular on the position of women.

The hamoulah*

The institutions of Palestinian village society drew their strength from specific economic conditions. The growth of the main village institution – the *hamoulah* – was based on land ownership, an agrarian economy and a relative weakness of contacts with urban centres; and it was reinforced by Arab culture, tradition and religion. Even in the nineteenth century, with the intrusion of the imperialist powers into the region, contacts with Western civilisation and its values were mainly confined to the small urban population of Palestine; the village remained largely isolated from European influence until Zionist colonising activity became intensive.

After the defeat of the Arab states in the 1948-49 war, the Zionist movement subjected the Palestinians who remained inside Israel to its policy. But Zionist policy towards Israel's Palestinian subjects has been a combination of two mutually contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, it has aimed to preserve the traditional *hamoulah* structure of village society, in order to make it easier to keep the Palestinians under control. But on the other hand, by expropriating the Palestinians' lands, it has destroyed the economic basis of that very same traditional structure which Zionism wants to preserve. Without its lands, the *hamoulah* has lost its economic foundations: its members are dispersed as wage labourers in the Israeli economy, and the ties

*A *hamoulah* (pl *hama'il*) is a unit of social organisation, smaller than a clan and consisting of several extended families which have (or consider themselves to have) a common ancestor in the male line. (Ed)

which had bound them together are severed. But despite all this, the *hamoulah* has not collapsed.

In countries like England, which had undergone an industrial revolution, the expropriation of the peasants' lands destroyed the old rural society; the peasants migrated to the towns in search of new sources of livelihood, were transformed into an industrial proletariat and created new social frameworks appropriate to their new class. But in England both dispossessioners and dispossessed were English. It was a process rooted in the intrinsic economic development of England.

In Palestine, on the contrary, the process through which the peasants were dispossessed of the lands was caused by a clash between a colonising movement of immigrants and the indigenous population; it was not a process resulting from the intrinsic economic development of the country. Although in this country, just as in England, the dispossessed peasants were proletarianised, the traditional framework of the Palestinian village society was not broken. For the new Palestinian proletarians did not migrate into the towns: they were prevented from moving into the Jewish city near their place of work by legal restrictions (military rule, to which Arabs inside Israel were subjected and which operated a pass system, was lifted only about ten years ago') and by racist discrimination, on the part of the authorities as well as the 'man in the street'. The villages became working-class dormitories. But the old *hamoulah* structure of these villages was preserved.

Why?

The 1948 defeat left the Palestinian population inside Israel beaten and broken. Most of the urban population, as well as the inhabitants of over 350 villages, had been driven out of the Zionist state. The only remaining social institution was the *hamoulah*, which now became a kind of kernel, around which Palestinian identity inside Israel would be recreated and preserved. The Zionist attempt to obliterate and deny the existence of Palestinian national identity brought about a response characteristic of oppressed minorities – the strengthening of traditional structures.

But the traditional social structures could not serve as a framework for resistance and struggle against oppression, and were therefore turned into instruments of the authorities. In order to dominate and control the great majority of the members of a *hamoulah*, it was enough for the authorities to harness the headman to their wagon. A party which could bribe the headman would get most of the votes of his *hamoulah*. In this way the *hamoulah* structure was turned from a stronghold of resistance to Zionist policy into the institutional framework through which Zionist domination over Palestinian society is mediated. Even in those cases where the headman did not sell out to the authorities, the *hamoulah* could not serve as a basis for broad struggle; for the ties of solidarity which it fosters are exclusive to its own members, and do not bind together the broad mass of the people.

The *hamoulah* preserved its prestige and influence, and with it were preserved values and conventions which had characterised traditional Arab society. More than anyone else, it is the Palestinian women who have got the worst of this state of affairs: they not only belong to an oppressed people suffering from discrimination, but also have an inferior and underprivileged status within that people.

Women in Palestinian society

'The family honour' is the concept in whose name most of the restrictions upon the Palestinian woman's freedom of movement are imposed. In particular, women's individual liberty continues to be violated by the segregation of unmarried people of opposite sexes, a segregation based upon religious and traditional values as well as social conventions. Thus the unmarried woman is prevented from participating in socio-cultural activities in which men take part; this includes not only going to the cinema or to the coffee house, but sometimes even sitting together with guests in her own house. The married woman's freedom of movement is also restricted: she too is not allowed to participate in socio-cultural activities in which men are present, unless she is accompanied by her husband.

Betrothal and marriage arrangements in Palestinian society make it difficult for a woman (and indeed also for a man) to marry a person of her (or his) own choice. At the same time, these arrangements are an important means of preserving social differentiation. In general, marriage is an economic transaction; a rich family will make sure that its sons and daughters marry brides and bridegrooms belonging to rich families. This is ensured by the bride price: a man who cannot afford the high bride price demanded by a rich family, cannot marry a daughter of that family.

Incidentally, a similar phenomenon also exists among Israeli Jews. Israeli-Jewish society is more 'open', and in it marriage is theoretically a matter of free choice for both partners. But before the wedding there is usually a meeting of the families of both 'parties', in which they finalise the commercial transaction – how much money is to be paid to the young couple by each side in order to ensure its economic status. Not infrequently, weddings are called off before that stage is reached; the parents' opposition overcomes love and 'free choice'.

But in Palestinian society the situation is, if anything, worse. A father's prestige and authority over his family are much greater, and only very few young people would dare to defy the 'family' and marry a person of their own choice. The imposed segregation between unmarried men and women makes it difficult for love relationships to develop, and enhances the power of the head of the family: in the absence of love ties, the resistance of his sons and daughters is weaker than it might have been, and it is that much easier for him to impose

upon them his own will in the matter of marriage.

But in this, as in other social matters, the situation is gradually improving. For the time being change is rather slow, but it is gathering momentum. Of course, it all depends on the young people themselves, both men and women. Both share an interest in liberating themselves from the authority of the *hamoulah* tradition, in order to facilitate a freer contact between the sexes, before and after marriage, and to win the right to choose their own spouses. A struggle to abolish the institution of bride price will be an important first step along this road.

Historically, the concept of the 'family honour' was used to dictate a restriction of women's participation in the social process of production. But the Zionist expropriation of lands has worsened the situation of Palestinian women in Israel. [In the past, women used to take part in the family's production process, in agriculture. But when there was no longer any land, the men went out to work in the city, while social conventions tethered the women to their village home.]

However, the harsh economic realities of the last few years – rapid price inflation accompanied by a meagre rise in nominal wages – has forced the Palestinians to allow women to go out to work as wage labourers in order to supplement the family income. The Israeli economy, particularly the food and textile industries, was crying out for cheap manpower – or womanpower: Palestinian women fulfilled the demand of the labour market. Between 1967 and 1972, about 7,000 Palestinian women entered work in industry². Thousands of women are employed in agriculture on Jewish farms. Thus the 'sanctity' of the concept of 'family honour' was exposed; its role was clearly seen – to preserve relations of authority based on a socio-economic situation belonging to the past. When economic and social conditions had changed, family honour was no longer capable of keeping the woman at home.

Under capitalism, women workers generally constitute a reserve army of cheap labour, deployed according to the needs of the economy. A working woman is not considered to be the family's main breadwinner, and this is used by employers as a justification for not paying her the same wage as a man doing the same job. But in Israel, in addition to this discrimination in wages between men and women, there is also a national discrimination in wages between Jews and Arabs. Thus Palestinian women constitute the most exploited section of the labour force in the Israeli economy.

The inferior status of women in the patriarchal family is a circumstance shared by all Palestinian women workers and sets them apart from the other part of their class, the Palestinian men workers. Although they are super-exploited at work, Palestinian women workers find it very difficult to fight against their exploitation. If the very fact of their going out to work is regarded by traditional village society as something unusual and undesirable, how much greater will be the social resistance to any attempt by women to organise and

struggle independently! 'Family honour' prevents women from organising politically, and even stands in the way of their participation in political activity alongside men. And if this applies to their participation in organising for struggle against national oppression, which afflicts both men and women, it applies all the more to women's organising for struggle for their own rights.

The *hamoulah*, as guardian of family honour, is therefore the main source of weakness of the Palestinian woman, and especially the Palestinian woman worker, in Israel.

Changing reality versus stubborn conservatism

Economic reality imposes changes even upon conservative village society. Palestinian society in Israel still disapproves of women working in industry together with men. In fact, most Palestinian women workers still work in segregation. But women's work is gradually becoming more accepted, and at the same time the family's power over the woman's earnings is growing weaker. More and more women, especially unmarried women, keep some of their wages and do not hand them all to the head of the family. Their participation in the process of production and their growing, if relative, economic independence constitute preconditions for the success of the women's struggle against the bonds of *hamoulah* conservatism.

Other factors, too, contribute to the weakening of the *hamoulah*'s conservative grip. One of these is the influence of Western social values.

See below
Palestinian society tended to regard the Western bourgeois values imported into this country by the Zionist colonisers as corrupt. In fact these bourgeois values represented a historically progressive stage of development compared to the old religious-feudal values; but many Palestinians tended to identify these values with Zionist oppression. Moreover, this was used by Palestinian reaction in order to persuade the masses that democracy and socialism also are 'Zionist values' which have to be opposed. As a result, adherence to the traditional social values hindered the development of Palestinian society and handicapped it in the struggle against Zionism.

The view of woman as an inferior being, unfit to participate in social and political struggle, who must be tethered to the home, impaired the resistance of Palestinian society against Zionist oppression, because half of the population was thereby prevented from contributing its effort and energy to the struggle.

(There was a similar phenomenon in other Arab countries. But wherever the struggle for national and social liberation struck at the forces of reaction and conservatism, women took an active part in the struggle. This was the case during a certain phase in Algeria as well as in South Yemen. Also, in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza strip women play an important and useful part in the struggle against occupation.)

Now, in the course of time it is becoming clear that more and more Palestinians no longer identify democratic and socialist values with zionism (this refers both to political principles and to socio-cultural values). And accordingly the resistance to the adoption of these values is declining.

For example, among the laws imposed by British rule in Palestine, and later by the zionist power, there was a law prohibiting polygamy, whereas Islam permits it. But today, the ban on polygamy is no longer regarded as a zionist value which must be opposed. (We do not claim that this law has solved the problems of the institution of marriage; there is certainly much that should be changed in the arrangements and content of this institution. But the abolition of polygamy constitutes an advance in the status of women.) Accordingly, we do not know of any Palestinian who would seriously advocate the inclusion of the legalisation of polygamy in the programme of Palestinian national liberation.

Attitudes to the high birth rate are likewise changing. The high birth rate has been used – sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously – as a weapon against zionism. If the zionists wanted less Arab children to be born – then having more children became a ‘national task’. The relative rise in living standards, which normally has a downward effect on the birth rate, has not had this effect among the Palestinians in Israel. Their birth rate, 4.6 per cent per annum, is still among the world’s highest. Although this seems to be a policy of struggle, a reaction against zionist oppression, it tends to maintain the oppression of women. Their burden is particularly heavy in villages without electricity, child care and health services.

A family with many children finds it more difficult to provide for them materially and spiritually. This has an adverse effect not only on the women, who are tethered to their homes, but also on the children. However, the use of contraceptives is gradually spreading, and a growing number of women are becoming aware of their right to control their own bodies. Here, too, the *hamoulah*, religion and tradition pose themselves against change. Village conservatism regards any attempt at change as a zionist-inspired plot.

From all this it can be seen how difficult it is going to be for Palestinian women in Israel to struggle for their own liberation. It seems as though everything and everyone have joined forces to prevent their liberation and to make it harder for them to organise for struggle.

The obstacles in the road of Palestinian women’s liberation are formidable indeed. In addition to those we have already referred to – religion, tradition, the *hamoulah* – one of the greatest obstacles is subjective: the immense difficulty in becoming fully conscious of their state of oppression, isolation and lack of organisation. In the present situation, any ‘rebellious’ woman, who refuses to surrender to the bondage of convention, remains isolated and ostracised. Her first

aim is therefore to seek an alliance with other women in her struggle.

The experience of the women's liberation movement in Israel has shown it to be characterised by a particular feature, which is not shared by similar movements in other capitalist countries. For, in the zionist state of Israel an Israeli-Jewish woman cannot support free abortion on demand without falling foul of the zionist attitude to the 'demographic question'; she cannot repudiate the Rabbinate's authority in matters of marriage and divorce³ without taking a stand on their authority to determine 'who is a Jew' (and therefore entitled to a privileged status in Israel) and who is not; she cannot demand equality for women without confronting the counter-argument that 'the duties of men and women are also unequal, because the men have to shoulder a heavier military burden'; she cannot demand equality between men and women without also demanding equality between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab women. In short, one cannot consistently demand equal rights for women without questioning the most fundamental zionist principles.

This is a possible meeting point for Jewish and Arab women, for a joint struggle for women's liberation. The development of a Palestinian women's liberation force can intensify the contradictions within the women's liberation movement in Israel and lead to the creation of an internationalist and anti-zionist women's liberation movement.

Like every colonial power, zionism divides in order to rule. On the national level, it divides all Jews from all Arabs; on the confessional level, it divides Muslim, Druse, Christian and Jew from each other; it divides men from women; and among the Palestinians it divides one *hamoulah* from another.

The masses of this country – Arabs and Jews, men and women – can only liberate themselves from the national oppression and racist discrimination of zionism through an implacable struggle which will expose the lie upon which these divisions are based and will prove the community of interests of all the exploited, members of both peoples, of both sexes, of all religions and all *hamoulahs* – against their oppressors and exploiters: zionism and Arab reaction, both of which serve imperialism.

A struggle against the oppressive straitjacket of the traditional institutions of Palestinian society is necessary not only for the liberation of Palestinian women, but also of Palestinian men. Although men are, relatively speaking, socially privileged, the restrictions and prohibitions imposed upon the liberty of women are also restrictions and prohibitions upon the liberty of men.

The *hamoulah*, religion, tradition and the conservative customs are enemies of the Palestinian masses struggling for liberation. They are instruments for the oppression of women, but they also serve the oppression of the Palestinian people as a whole. Therefore it is the

duty of all Palestinians, both men and women, to struggle against them.

The liberation of women cannot come about without the liberation of society as a whole; and society as a whole cannot be liberated without the liberation of women. The struggle against all forms of oppression and exploitation, for national and social liberation, is the struggle of all. Women must take part in this struggle. If they take a stand equally with men, in the broader front, it will help their own struggle for social equality.

Translated from *Matzpen*, May 1977.

References

1 This refers only to Israel proper, in its pre-1967 borders. The Arabs of the territories occupied in 1967 are still under military rule. (*Ed*)

2 *Davar*, 10 March 1972.

3 The fact that the ecclesiastical authorities in Israel have such wide powers (including monopoly of jurisdiction in matters of marriage and divorce) is not only injurious to non-religious Jews who are put, against their will, at the mercy of the clerics. Arabs of the Catholic faith, for example, cannot be divorced in this country, whereas in Rome under the very nose of the Pope, they can get a civil divorce.

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Arab women

Magida Salman

Is it a lapse into impressionism to 'lend great importance to the weight of Islam' in considering the roots of the oppression of Arab women? Despite all the social transformations that have occurred in the Arab world since the era of the caliphs, secularisation has yet to take hold in nearly all the Arab countries. Legislation dealing with marriage, divorce, and the status of women (inferior in all cases) is still based on, or directly inspired by, Koranic law in all the Arab-Islamic states. What role is played by Islam, what is its influence, and how is it used? This article will deal with some of these questions.

Islam, a state religion

The administration of society under Islam is regulated by the sacred texts as elaborated in the Koran. The moral system preached by the prophet Mohammed is itself law. The Muslim religion has found expression in a code of practical laws to be observed not only with respect to Allah but also with respect to the Muslim state. Indeed, the Koran, the shari'a, and the hadith, subjects of polemics among legislators even today, were themselves shaped by the experience of the prophet as the ruler of a state.

Koranic law explicitly stipulates the superiority of men over women. To begin with, the Koran itself is addressed exclusively to men, and not to women: 'Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other . . . As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them' (*The Koran*, translated by N. J. Dawood, Penguin Classics, sura 4, 'women', pp 360-61). Countless other quotations of the same character could be adduced. Some defenders of the Islamic position on women have made the claim that Islam represents an advance over other monotheistic religions in that it introduces sexual equality, by expunging from sexual pleasure any notion of sin or guilt. This lack of guilt, however, is not synonymous with freedom, for it profits only men and in fact consecrates women's role as sexual object. For example: 'Women are your fields; go then into your fields as you please' (*The Koran*, *ibid*, sura 2, 'the cow', p 347).

As has been pointed out: 'Thus, "love" exists not as a human relation but as a sexual relation, as servitude. In reality, there are no

women, only females. For the Arab man, women exist in various personifications: virgin girl, wife, mother. There is no room for the woman friend or lover . . . The woman in the Koran is not a lover but a wife. There is no love, only sexuality . . . Marriage is a sexual pleasure on the one hand and a means of procreation on the other; the image of the wife is thus identified with that of the mother.’¹

It is not our purpose here, however, to enter into a long discussion of the sacred texts. The important thing is that since Islam is a state religion nearly everywhere in the Arab world, the Koran and the shari’a form the foundation of judicial law, or even inspire it directly. Nonetheless, in many areas attachment to the teachings of the prophet has given way to adaptation to the conditions of the modern world. Usury, for example, is a great sin in Islam. But even the ‘most Muslim’ ruling classes do not forswear the interest generated by their bank accounts. Profits, you see, can no longer be regulated by the norms that prevailed during the seventh century. No, it is only when it comes to all the norms regulating the lives of women – marriage, divorce, polygamy, the care of children, the imposition of male guardians for women – that adherence to the teachings of the prophet is complete. In other words, although Islam, like all other ideologies, has made adjustments to the social changes imposed by history, it has displayed a remarkable rigidity on all subjects involving the role of women in society.

Indeed, so strong has this conservatism been that it has incorporated many laws and traditions that were generally assumed to be Islamic and were thus preserved over the centuries, even though they were actually products of reactions to Islam and its effect on pre-Islamic society; or of purely conjunctural necessities which arose at certain points in the evolution of this or that society. One striking example may illustrate the point: the wearing of the veil.

This practice seems to have developed as a reaction to the Koranic reform that guaranteed women the right to inherit property; it became general as the nomadic tribes settled during the early years of the expansion of Islam. ‘In making inheritance for women compulsory, the sacred book . . . dealt a terrible blow to the tribe, one which the tribal societies worked hard to evade even while converting to Islam more or less gracefully. Today we may note that the generalisation of the veil and the cloistering of women closely correspond to Koranic observance in the matter of female inheritance.’²

‘There seems to be a particular chain of events, one which I myself have witnessed:

1. Religious fervour imposes female inheritance rights
2. Female inheritance rights destroy the tribe
3. The demolished tribe accepts the presence of outsiders
4. Fathers begin veiling their daughters so as to preserve them for the boys of the family despite everything.’³

In *The Social Structure of Islam* Reuben Levy presents details

concerning the appearance of the veil among Muslim women: 'Closely bound up with the subject of marriage in Islam is that of the veiling and seclusion of women. In ancient Arabia, custom appears to have varied; the women of the desert-dwellers going unveiled and associating freely with men, while women in the cities were veiled.'⁴ Levy points out that women were not required to wear veils during the reign of the caliph Omar (634-644).

The exact date of the generalisation of the veil and the definitive reasons for it remain to be determined in many cases. What is certain, however, is that the custom pre-dates Islam to some extent and was not specifically stipulated by the prophet Mohammed. Nonetheless, once it became identified as 'Islamic', it was raised to the level of custom, and often even law.

The confounding of religious structures and state structures, of law and sacred texts, is a general characteristic of the societies in which Islam emerged and triumphed. This characteristic has prevailed, with differences in form, from the epoch of the Muslim conquests and the first caliphs through the Ottoman empire and even into the epoch of capitalism.

Nevertheless, this phenomenon has been most striking in all that relates to the position of women in society. The impact of Islam on this question may be grasped more clearly by taking a look at the argument of the great reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (the era of the *Nahda Arabia*, or Arab renaissance). Most of these reformers had attended French universities and, upon returning to their countries, issued appeals for the modernisation of the state (men such as Salameh Musa and Qassim Amin⁵). Amin, one of the greatest of the reformers, is considered a pioneer in the domain of the emancipation of women. Of Turkish origin, he studied law at the University of Montpellier in France and later served as a legislator in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century. He was the author of several works on the status of women. In his book *The Liberation of Woman* Amin called for equality for women in the realm of social life and insisted on the need for the education of women. At the same time, he strove ceaselessly to fuel his argument with quotations from the Koran. For him, correspondence with the Koran was the very proof that he was on the right path, that he stood within the legitimacy of 'our society'. This led him into long religious digressions, which are interlaced in bizarre fashion through his otherwise rational thought. For instance, after citing the passage in the Koran instructing believers to 'enjoin believing women . . . to cover their adornments (except such as are normally displayed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons,' etc. (The Koran, op cit, sura 24, 'light', p 212), Amin writes pages attempting to demonstrate that 'adornments' (in other words, 'private parts') do not include the face or the hands.

This was at the beginning of the twentieth century. And today? Not more than three years ago an 'emancipated and enlightened' sheikh came to a round table discussion organised by feminists at Dar el-Fann in Beirut to convince the audience that Islam has liberated women and that the Koran must be followed to the letter in all matters of personal status. He simply repeated the official positions on which the 'partisans of equality of the Muslim woman' have been harping for decades. And of course, he defended the legitimacy of the theocratic state.

Bourgeois ideology in the Arab world: an Arab-Islamic ideology?

'Our bourgeoisies seem to find the drafting of a secular personal code more dangerous than nationalisations.'

In some non-Arab Muslim countries secularisation was achieved by a bourgeoisie struggling to modernise and strengthen indigenous capitalism. This demonstrates that the explanation for the humiliating position of Arab women (and the sources of the unhealthy obsession with virility among Arab men) are not to be sought merely in the content of the Koran. They lie, rather, in the necessity felt by the ruling classes – and the local bourgeoisies now in power – to 'respect' Islamic tradition and to administer Islamic states (except in the special case of Lebanon, where secularisation does not exist in any event, and Tunisia, which must be examined separately).

After the revolution led by Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, the state was secularised and many changes were introduced in the status of women, especially in the towns. Why weren't Nasser's attempts to establish an independent and modern Egypt strengthened by the proclamation of a secular state? Why didn't the Algerian National Liberation Front resort to this weapon against the reactionaries and against the demagogy of 'forward-looking' imperialists, even at the peak of the anti-imperialist struggle? Why has the Baath Party felt compelled to identify the struggle for Arab unity with Islamic identity and, once in power, why has it hurried to declare Islam the state religion, in both Iraq and Syria? (The intellectual founder of the Baath, Michel Aflaq, who is of Christian background, converted to Islam about a year ago, claiming that Arabism and Islam could not be separated.) And one could add the caricatures of such phenomena: Qadaffi's 'Jamahiria' or Saudi Arabia, where the ridiculous in no way alleviates the atrocious oppression that denies women any choices whatever, even women of the ruling classes.

One of the reasons for this apparent anomaly is that the reaction to colonial and imperialist oppression in the Arab world took the form of attachment to local traditions and beliefs as a response to the cultural pressure of the settlers. 'When the French landed in Algeria in 1830, the society they attacked was, regardless of their own prejudices

and ignorance, part of an old civilisation which had long competed with their own, Arab-Islamic civilisation . . . The Koranic prohibition of Muslim women marrying non-Muslims . . . protected Muslim women from delivering their bodies to the oppressor . . . But this refusal, on the other hand, placed the women of North Africa even further under the grip of the men of their own society, for the women, along with everything connected to private life, became a symbol for the men, a concrete refuge from the colonial indignity to which they were subjected. That is why the women were forced to live in narrow confines, jealously overprotected, their lack of public appearance and their very intangibility serving now as the ultimate guarantee of masculine dignity, now as an excuse for those who were compromised by collaboration with the occupier.'⁶

The authors of the article from which this quotation is taken explain the varying influence of colonialism on the status of women in North Africa and in Mexico on the basis of this differing pre-colonial reality. (Spanish colonialism in Mexico during the sixteenth century confronted a tribal society; this led to cultural and 'racial' blending, which was not the case in North Africa.)

This sort of reaction was to assume a broader, although more contradictory, dimension during the epoch of imperialism. The division of the Arab world by the European imperialist powers led to the development of nationalist consciousness, an important element of which was the desire to reassert the Arab unity that had been destroyed by the 'westerners'. This consciousness found expression in an attachment to the unifying elements that had preceded the division: language, customs, and religion experienced as a cultural tradition. Islam thus became a component of bourgeois nationalist consciousness. The Arab woman has suffered from this reaction, which has acted to circumscribe the upheavals in her status that could have been introduced both by contact with European society and by the mass struggles for liberation from the domination of European imperialism.

The reaction to imperialism, however, was contradictory, precisely because of the influence of imperialism on the pre-capitalist socio-economic structures of the Arab world. The needs of imperialism and of the new, imposed mode of production required that young girls be sent to school (especially in the cities) and that a layer of women employees in the tertiary sector be developed. In some cases there was also a need for cheap female labour power to exploit. Indeed, the changes wrought by the entry of capitalism and by the imbalances through which it developed gave rise to the first struggles of Arab women.

✱ The ensuing contradiction may be summarised in this way: On the one hand, the oppression and social changes imposed by imperialism created the objective basis both for the development of women's struggles and for the integration of women into the more general

national liberation struggle against colonialism; on the other hand, the form in which bourgeois nationalist consciousness took root among the masses entailed a strengthening of Islam and even a tendency towards the assimilation of Islam into that consciousness itself. This latter factor militated against the rise of women's struggles and even against the active participation of women in the national liberation struggle. Later, bourgeois nationalist consciousness in the Arab world, fully identified with Islamic ideology, was to become a weapon in the hands of the indigenous ruling classes which assumed state power in place of the European colonialists. In other words, the Islamic position on women, along with the Islamic position on other social questions, became an instrument for the perpetuation of the general domination of the Arab ruling classes.

'Arab socialism': an 'Islamic' socialism

'We favour neither communism nor capitalism, but an Arab socialism, an Islamic socialism.'

For reasons we will not go into here, the national liberation struggle in the Arab countries, which reached its peak during the 1950s, was led by nationalist movements. These movements came to power either through coups organised by young army officers or through the action of political parties whose base was essentially petty bourgeois. The bourgeois regimes established by the anti-imperialist struggles and movements in the Arab world were often impelled to take radical measures against imperialist intransigence. They were thus compelled to rely not only on the urban petty bourgeoisie but also on the peasantry and the working class, and even to mobilise the workers and peasants to some extent. But it was also necessary to ensure that radicalisation and popular mobilisation would not sharpen the class struggle, that the upsurge of mass action could be contained within limits compatible with the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production. The formula by which this delicate equilibrium was assured was well chosen: Islamic socialism. Or to put it another way: socialism for popular consumption, Islam for the survival of capitalism.

All that women gained from this was a number of political rights (such as the right to vote) and the right to work whenever the new, independent state was short of labour power. The religious authorities were always on hand to declare either that Islam permitted women to participate in social activities or that Islam required the seclusion of women, depending on the needs of the moment. (The latter sort of declaration, of course, was of special value during periods of social unrest, sharpened class struggle, or rising unemployment). The pronouncements of the sheikhs of Al-Azhar mosque in Egypt, guardians of the Koran and the shari'a, are striking in their contradictions.

In the countryside, the only perceptible change in the status of women was the intensification of poverty, especially since the various agrarian reforms all ended in failure.

In all these independent states, secularisation was regarded as an excessively disruptive element in an already precarious stability. In all these states, personal status is based on Koranic law and the lives of women are regulated by 'the traditions of our Muslim culture'.

Let us take one example. What has 'Islamic socialism' meant for women in independent Algeria, a country whose liberation movement, the National Liberation Front, has been held up as having radically transformed the conditions of women?

Since 1967 the official government newspaper, *el-Moujahid*, has ceaselessly issued advice for the right-thinking, such as: 'Our socialism rests on the pillars of Islam and not on the emancipation of women with their make-up, hairdressers and cosmetics, from which arise unchained passions harmful to humanity.'

In the chapter entitled 'Hypocrisy' in her book *Les Algériennes* ('Algerian Women'), F. M'Rabet quotes from an article published in the magazine *el-Jaish* in 1965: 'What would become of Algerian virility and glory, of the Arab-Islamic national character of our vigorous youth, into what state would our young men fall, if they saw their sisters in the arms of foreigners, who are their enemies and the enemies of the whole Arab nation?''⁷

In the countries in which Islam is the state religion there is generally only one political party, the ruling party, and the organisations of the various sectors of the masses are tightly controlled by this party. Thus, the National Union of Algerian Women declared during its first congress, in 1966: 'The congress must . . . entirely devote itself to the protection of the family unit . . . through the establishment of structures that conform to the Algerian personality and to Arab-Islamic culture.'⁸

In 1972 the initial draft of the family code made this stipulation in regard to marriage: 'Error in person or violence entails the annulment of the marriage.'⁹ Yes, the veil plays tricks. The prospective husband (who has paid a price for his chosen bride) can be deceived and find himself married to someone else, for the 'error in person' can be discovered only after the marriage, when the veil falls.

Although the proposed family code rested on Islamic law, it had, of course, to be adapted to some modern necessities and thus divested of a few excessively embarrassing rules. The 'sacred texts' were consequently juggled about. Article 49 of the draft stipulated:

'The requirement of monogamy has its foundation in the Koran and the shari'a . . . Averroës taught that monogamy was obligatory . . . This was also the view of the caliph Omar Ibn Abi el-Khattab, Omer Abdel Aziz, the Mu'awiya. In addition, this custom has long been common in our country. A *fetwa* (religious ruling) rendered by Abu Zakariya el-Moghali in the ninth century illustrates this clearly

and precisely. The commission has thus considered it its duty to consecrate this custom in the present article.'¹⁰

Was it really necessary to seek justification from all these celebrated Muslim personalities simply to propose the establishment of monogamy, especially since, *pace* the legislators concerned, monogamy in no way 'has its foundation' in the Koran?

The Muslim Brotherhood: an Arab version of fascism

Since the Arab bourgeoisie is an Arab-Islamic bourgeoisie, it is only logical that local fascism has taken the form of an exaggerated version of this religious identity. Created in 1919, the Muslim Brotherhood was to remain numerically modest until the late 1940s, a period of great social and popular agitation in the Middle East. The principles of the movement then became increasingly popular, primarily among the petty bourgeoisie (especially in Egypt and Syria). Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood waged a campaign against 'big capital', for the defence of private property, against the 'Occident' and its imported values (although they refused to use the word imperialist), against the communists (the main enemy), and above all against any reform of religion and against secularisation. The Muslim Brotherhood has waged a constant and determined struggle against the liberation of women. They mobilised according to the watch-word 'communism = atheism = liberation of women'. The recent reappearance of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is a result not merely of de-Nasserisation (the organisation had suffered great repression during the Nasser period) but also of the exacerbation of the social crisis in the country and of their desire to counter an unorganised but quite militant workers' movement.

While fascism in Europe strove to confine women to children, church, and the kitchen, the Muslim Brotherhood demands the reveiling of women, the rejection of any reform of the family code, the stoning to death of adulterous women, etc. The Brotherhood's activity in Cairo after the workers' rebellion of January 1977 testifies to this.

In Lebanon in 1970, during a period of rising class struggle, the Hizb el-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), an instrument of the Muslim Brotherhood, distributed a long leaflet in the Sunnite Muslim petty-bourgeois neighbourhoods of Beirut, explaining that Islam prohibits the mixing of men and women in public places, that schools are public places, and that girls should therefore be withdrawn from coeducational schools. But the danger is that the Muslim Brotherhood is not content with merely handing out leaflets; it uses violence, sometimes with the implicit agreement of official authorities and with generous material aid from the Saudi Arabian and Libyan regimes. In Algeria for the past two years, Muslim Brothers, sometimes aided by

the police, have been attacking women who walk alone at night, repressing them physically.

Given this overall situation, it is difficult not to stress the weight of Islam when considering the struggle for the liberation of Arab women. It is difficult not to take account of the direct physical oppression Arab women suffer because of attachment to Arab-Islamic traditions. It is no accident that the demands of the Union of Egyptian women, founded in 1923 in the wake of the revolution of 1919, concerning the reform of the personal status code are still on the agenda even today. The especially intense oppression suffered by Arab women and the direct guardianship of the males of the family, whose honour and virility are determined according to the behaviour of their wives, do not result in a higher level of consciousness among Arab women; just the opposite. This persistent weight is always present, ready to be used to serve stagnation and counter-revolution. Although its elimination can be the result only of a social revolution that eradicates all forms of exploitation and enables women to put an end to the humiliation they have suffered for centuries, the present and future influence of this oppression must on no account be minimised.

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Zionism and its scarecrows

Moshe Machover and Mario Offenberg

More than ten years have passed since the beginning of the occupation of the areas conquered by Israel in the June War of 1967. The Palestinian liberation movement has become a factor that can no longer be disregarded in any discussion on the perspectives of the Palestinian question and the Middle East conflict. The relative victories of the Arab armies over Israel in the October War of 1973, the economic and ideological fragility of the Israeli state and finally the new attitude of the US and the West European states towards the Arab states – along with the resulting inevitable readjustment of the nuances regarding the question of Israel-Arab confrontation – these things reveal all too clearly the political weakening of Israel's position both at home and abroad. Viewed internationally, the isolation of Israel occurred not only in the countries of the Third World and Eastern Europe but to a certain extent also in the West.

While the bourgeois mass media in the West express 'solidarity' and 'anxiety' for 'threatened' Israel but also for the first time report – cautiously and distortedly – on the Palestinians' struggle for national self-determination, the Western left assesses the Middle East conflict in terms of its anti-imperialist policy. The left attributes the causes of the Middle East conflict to the fact that zionism – a reactionary, colonising movement associated with imperialism – realised its intention of creating the zionist state of Israel at the expense of another people. After its establishment, Israel assumed the role of 'watch-dog' for imperialist interests in the Arab East.

However, it is clear that zionism and its propagandists abroad, using both 'historically based' accounts and appeals to the emotions, do their utmost to prevent and reverse the discrediting of zionist policy and positions. These propagandists no longer project the traditional image of the 'brave little pioneer who is 150 per cent right', nor do they come out openly with crude, arrogant nationalism in support of Greater Israel and the expulsion of the Arabs. It's all handled more subtly and modestly today – and for a good reason: whenever the zionist nature of the Israeli state is seriously challenged – whether by actual political and military developments, or by ideas calling for a multinational Palestine or a supra-national socialist union of the whole region, the pro-zionist side tries to present the Palestine conflict in terms of a 'tragic confrontation between two equally justified national aspirations' which can be settled on the basis of freezing the

zionist acquisitions of 1949 (with 'corrections').

This article aims to show how the objective and subjective henchmen of zionism in the West, in their attempt to fluster the critics of zionism, present 'leftist'-tinged arguments in support of the Israeli state, but especially directed *against* its Jewish opponents of the anti-zionist socialist movement inside Israel.

Some time ago the West German magazine *links* published in serialised form the paper *The Class Nature of Israeli Society*, which was written in 1970 by Haim Hanegbi, Moshé Machover and Akiva Orr, members of the Israeli Socialist Organisation *Matzpen*¹. A reader of *links*, Alfred Moos, in a critique, objected both to the *Matzpen* article and the anti-zionist position in general.²

We consider Alfred Moos's article typical of the arguments of the so-called 'left-wing' zionists. Therefore, besides dealing with the central points of the argument in his article, we also want to try to use this example to explain the position of 'left-wing' zionists generally, to criticise it and to show how this position is very similar to that of the official zionist propaganda, despite all the nuances.

Firstly, however, a preliminary remark: The attack on the *Matzpen* article takes advantage of the fact that it does not contain a historical analysis of zionism: neither as to the relation of zionism to the Jewish question in Europe, nor as to the relation of the zionist enterprise to the majority of the indigenous population of Palestine (the Palestinian Arab people) and to the various imperialist powers which have dominated the region since the beginning of the zionist colonisation to this day.

The reason why there is no such historical analysis in that article is simple: the article did not intend to present a comprehensive historical reckoning with zionism but more particularly to point out the basic structure of Israeli class society today.³

Zionism and Anti-semitism

It is indicative that 'left-wing zionists' always start their attacks on Israeli anti-zionists with the remark that the Jewish immigrants to Palestine – who provided the human raw material for the zionist enterprise – 'fled all too frequently from physical extermination and from antisemitic humiliation and the loss of their means of livelihood at the very least'. The threat the propagandists of zionism like so much to use is concealed behind this introduction: whoever denounces zionism, whoever rejects the Israeli state, whoever puts up a fight against the zionist nature of Israel and zionist policy – is an ally of antisemitism.

The threat is expressed even more bluntly: for example, that the present struggle against zionism 'is decorated with crumbs from the national-socialist kitchen.' Still more: 'Sometimes one almost has the

impression that zionists are the newly costumed ‘Elders of Zion’ for many leftists.’ Words of warning and threats are also aimed directly at anti-zionist Israelis: ‘Young Israelis, who are calling upon people to participate in the struggle against zionism, shouldn’t forget that their parents or grandparents in most cases were persecuted people for whom Palestine/Israel was the only refuge and that they would hardly have the right today to close Israel’s borders if sometime in the future Jews should be forced to flee to Israel in the face of antisemitic persecution. The old Jewish self-hatred sometimes gives rise to queer practices.’

Such libellous statements are nothing new. They were already directed against the Jewish communists in Russia who denounced zionism at the second World Congress of the Communist International:

‘We are concerned with the zionists in Palestine, who, under the pretext of founding an independent Jewish state, oppress the working population and force the Arabs living in Palestine under the yoke of the English, whereas the Jews are only a minority there. This matchless lie must be stamped out and indeed most vigorously, as the zionists are working in every country, approaching all the backward Jewish working masses and trying to create groups of workers with zionist tendencies (Poalei Zion), who have recently been endeavouring to adopt a communist phraseology. (. . .) The Communist International must oppose this movement most vehemently’.⁴ One of the most well-known representatives of zionism made no secret of his opinion of the anti-zionist communists: ‘These psychopaths and sadists, full of hatred for everything Jewish, shall rot in their own depravity and hideousness and suffocate in their own filth.’⁵ The way the zionists treat their (Jewish) critics, who oppose them on the basis of the principles of internationalism, has not changed. The co-founder of the pre-communist group in Palestine was labelled a ‘traitor’ and ‘enemy of the Jewish people’ in 1920,⁶ because he dared to say abroad that the expulsion of the Arab fellahin by the zionist movement was a challenge for the entire Arab world to make a stand against the Jews of Palestine.⁷ Even the ‘doves’ of zionism show no mercy; for them, the anti-zionists from the ‘Holy Land’ are suffering from a ‘pathological feeling of enmity towards the Jewish national creation’, as they are propagating the ‘belief in inciting a war of genocide against the Jewish community of the country’.⁸

Israeli revolutionary socialists have been accustomed to the reproach of ‘self-hatred’ all along and have been well armed against it. However, from their own experience they know that the defamatory scarecrow of equating anti-zionism with anti-semitism still succeeds in intimidating a considerable part of the left (not to mention the democratic non-leftists) outside Israel. It is therefore essential that the left in Western Europe also learn to see through this false and defamatory equation and to recognise it as a propagandist scarecrow on the part of zionist policy.

There is no doubt that the modern zionist movement arose as a reaction to anti-semitism and the plight of the Jews in Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this century. But it is not enough merely to point out that zionism constitutes a reaction to anti-semitism; we must determine *what kind of reaction it is*. In principle there can be two opposing attitudes towards anti-semitism as towards other similar phenomena of discrimination and oppression for racial, ethnic, religious and similar reasons.

The first attitude is common not only to socialists but also to all those who have a progressive outlook (radical liberals, radical democrats etc). The way they see things, discrimination and oppression of minorities do not originate in human nature but are rather the result of certain conditions – namely, social, economic and political conditions, which are *historical* and consequently *changeable*.

According to this view, only the struggle to change the prevailing social, economic and political conditions is the politically correct reaction to anti-semitism and other similar phenomena, this change being an organic component part of the general struggle for ‘a better world’. Of course the various progressive tendencies (revolutionary socialists, social reformists, radicals) considerably differ from one another both in their conceptions of the new world they are striving for and also in the means necessary to wage the struggle. All, however, share one common assumption: the struggle against the roots of anti-semitism and similar phenomena is not futile and (as a part of the general struggle for a better society) is the only correct political answer.

On the other hand, in the case of those who hold reactionary and racist views, we generally find an opposing attitude: the antagonism and conflict between the majority of a population and racial, ethnic and religious minorities are rooted in ‘human nature’ itself; a struggle against anti-semitism (or against similar phenomena) is pointless because anti-semitism is a necessary, normal, indeed even healthy phenomenon. The only way to solve the problem once and for all is to destroy its alleged roots: it is imperative to change the situation where Jews live as a minority among non-Jews. It will not be difficult for the reader to see that this second attitude is the one characteristic of anti-semites. However, the truth is that this attitude constitutes the fundamental premise and the point of departure for *both anti-semitism and zionism*. The only difference is that zionism appeals to the Jews to leave the ‘non-Jewish’ peoples *of their own free will*, whereas anti-semitism simply demands that *they be thrown out*.

One can show that many anti-semites are aware of the elements that anti-semitism and zionism have in common. For example, the British colonel, R. Meinertzhagen (who was political officer on the staff of the conqueror of Palestine in the first world war, General Allenby)

confides to us: 'My inclination towards Jews in general is governed by an anti-semitic instinct which is invariably modified by personal contact. My views on zionism are those of an ardent zionist'.⁹

To the anti-semite's friendly wave the zionist responds with an elegant bow. In his diary, the founder of zionism, Theodor Herzl, tells how he was influenced by the Dreyfuss trial, on which he, Herzl, reported for an anti-semitic Vienna newspaper:

'In Paris (. . .) I achieved a freer attitude towards anti-semitism, which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all, I recognised the emptiness and futility of trying to "combat" anti-semitism.'¹⁰

The ideology of zionism, as conceived by its founder, Theodor Herzl, is based on earlier studies done by other 'race theoreticians'. For one of them, anti-semitism is subject to a biological law: 'Jewbaiting is a kind of demonopathy with a difference: it is not a quality of a particular race but common to all mankind . . . Like a psychic affliction, it is hereditary, and as a disease has been incurable for two thousand years.'

Another 'theoretician in things Jewish' says: 'Jewish noses can't be re-shaped and black, curly Jewish hair can't be changed into blond hair or combed straight by christening. The Jewish race is a basic one and reproduces itself in its integrity despite climatic influences. The Jewish type has itself always remained the same throughout the course of the centuries. (. . .) It's no use Jews and Jewesses denying their origin by being christened and disappearing into the great sea of Indogermanic and Mongol tribes. The Jewish type cannot be exterminated.' Although these statements could well have come from the Alfred Rosenberg Nazi school, we must name the actual authors: the first is the zionist thinker Leo Pinsker, the second is Moses Hess.¹¹

It is not difficult to cite many further quotations from zionist sources, from the beginnings of zionism to the present day, which show the common theoretical point of departure of zionism and anti-semitism. We shall spare the reader these quotes and make do with the analysis of a young contemporary Israeli historian, Yigal Elam:

'Zionism assumed anti-semitism to be a natural state of affairs as far as the attitude of the world towards the Jews was concerned. (. . .) zionism did not consider anti-semitism an abnormal, absurd, perverse or marginal phenomenon. Zionism considered anti-semitism a fact of nature, a standard constant, the norm in the relationship of the non-Jews to the presence of Jews in their midst (. . .), zionism considered anti-semitism a normal, almost rational reaction of the gentiles to the abnormal, absurd and perverse situation of the Jewish people in the Diaspora.'¹²

Revealing and illuminating is the almost apologetic understanding a prominent zionist leader shows for Nazism in 1934:

'(The Jews) have been drawn out of the last secret recesses of christening and mixed marriages. We are not unhappy about it. In

their being forced to declare themselves, to show real determined courage, to stand by their community, we see at the same time the fulfilment of our desires. (. . .) The theory of assimilation has collapsed. We are no longer hidden in secret recesses. We want to replace assimilation by something new: *the declaration of belonging to the Jewish nation and the Jewish race*. A state, built according to the principle of purity of the nation and race (ie the Third Reich – *editor's note*), can only be honoured and respected by a Jew who *declares* his belonging to his own kind.¹³

The far-reaching harmony between zionism and anti-semitism, caused by the common ideological point of departure, goes even further than could be assumed . . .

The introduction to the infamous racist Nuremberg Laws of 15 September 1935 says among other things: 'If the Jews had a state of their own in which the bulk of their people were at home, the Jewish question could already be considered solved today, even for the Jews themselves. *The ardent zionists of all people have objected least of all to the basic ideas of the Nuremberg Laws*, because they know that these laws are the only correct solution for the Jewish people too (. . .).'¹⁴

Such implicit harmony between zionism and anti-semitism must have been a dreadful blow for those Jews and non-Jews who saw the solution of the issue in waging a political struggle to 'democratise' their societies. Isaac Deutscher reports that in Eastern Europe, and especially in Poland, the Yiddish-speaking workers who considered themselves Jews without reservation were the most resolute enemies of zionism. They were determined opponents of emigration to Palestine. These anti-zionists thought the idea of an evacuation, an exodus from the countries they called home, where their ancestors had lived for centuries, amounted to abdicating their rights, yielding to hostile pressure, betraying their struggle and surrendering to anti-semitism. For them, zionism seemed to be the triumph of anti-semitism, legitimising and validating the old cry 'Jews out'. The zionists accepted it, they wanted 'out'.¹⁵

Zionism was indeed *a reaction* to anti-semitism; the *basic assumption*, however, on which zionist ideology is based *agrees with that of anti-semitism*.

Zionism and the rights of the Jews

From what has been explained above, it becomes clear why zionism was so often indifferent to the struggle against anti-semitism and for equality for the Jews; as it disputes from the very outset the possibility and usefulness of a struggle against anti-semitism. The situation of Jews living outside Palestine interest zionism only in so far as they are moved by their situation to emigrate to Palestine or at least to support

zionism. This is expressed by the Israeli historian Y. Elam, whom we have already quoted above, as follows: 'From the very first moment it (zionism) gave up all considerations connected with the situation of the Jewish people in the Diaspora, except in so far as they contributed to the zionist enterprise.' And so it came about that in the years after the Nazi takeover in Germany, 'when the demonstrations and protest actions against the Nazi regime of terror reached their climax, the voice of zionism was not to be heard.'¹⁶

The zionists in their entirety rejected the continued existence of the 'Diaspora'. According to this view, the life of Jews outside Palestine/Israel is reprehensible, whereas only emigration to Palestine, the active participation in the zionist enterprise, is considered desirable. Regarding the attitude of zionists towards the Jews living in the Diaspora, the Israeli professor of history and zionist functionary of many years standing, Arie Tartakower, says: 'They (the majority within zionism) considered every attempt to protect Jewish rights in the Diaspora to be a complete waste of energy.'¹⁷ Even if zionism's contempt for the Diaspora was an apparent contradiction – for selfish reasons zionism could not be indifferent to what became of the reservoir of immigrants – it seems that the zionists (like Herzl originally) considered anti-semitic intrigues, which might drive the Jews to Palestine, to be more important, up to a certain point, than the struggle against anti-semitism. Without doubt, this way of reasoning implies to a degree an element of discipline, but also self-justification and most certainly a deep contempt for humanity, and infinite hypocrisy.

Before and during the second world war, individual zionists like Nahum Goldmann and Yitzhak Grienbaum, demanded participation in the struggle for the rights of the Jews. However, all trends and all important leaders of zionism refused this demand. In 1935 the board of the Jewish Agency, the institution which ran zionist activities in Palestine, appointed a special commission to look into the problems of the Jews in Germany. So it came about that during the board meeting of the Jewish Agency on 31 December 1935, David Ben-Gurion, in answer to the demand of Y. Grienbaum that the zionist movement should take part in the struggle for the rights of the Jews in Germany, stated that 'Even according to Grienbaum, the job of the commission appointed by the board was not to deal with the rights of the Jews in Germany. This commission's job was to discuss the question of the Jews in Germany only from the aspect of their immigration to Palestine, and its report is not at all inconsistent with any measures which might be taken in support of the rights of the Jews in Germany. The commission's job was to discuss the zionist aspect of the question and not to deliberate on measures to be taken in support of the rights of the Jews in the Diaspora.'¹⁸

Even if we accept the idea that the report of this commission was '*not inconsistent*' with the struggle for the rights of the German Jews

(and this is by no means sure!), the fact still remains that the commission was by no means willing to pay any attention to this struggle. Indeed, it was the main job of this commission to organise the famous 'transfer' deal, the trade contract between the Zionist movement and the Hitler government, according to which the money and property of German Jews were transferred to Palestine in the form of German goods, thus breaking an anti-Nazi economic boycott organised by anti-fascist forces. Here too (as Y. Elam rightly points out) it was 'not the attempt to save Jewish property in the Diaspora which was behind the deal, but the attempt to increase the economic strength of the Jewish "Yishuv" in Palestine.'¹⁹

This indifference on the part of Zionism towards the struggle for the rights of the Jews has existed all along. It continues even today, for example, in the case of the Soviet Jews. It must be pointed out that the vociferous campaign of the Zionist movement in this matter does not aim to help the Jews in the Soviet Union as such but is only directed at securing *one single privilege* – namely, the right to emigrate to Israel. The struggle for the rights of the Jews which, like any other struggle to secure equal rights for a national or ethnic minority, deserves the support of every progressive person, is hardly of interest to Zionism. Moreover, as we shall see later, it is certain that if, for whatever reason, there is a decline in the propensity of Soviet Jews to emigrate, this will cause many Zionist leaders disappointment and regret. This has become especially evident since 1967.

Every attempt to present the 'Jewish problem' in the Soviet Union in an ahistorical 'eternal dimension' – which is typical of idealism generally and Zionism in particular – is from the outset manipulatory and misleading, and mainly based on exploiting the emotions and the ignorance of the observer. The 'Jewish problem' in the Soviet Union is *one* of the national problems there – not the only one, not even the most important one; it does not exist 'autonomously' (according to the false slogan: 'even socialism can't solve the problem of the Jews . . .'), separately or independently of the other inner social processes of the Soviet Union. .

It would definitely be very presumptuous to attribute the Soviet Jews' willingness to emigrate only to their desire to gratify Jewish religious and cultural needs to a greater extent than is possible in the Soviet Union, or to their wish to strengthen Zionism politically, economically and militarily in Israel. For some of them that may be true. For many, however, the simple wish to live outside the Soviet Union is the main drive. Over half of the Jews allowed out of the Soviet Union, ostensibly as going to Israel, never arrive there. They 'drop out' during the stopover in Vienna or Rome and that's the end of their 'journey to Jerusalem'.²⁰ The Russian Zionist activist, Dr Viktor Polski, who left Moscow in 1974 and emigrated to Israel, laments: 'Should exit conditions be relaxed and fewer refusals be issued by the Soviet government, I have no doubt that the emigration

flow will increase considerably. However, I greatly fear that the flow of those arriving in Israel will not increase proportionately. If the Soviet Jews' image of Israel and the actual conditions behind it don't change, the proportion of those who drop out in transit will be greater than those arriving in Israel.²¹

Many of the Soviet Jewish emigrants have fallen victim to Israeli propaganda, which by radio and much more subtle and seemingly 'unofficial' means, penetrates into the interior of the Soviet Union. Recently the situation has begun to change: relations and friends already emigrated report in detail on the rude awakening they have undergone in the zionist state. Instead of a completely harmonious, affluent society without any friction, they found a class society in which they are exposed to the same exploitation, unemployment, inflation, bureaucracy, alienation which make up the day-to-day life of the rest of the working population of Israel – in spite of the great financial benefits they enjoy as privileged immigrants. In addition, there is the constant deadly peril of confrontation with the Palestinians and neighbouring Arab states. In 1974 half as many Jews emigrated from the Soviet Union to Israel as in the previous years 1973 and 1972 respectively.²²

With the worsening of the economic crisis in Israel and increasing inflation and unemployment rates, the resentment of the Israeli population at the Soviet Jews, with their special prerogatives as regards housing and jobs and their special tax reductions, is becoming more marked. Any member of the working population can easily realise that the national income cake, in any case inadequate, and the capital collected abroad by the zionist organisation are being distributed most unfairly.

In the past grievances were voiced quietly and confidentially about the preferential treatment of the immigrants; but they were 'needed'. Today, however, many in Israel express their annoyance openly. The Jews and more specifically the Jewish underprivileged social strata, like the Orientals, sections of the youth and the working class, are venting their protests more blatantly and explicitly against immigration at their own expense. For the most part they are reacting quite spontaneously, generally without realising that thereby they are already assailing one of the basic principles of zionism. 'Ingathering' of the Jews in Palestine/Israel, demographically outnumbering the Arabs, feeding the insatiable – and in the long run, inadequate – Israeli military machine with human raw material for its fight to the bitter end: this is zionism, among other things. All immigration to Israel is – today as in the past – motivated, controlled and run by zionism. The objective contradiction between zionist immigration and the interests of the working population of Israel cannot be solved. It is an additional source of internal Israeli class conflicts.²³

But what becomes of the Soviet Jewish 'drop-outs'? The Israeli journalist, Abraham Tirosh, reports on Jewish emigrants from the

Soviet Union, who either arrived in Israel and then left the country, or who managed to 'beat it' in Vienna, in transit from Moscow to Tel-Aviv, despite constant Israeli surveillance.²⁴ These Jews, who are in a terrible predicament and urgently need help, are as a rule turned away by the Zionist 'Jewish Agency' which has offices in all important cities in Western Europe. The European office of the only allegedly independent Jewish refugee organisation, the HIAS, is in Rome. Tirosch continues: Penniless and disoriented, these Jewish refugees trudge to Vienna and Rome. 'The HIAS organisation refuses to take care of the Soviet emigrants who arrive at their offices in Vienna, Rome or in Israel, unless they have received the confirmation and permission of the Jewish Agency, which looks into each case thoroughly. The acting director of the immigration department of the Jewish Agency, Yehuda Dominitz, and leading circles of the HIAS have strongly denied recent news, according to which, contravening the agreement, HIAS has begun to handle Soviet emigrants from Israel to Europe and the USA.'

The issue of the Soviet Jews can be summed up as follows: The Zionist movement is not struggling for the recognition of the right of *every person* to be able to emigrate from one country to another – in itself a progressive demand which every socialist should support – but it demands this right as a special privilege *only for Jews*, and then only on condition that they immigrate to Israel and to no other country.

The basis of the Zionist campaign on Soviet Jews is not the general idea of universal human rights but the Zionist thesis according to which every Jew everywhere in the world has a special right to Palestine. And in the same breath, Zionism denies the political and national rights of the Arabs of Palestine to their homeland.

Indeed, this same Zionist government and this same Zionist view demand the automatic right of a Jew born in Moscow to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel and automatically grant him Israeli citizenship. At the same time, the same view and the same government deny the right of an Arab born in Haifa, who today for example is living in the Gaza Strip or in a camp on the outskirts of Beirut, to return to his home town and to receive his civil rights there. Human rights in general and even the rights of the Jews as a whole interest Zionism only in as far as they help to promote Jewish immigration to Israel.

'Cruel Zionism'

We have already mentioned the *transfer*, that morally dubious business deal between the Zionist movement and the Hitler government. When this deal was criticised – at the time progressive forces were calling for an economic boycott of the Third Reich – Moshe Shertok (later known as M. Sharett, a well-known Zionist leader and

Israel's first foreign minister) answered as follows: 'Here there is a conflict between the Diaspora and Eretz-Israel (ie the Zionist enterprise in Palestine – *editor's note*) . . . It is Zionism's lot to have to be cruel to the Diaspora at times, when the development of the country demands it.'²⁵

This cruelty of Zionism towards the Jews of the world is sometimes especially cynical. It often happens that people who belong to an oppressed group but who nevertheless do not want to or cannot participate in the struggle against the cause of their oppression and prefer an individual solution – emigration to another country. Socialists do not propose to rob them of this possibility; on the contrary, they insist on the right of every individual to emigrate freely. They object most strongly however to emigration being presented as a collective political solution, as a substitute for the struggle against oppression. It must be mentioned at this point that in the 1920s, 1930s and also later, many of the East European Jews did in fact choose this individual solution of emigration. Many millions emigrated from countries where they had suffered great hardship, to the US and other countries, and thus found a satisfactory solution to their problem themselves. Zionist emigration to Palestine was negligible in comparison with the flow of Jewish non-Zionist emigration to other countries. The difference however lay in the fact that Zionist propaganda was directed at the more active and also more conscious elements, who were looking for a political and not simply an individual solution; and it offered them the wrong political solution. Moreover, it tried stubbornly to prevent these Jews from joining in the revolutionary struggle in their own countries – this was to a certain extent both the requirement and aim of the Zionist campaign.

There are also exceptional situations in which there is no possibility of a struggle on the part of the oppressed minority at all, and this minority is particularly exposed to great danger. In such cases the only humane solution is the prompt organisation of emigration for those in immediate danger to any countries ready to grant them asylum. (A fairly recent example is that of people of Indian origin in Uganda in 1972.) Such was the situation of the Jews in Germany and other European countries at the end of the 1930s. It was clear that to save the Jews from the danger of extermination, it was necessary to enable them to emigrate to any safe place.

At this historical moment truly cruel Zionism (without inverted commas) showed its absolutely cynical attitude towards the problem of saving the Jews. The leaders of Zionism reacted with indifference and even hostility towards the emigration of Jews from the endangered countries to places other than Palestine. Zionism clearly showed that in principle it is not interested in saving the Jews themselves, but only in saving them by emigration to Palestine. The leader of the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizman, said: 'Zionism is eternal life and, compared with that, saving thousands of Jews is merely

extending their lives on borrowed time.’²⁶

David Ben-Gurion’s letter of 17 December 1938 to his colleagues of the Zionist Executives is particularly shocking. In reaction to attempts by the Western powers – under pressure of public opinion – to find various expedients for the problem of the Jews in Germany, Ben-Gurion writes: ‘The Jewish problem now is not what it used to be. What is now happening to the Jews in Germany is not the end but the beginning. Other anti-semitic states will learn from Hitler’s deed . . . Millions of Jews are now faced with physical extermination. The refugee problem has now become an urgent world-wide issue and England, assisted by anti-zionist Jews, is trying to separate the refugee problem from the Palestine problem. The frightful extent of the refugee problem requires a speedy territorial solution and if Palestine won’t absorb any Jews, one would have to look for another territory. Zionism is endangered. All other territorial experiments, which are doomed to failure, will require huge amounts of capital, and if the Jews are faced with a choice between the refugee problem and rescuing Jews from concentration camps on the one hand, and aid for the national museum in Palestine on the other, the Jewish sense of pity will prevail and our people’s entire strength will be directed at aid for the refugees in the various countries. Zionism will vanish from the agenda and indeed not only from world public opinion in England and America but also from Jewish public opinion. We are risking zionism’s very existence if we allow the refugee problem to be separated from the Palestine problem.’²⁷

It is not just that zionism and saving Jews in danger of extermination are not one and the same thing; at a critical historical moment, zionism took a stand *against* saving the Jews. Here we must add something; it is true that those Jews who before the second world war had participated in the zionist emigration from Central and Eastern Europe thereby escaped annihilation by fascism. The attempt, however, to use this as a ‘socialist’ justification of zionism is nothing but demagoguery and moral blackmail.

Firstly, many more Jews managed to save themselves without zionism, indeed contrary to zionism, either by emigrating to America or by fleeing to the interior of the Soviet Union. Secondly, the deliverance of the Jews in Palestine was due to the fact that the German army in Africa under Rommel only got as far as El-Alamein, and did not conquer Palestine. Palestine was also on the planned route of the fascist conquerors. If Rommel’s army had conquered Palestine and had got as far as Syria, the fate of the Jews in Palestine would undoubtedly have been the same as their brothers’ in Poland. No ‘magical mystical’ power of zionism’s would have protected the Jews of the zionist community from the Nazis then.

Only few zionists were ready to recognise the untenability of the zionist axiom, according to which Jews could ‘get out of’ world history through zionism so that they would then be outside the fascism-anti-

fascism process. This is what the Zionist leader Yaakov Zrubavel said in January 1945 in the Congress of the 'World Organisation of Poalei Zion' and thereby gave rise to violent disagreement: 'Is it admissible to build everything on this catastrophe? (the annihilation of the European Jews – *editor's note*) And isn't it pure chance that we have survived in Palestine? Wasn't Hitler at the gates of the country? What would have been our situation and fate here then? Large sections of the population here and certainly those present here could have defended themselves, just as the Jews in Warsaw defended themselves. Hitler didn't only plan to annihilate the Diaspora but *Jewry*, all Jews everywhere. We have saved ourselves *by pure chance*.'²⁸

Those who consider the extermination of the Jews by German fascism to be a 'refutation' of the Marxist view of the Jewish problem and its solution by social struggle and social change, and who invoke this as proof of the 'necessity' of Zionism, should be answered in the words of Isaac Deutscher:

'To my mind the tragic events of the Nazi era neither invalidate the classical Marxist analysis of the Jewish question nor call for its revision . . . Classical Marxism reckoned with a healthier and more normal development of our civilisation in general, with a timely transformation of the capitalist into a socialist society. It did not reckon with the persistent survival of capitalism and its degenerative effects on our civilisation at large. Nevertheless Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky repeatedly said that mankind was confronted with the alternative of either international socialism or barbarism – *tertium non datur* . . . European Jewry has paid the price for the survival of capitalism, for the success of capitalism in defending itself against a socialist revolution. This fact surely does not call for a revision of the classical Marxists' analysis – it rather confirms it.'²⁹

Indeed there was no essential connection between the deliverance of the Jews in the second world war and Zionism. What brought about the deliverance of the Jews in Palestine was the fact that Hitler's war machine had been brought to a halt. The Jews were saved wherever Nazism could not reach. The historical conclusion to be drawn from this is that only the worldwide struggle against fascism and reaction is an effective answer to anti-Semitism. This conclusion is exactly opposed to the one drawn by the so-called 'left-wing' Zionists.

Zionist propagandists often point out that the emigrants to Palestine/Israel from Eastern and Western Europe 'and recently from the Arab countries' came because of anti-Semitism and lack of a means of livelihood: 'Zionist ideology played in most cases no role at all or at the most a secondary one . . . These people did not need any pressure or Zionist propaganda to decide to emigrate to Palestine.'³⁰

The answer to that is: first, no one is trying to deny that Zionism used countless thousands of people as human raw material for its own

enterprise, people looking for an escape from destitution and oppression, – many of them were not particularly enthusiastic zionists to begin with. On the other hand, however, the assertion that zionism did not have to exert any particular pressure on these people to get them to emigrate to Palestine/Israel is very far from the truth. Let us recall as an example the emigration of the Jews from Iraq at the beginning of the 1950s. A brief outline of the affair: in 1950 the zionist movement concluded a secret deal with the reactionary government of Iraq, according to which the emigration of the Jews of that country to Israel was to be encouraged. The Iraqi government concluded this deal among other things because it had a financial interest in it: the property of emigrant Jews was to be confiscated and handed over to the government. Both the zionists and the Iraqi government were completely satisfied with this arrangement. The only problem was that the Iraqi Jews themselves did not want to play along. The way they saw things, they had absolutely no reason to emigrate from Iraq to Israel. Their relations with the Islamic and Christian sections of the Iraqi population were in general quite good.

Then something strange happened: bombs exploded in various Jewish establishments and meeting places. Some Jews were killed by the bombs. As a result, the Iraqi Jews panicked and within a short time most of them applied to emigrate to Israel. Some time later it turned out that those who had planted the bombs were without any doubt agents of the zionist movement who were following their movement's instructions. So the leaders of cruel zionism had decided that wherever there is not enough anti-semitism, it must be intentionally created or simulated in order to frighten the Jews and motivate them to implement the zionist solution. All the details of this affair, based on the statements of Iraqi Jews and some of the 'heroes', the names of the bomb-planters, were published only fifteen years later in Israel. Many Jews from Iraq living in Israel today, when asked who planted the bombs admit in private conversations: 'Hatnu'ah' – 'the Movement', which in Hebrew usage means the *zionist movement*. This is not the only affair of this kind. In this case however many of the details became known.³¹

The Problem of Land and Expulsion

We have seen that zionism is not quite the same as the deliverance of Jews from danger and anti-semitism. Moreover, the important thing about zionism is not that it wants to solve the problem of the Jews by emigration generally. The important thing is zionism's insistence that Jewish emigration be directed exclusively at a systematic colonisation of Palestine with the aim of establishing an exclusivist Jewish nation-state. The character traits of the 'zionist enterprise' in Palestine are the inevitable result of this aim. 'Left-wing' zionists often explain that

‘the land they immigrated into was already populated by Arabs – that is the tragedy of the Jewish immigration to Palestine, which doubtlessly is frequently unrecognised or suppressed; but then, who can expect an ethnic group – whatever it is and whenever it was – to be prepared to commit collective suicide, when there is the possibility of migrating, even if the country in question is already populated by other people.’³²

There was nothing tragic about the fact that the US was already populated, for those Jews who chose to escape danger and persecution by migrating privately to the US – and there were many many more of them than those who chose the Zionist solution. It did not even enter their minds that in order to escape ‘collective suicide’ they should expel the non-Jews from the US. The ‘tragedy’ only began when the Zionist settlers aimed not only to settle in Palestine but to change it from an Arab country into an exclusivist Jewish nation-state. We put the word tragedy in inverted commas because the ‘left-wing’ apologists of Zionism use it to give the impression that it was a matter of some cruel play of blind fate, not the result of intentional and planned actions on the part of the leaders of the Zionist colonisers. Chaim Weizman, the president of the Zionist Organisation, explained the Zionists’ aim before the Paris Peace Congress in March 1919 as follows:

‘With the establishment of a Jewish national home we intend to create such conditions in Palestine as make it possible for us to transport 50,000 to 60,000 Jews yearly, to develop our language, establish our schools, universities and other national institutions and to continue to work in this direction until Palestine is finally just as Jewish as America is American and England is English.’³³ And what was to become of the existing population of Palestine, which was predominantly Arab? Some prominent Zionists are much more honest here than many of their apologists; Menachem Ussischkin, member of the Zionist Executive, reports on the Zionist solution planned for what was called in the Zionist vernacular, the ‘Arab question’:

‘We are condemned to remain a small island in the Arabian ocean for ever; but that does not mean that we should allow ourselves to be humiliated or subjugated. We have to keep silent and go to Palestine. Hard times are ahead. *But if we go to Palestine ten by ten, hundred by hundred, thousand by thousand, hundreds of thousands, the Arab question is solved.*’³⁴

The ‘Arab question’ was ‘solved’ satisfactorily for Zionism: the Arab people of Palestine were made foreigners in their own country. ‘Tragedy’?

The territorial expansion of Zionism which can be traced exactly from the already famous maps of Israel (1947, 1949, 1967, 1973) is no coincidence, no historical mishap. It arose from the global matter-of-factness of the Zionist movement which on the one hand lays exclusive Zionist claim to the whole of Palestine – naturally, only for

Jews – while on the other hand it believes it can counter the objective incompatibility of the Zionist entity with its Arab environment by means of the military, strategic and demographic advantages gained by expanding its borders. The annexation of Arab territories under Zionist rule has both history and method. In 1918 the population of Palestine was made up of 599,000 Arabs and 67,000 Jews, who owned two million hectares and 65,000 hectares of land respectively. In 1970 only 86,000 hectares of Israeli land (ie approximately 4 per cent) were still in Arab hands.³⁵ Until 1948 Zionism had to take over and colonise land ‘step by step’; but after achieving state sovereignty, it was able to take over both the lands and the villages of the Palestinian refugees (in Israeli legal terminology ‘abandoned property’) as well as substantial parts of the lands of those Arabs who stayed in Israel, by their administrative transformation into ‘closed military areas’ and their consequent confiscation. For example, this was how the ‘Judaisation’ of the Galilee was engineered and imposed from the fifties.³⁶

The Zionist policy on land left nothing to chance. The fact that it was connected with iniquities, expulsions and great suffering for the Arabs of Palestine was not a ‘mistake’ but the logical consequence of the policy which Zionism consciously and systematically pursued. Before the terms ‘colonisation’ and ‘colonialism’ generally came to be regarded throughout the world as dirty words, the Zionist movement used them to describe its own pursuits in Palestine. It spoke of ‘*Kolonizatzia*’. The nasty aftertaste of the word later led them to use the Hebrew circumlocution for the same concept. At its foundation congress in Petah-Tikva in 1919, Ben-Gurion’s party *Ahdut Ha’avoda* (which was to be the leading ‘left-wing’ party in the Zionist movement ever since) proclaimed the aim of the ‘Zionist Workers’ Movement in Palestine’ (sic): ‘The transfer of the land of Palestine, its rivers and its natural resources to the possession of the entire Jewish people.’³⁷ A definite aim without doubt, but the Zionists knew very well that ‘our country (is) not only small but for the most part in the possession of others.’³⁸

A complicated and fateful enterprise in the opinion of both its supporters and opponents who knew one thing very well: *Palestine was already populated, its transformation into a ‘Jewish’ country would have to be at the expense of the indigenous population!* The Zionist economist Alfred Bonn  , says: ‘The problem of land is one of the questions which has become particularly acute and politically significant with the expansion of Jewish colonisation in recent years. If Palestine had been an unpopulated country or if conditions there had been the same as in the colonial territories of Australia, Africa or South America which are hardly populated, the significance of the question would not have gone beyond the bounds of pure economics. *But Palestine was a populated country when the Jewish colonisation movement began and it was even more densely populated on average than the neighbouring countries.*’³⁹ Ya’akov Meiersohn who has

already been quoted says in 1920: 'In Palestine there is no unsettled land at all; the land of Palestine is settled, but not intensively cultivated. I am stating quite frankly and clearly that up till now not one piece of land has been bought in Palestine which had not been cultivated before by Arabs.'⁴⁰

The Communist Party of Palestine says in this regard: 'The Zionist movement does not like to buy lands which have to be drained before construction can begin. It prefers land which has been worked for years by the fellahin (. . .) First, it is more economical and in the public good to build kibbutzim on land that has already been cultivated than on uncultivated land; and secondly by doing this one fulfills a (Zionist) duty: the Arabs, the "goyim", are expelled from the "Holy" Land, now "redeemed" by the hands of Jewish workers.'⁴¹

Today no one can deny that the Zionist Movement of Palestine, which was under the leadership of Ben-Gurion from 1920 until the mid 1960s, intended anything but to have a Jewish majority as great as possible in a territory as big as possible – and for the most part 'free of Arabs' . . . Ben-Gurion writes: 'First and foremost I am a Zionist and strive for the concentration of the Jewish people in its own country. Only after that do I see the Arab question arising.' And further: 'If the Zionist idea has any true content, it is the content of the state. Zionism is the desire for a state of the Jews, the yearning for the country of Palestine and for the establishment of a government.' Four years later, in 1928 he wrote: 'Palestine for the Jewish people and Palestine for the Arab people is not one and the same thing . . . We would be deceiving ourselves if we said that it were one and the same . . . Palestine is destined for the Jewish people and the Arabs who live there.'⁴² It must be noted here that Ben-Gurion means *all the Jews in the world* and refers to them as a *people*, whereas in Palestine there was not even an Arab people, just 'the Arabs who live there'. In 1931 he says: 'I have always only viewed the Arab problem from the Zionist point of view, ie I wanted to solve the problem of the Jewish people in Palestine, concentrate on them in this country in order to make them a free people living in their own country. There isn't an Arab problem in Palestine, only a Jewish one – like everywhere else, by the way.'⁴³

The fact that the very vociferous Zionist 'workers' movement' practises colonialism under the cloak of socialism may be confusing, but the facts speak for themselves. For those who could not understand how socialism could be consistent with colonialism, internationalism with nationalism, workers' solidarity with expropriation and repression, the 'left-wing' Zionists enacted their verdict in 1921: 'Whenever we come across a contradiction between national and socialist principles, the contradiction should be resolved by relinquishing the socialist principle in favour of the national activity. We shall not accept the contrary attempt to solve the contradiction by dispensing with the national interests in favour of the

socialist idea.’⁴⁴ If one sees through the ‘socialist’ claims of zionism, its contradictory nature and untenability, the zionist movement loses one of its most important propagandistic hobby-horses which has helped it to rope in and take unfair advantage of socialists, who are subjectively all too sincere but nevertheless confused, in support of an objectively abominable colonial and repressive enterprise.

Indeed, that is what happens, whether it is a ‘bourgeois’ or ‘left-wing’ zionism. As far as the practical implementation of the zionist project in Palestine is concerned, the consequences for the Arabs of Palestine, the objective consequence of the zionist enterprise for the country in general are the same, no matter how one subjectively would like ‘one’s own’ zionist activity to be understood – as opposed to that of ‘the others’.

This is quite clearly a matter of planned politics. Even the founder of zionism, Theodor Herzl, writes in his diary on 12 June 1895:

‘By buying land we are immediately giving material advantages to the country which takes us in. By and by, we have to get the private land in the areas given to us out of the hands of its owners. We want to get the poor inhabitants across the borders without making a stir, by giving them work in the transit countries. But in our country we won’t give them any work at all . . . It’s good for the landowners to believe they are exploiting us and getting excessive prices for their land. But no land will be sold back to them.’⁴⁵

This was and still is even today zionism’s conscious and planned policy: the ‘poor population’ ie the majority of the Arabs in the Promised Land should be excluded from the country by all ways and means. In 1940 Joseph Weitz, head of the Colonisation Department of the Jewish National Fund in Palestine at the time, and therefore responsible for the practical implementation of zionist colonisation, wrote in his diary: ‘Among ourselves it should be clear that in this country there isn’t room for both peoples together. With the Arabs we won’t achieve our aim of being an independent nation in this small country. The only solution is Palestine, at least a West Palestine (ie the entire area west of the Jordan, as distinct from “East Palestine”, which refers to Transjordan – *editor’s note*.) without Arabs . . . and there’s no other way but to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries; to transfer all of them. Not a single village, not one tribe should be left behind . . . For this purpose money, plenty of money will be found. Only after this transfer will this country be able to absorb millions of our brethren.’⁴⁶

In his article in the daily newspaper *Davar* (officially the organ of the *Histadrut* but actually the mouthpiece of the *Mapai*/‘*Avodah* party) of 29 September 1967, Joseph Weitz himself tells us that this excellent plan, which he had entered into his diary 27 years previously, was not just his own idea. The most important zionist leaders in Palestine gave this plan their support and they started to put out feelers to see how this could be realised in practice. Indeed, a large

part of the programme was realised eight years later in 1947 when 'the UNO passed a resolution to partition the country into two states and *to our gretgreat good fortune* (our italics – *editor's note*) the war of liberation broke out which brought with it a two-fold miracle: a territorial victory and the flight of the Arabs.'

There can be no doubt that the expulsion of the Palestinians from their country was not a 'tragic blow' of blind fate but the result of consciously planned zionist policy. Under these circumstances the question posed naively by 'left-wing' zionists sounds really amazing: 'In the years of the Mandate 1920-1947/48, before the Arabs offered violent resistance to the UN resolution to partition the country, how many Arab peasants actually lost their land, despite the legislation of the Mandate protecting the Arab peasants, and could no longer work in agriculture, and how many Arabs immigrated in this period from the neighbouring countries to Palestine?'⁴⁷

Some indicative characteristics of this argument can be deduced from these questions. First, it follows that the expulsion of the Arab fellahin was warranted after the Arabs had 'offered violent resistance to the UN partition resolution'. Such views should be met with silent scorn. We should remember that in all the hypocritical apologies of colonialism throughout the world it is usual to call mass expulsions of the colonial peoples a just punishment for the fact that these wicked natives dare to offer violent resistance to their mass expulsion. Secondly, it appears that the known intentions of zionism, as expressed in the above quotations and in many other documents and the known historical facts, are supposed to be consciously ignored. Instead one should tell the story that zionism did not expel the Arab fellahin on a large scale until 1948. The truth, however, is quite different.

Examples of mass expulsions of Arab fellahin as a result of zionist colonisation can be cited very easily. Many expulsions took place before the establishment of the zionist state and continued during the entire period of the British Mandate, ie till 1948.

Such questions from 'left-wing' zionists are also intended to lead one to believe that British imperialism – with the Mandatory government – offered some effective protection against expulsion. This is not true either. In this context let us refer to the memoirs of a Jewish English zionist, M. Hyamson, who in the first half of the Mandate period was a high government official in Palestine. M. Hyamson reports on the first attempt, which was made at the beginning of the 1920s to protect Arab tenants from expulsion: The need (for these regulations) became urgent, because Jewish agencies bought relatively large amounts of land from (Arab) landowners who lived in Paris, Beirut or Cairo, whereby the moral – if not the legal – rights of the tenants, who had been resident on that land all along, were ignored. According to the new legislation the transfer of lands was forbidden if the tenant's interests were not ensured by

leaving him enough land to guarantee his own and his family's livelihood. This, however, was contrary to the interests of both sellers and buyers. The buyers were willing to pay prices higher than usual but demanded that the land be available for settlement. The sellers, who had no local interests at all, were of course keen to sell at as high a price as possible.

They very quickly found a way to dodge the law by means of a small payment. They found allies in the money lenders to whom most of the tenants were deeply in debt. In order to get the tenants to abandon the land before it was transferred, they paid them small sums of money with which they could settle some of their debts to the money lenders. Then, when the transfer came, there were no more tenants there to take care of. So everyone was completely satisfied: the sellers, the buyers and understandably the money lenders, but of course the tenants only for a limited time.

The tenants were only satisfied for a short time because the 'damages' they received from the landowner amounted to very little. It was hardly enough to repay their debts to the money lenders. Moreover, Hyamson says the fellahin and tenants who were forced to leave their lands could not obtain employment in most of the newly developed manufacturing plants in the country. These manufacturing plants were Zionist, and Zionism refused in principle to employ Arab workers. Hyamson continues that 'in 1929 a new regulation was passed which gave the tenants still less protection . . . ; it virtually legalised the established practice'.

Two years later the purchase of land began once more on a large scale and the expected problem of the Arabs without land was again at the top of the agenda. This problem caused unrest and forced the Mandatory government to enact new regulations. However the new regulations of 1931 did not offer the tenants any effective protection either, for those landowners who wanted to sell their land at 'acceptable' prices could still dodge the objectives of the law. This state of affairs continued until the end of the Mandate.⁴⁸

We have summarised only a small part of Hyamson's interesting chapter on this topic. It clearly follows from the extracts above and from the entire chapter that the problem of those tenants who lost the basis of their livelihood (ie the land which they and their forefathers had cultivated for generations) because of Zionist colonisation, was an extremely serious one and involved a great number of people. Similarly it is clear that the decrees of the Mandatory government could not protect the tenants effectively from the conspiracy between the Zionist institutions, landowners and moneylenders, serving their common interests. One example only:

The 8,000 fellahin from 22 villages who had lost their land at the beginning of the 1920s when the great landowner family Sursuk sold land to the Zionists, received exactly ten shillings per capita from the Zionist Organisation.⁴⁹

To make zionist colonisation seem harmless, zionists often point out that at that time 'a total of only 664 claims for damages' were placed by Arab peasants. Here, besides the fact that the possibility of so-called (and relatively low) damages was publicised as little as possible, nothing is said about the number of dispossessed peasants who from the outset were excluded from the possibility of claiming 'damages':

Peasants who were expelled after their land was sold to non-Jews. (There were many sales to Arab agents and profiteers who then sold the land to the Acquisition of Land Department of the Zionist Organisation)

Peasants who were not classified as tenants; agricultural workers and peasants who only sold part of their land.

Peasants who had no documentary proof of their tenancy rights (very many!)

Peasants who after sale were allocated other land, even if it could not be cultivated.

Peasants who had found other employment after being expelled.

That is how, in the interests of zionism, they managed to limit the classification 'landless Arab' to a small group.⁵⁰

In the period 1920–36, the time when the foundations of the zionist enterprise in Palestine were being laid both in the towns and in the country areas, there was an increased 'exodus' of peasants from the country areas – an exodus which must be understood correctly: not 'out of' the country but a migration as a result of the peasants' losing their land. The Arab urban population of Palestine increased from 194,000 in 1922 to 298,000 in 1936.

The landless Arabs met with increasing unemployment in the zionist-dominated urban economy, caused by the zionist insistence on 'Hebrew labour' and boycott of Arab labour. But let us get back to the fact that the fellahin were mostly expelled by the sellers before the sale (in deliberate agreement with the buyers). This fact enabled zionism, like Pontius Pilate, to protest its innocence and to maintain it was not responsible for the expulsion of the fellahin. However, there are also enough examples of cases in which the zionist colonisers, in collaboration with the British police, actively participated in the expulsion of the indigenous fellahin as in Al Fuk (today Afula) at the end of 1924, or Wadi al-Hawarith (today Emek Hefer) in 1933.

Still today the propagandists of zionism spread the claim that the zionist institutions (at least until 1948) in most cases received 'deserted lands' so that zionism is not responsible for the expulsion of the masses of fellahin. From a technical point of view and applied to the appropriate cases that is not a lie but actually a half-truth – which is worse than a lie. For the zionist propagandists conceal the fact that, to dodge the laws enacted to protect the fellahin, the zionist institutions demanded that the sellers expell their tenants themselves, before going through with the sale.

By the way, we can see here how far from the truth is yet another claim of the 'left-wing' zionists: the claim that 'it was not the poor fellahin but the great landowners who, for reasons of class consciousness, rejected Jewish immigration and they consequently feared "infection" of their fellahin with social ideas imported from Europe'. In the first place, the 'social ideas' zionism brought from Europe were intended for exclusively Jewish use. All the institutions of organised work and community life were in no way intended for Arabs. Zionism never propagated any progressive social ideas among the fellahin. On the contrary: zionism was, as we saw above, the objective ally of the great landowners. This was the only social class in Arab society which received any advantages through zionist colonisation – they received for their lands prices which were higher than before colonisation. The fellahin were in fact the victims of an alliance between zionism, the great landowners and the moneylenders. It is true that to veil their real interests and intentions, the great landowners sometimes launched vigorous verbal campaigns against zionism. But it was all talk.

Here we must mention that the method of expulsion (which was usually concealed to evade the law) and the lack of any reliable registration of proprietary and usufructuary rights are the reasons why it is still impossible today to supply exact details as to the extent of the expulsions. There is no doubt that there must have been many thousands. The exact figure, however, would have to be determined through painstaking detailed research. The question how many fellahin lost their land because of zionist colonisation can at present only be answered generally.

In this context, here is an extract from a speech of Moshé Dayan before the students of the Haifa Technical University ('Technion') as quoted by the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* of 4 April 1968: 'We came to this country, already inhabited by Arabs, and established here a Hebrew, ie a Jewish state. In large areas we bought lands from the Arabs. Jewish villages arose in place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of these villages and I'm not reproaching you for that, as those geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books no longer exist but the villages don't exist any more either. Nahalal arose in place of Mahlul, Gevat in place of Jibta, Sarid in place of Haneifs and Kefar Yehoshu'a in place of Tel-Shaman. Not one place in this country was built where there hadn't formerly been an Arab population.'

Indeed the professional generals of zionism often speak more clearly and more frankly than many of their 'left-wing' apologists. The colonisation of a country and the resulting expulsion and oppression of its indigenous inhabitants, and all of this with the propagandistic aim of a so-called 'progressive' society in Palestine, as the zionists, disguised as socialists, saw it, is not only pure hypocrisy but also the theoretic and practical prostitution of revolutionary

theory – a theory advocated only verbally.

The first systematic research into the extent of the destruction which zionism and zionist colonisation caused to the original Palestinian society, compiled by the Palestinian historian 'Aref al'Aref and presented on 15 February 1973 by the chairman of the Israeli League for Human Rights, Professor Israel Shahak, contains a complete list of those Arab villages in Palestine which existed until 1948 and which today would be sought in vain. They no longer exist. In figures: 385 – in words: three hundred and eight-five.

It follows from some of the quotations above that it was part of the zionist expulsion policy to exert pressure continually on the Arabs by not employing them. 'Left-wing' zionists feel slightly uncomfortable about this point . . . but only for a moment. They concede that the displacement of Arab workers from their jobs is one of those things which 'have a repulsive effect on us Europeans'. However in the same breath they call on their readers to free themselves from such merciful, weak, apparently specifically European 'prejudices'. You must understand, the Arab workers had to go, 'to protect these (Jewish) workers from starvation, as it was just impossible for Jewish workers to live on the same wages as Arab workers'. So, one has to excuse them: the Jewish workers had a European stomach which was bigger than that of the Arab members of the same class.

After such brilliant argument, however, they apparently get an uneasy feeling once more and admit that perhaps 'some kind of solution more favourable to the Arabs could have been found. For example, one need only have somehow institutionalised the actual circumstances – the Arab peasants sold their products unhindered at lower prices even in Jewish towns – and a lot of dirty linen would have been avoided.'

This attempt to excuse, however, is a twofold failure: an untruth and an absurdity at one and the same time. It is untrue that the zionist institutions did not systematically interfere with and hinder the sale of products by the Arab fellahin: this was done not only with propaganda but also with the aid of more effective means of 'persuasion'. (The zionist leader David Hakohen reports for example in the supplement of the newspaper *Ha'aretz* of 15 November 1968 how he and his colleagues poured petroleum over tomatoes being sold by Arabs and broke their eggs.) The attempt at an excuse is fundamentally absurd because the only way of solving the problem which would have avoided 'a lot of dirty linen' would have been for zionism to abandon its main aim.

From the standpoint of the zionist aim – the transformation of Palestine, which was an Arab country, into a 'Jewish' nation-state – the presence of the Arabs was an obstacle which had to be removed. The way to achieve this goal was to refuse the Arabs work, as all zionists since Herzl have realised.

The policy of 'zionising' and at the same time 'de-Arabising'

Palestine has not changed fundamentally. On the contrary: the Arab areas conquered in the 1967 June War gave Israel the opportunity to erect more than 80 additional civilian and military settlements there and to expel many thousands of Arabs, some for the second time in twenty years. The guiding words of Moshé Dayan say it quite clearly: 'In the course of the last hundred years, our people have been undergoing a process of building up the country and the nation of expansion, by increasing the number of Jews and settlements and of colonisation in order to expand the borders. Let there be no Jew who says that this is the end of the process. Let there be no Jew who says that we are near the end of the road.'¹

Israel is as a state a huge *fait accompli*. However, it is not likely that Israel, even within the borders of 4 June 1967 'plus corrections', can look forward to peaceful and harmonious coexistence with its Arab neighbours in the long term. The Middle East conflict is not simply a 'border conflict'. The cause of the historical conflict between the state of Israel in its present Zionist form on the one hand and the Arabs on the other, is the existence and the effects of Zionism. Whoever is sincerely interested in the future of Israelis and Arabs in the Middle East should seriously reflect on this.

References

1 First published in English in *New Left Review* 65, Jan-Feb 1971.

2 Cf. Alfred Moos, in: *links* no 33, 1972. A Hebrew translation of Moos's article was immediately published in Israel by the Zionist group which had split from the CP of Israel in 1965, *Maki* (today: *Moked*) in its organ 'Kol Ha'am' no 32 (1972) under the title 'Zionism, the Scarecrow'. This group had taken it upon itself to back the Israeli state by accusing 'from a communist point of view' all opponents of the Zionist policy of anti-socialism and by seizing most gratefully on any political or apologetic contribution from abroad. These people revised socialist positions not only by putting forward the classical Zionist arguments, but by such historicist constructions which use the actual events and negative trends in the international communist movement and in the Soviet Union, to come to the conclusion they desire, i.e. that socialist opposition to Zionism is only one more negative trend, which, like the Stalinisation of the Soviet Union and the Comintern, is to be condemned and repudiated. When in the following the position of 'left-wing' Zionists is quoted, we are referring to this article by A. Moos.

3 The original Hebrew text of the *Matzpen* article mentioned appeared originally in the Tel-Aviv organ '*Matzpen*' and the editors presumed that the reader is familiar with the organisation's analysis of the history and nature of Zionism, as put forward in many articles since 1962. It is obvious that these analyses cannot be repeated in detail here. They partly appear in: Arie Bober (ed), *The Other Israel: The Radical Case against Zionism*, New York 1972; Cf also Nathan Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah*, Inklinks, London 1978.

We shall only go into historical questions here as far as it is necessary to disprove the argument of the so-called 'left-wing' Zionist criticism of anti-Zionism.

- 4 Speech by Esther Maria Frumkina in: *Der 2. Kongreß der Kommunistischen Internationale. Prot. der Verhandlungen vom 19.7. in Petrograd und vom 23.7. bis 7.8.1920 in Moskau*, published by Verlag der KI, Hamburg 1921 p198.
- 5 David Ben-Gurion, *Memoirs*, Part 1, Tel-Aviv 1971, p245 (in Hebrew).
- 6 Cf eg in *Kontres*, organ of the Ahduth Ha'avoda, no 47, Tel-Aviv 1920 (in Hebrew).
- 7 'Yaakow Meiersohn, *Nach der 5. Poalei-Zion-Konferenz* – Brief an die Genossen der Sozialistischen Arbeiterpartei in Palästina (in Yiddish), Vienna 1920, reprinted in Mario Offenberg, *Kommunismus in Palästina-Nation und Klasse in der antikolonialen Revolution*, Meisenheim/Glan (BRD) 1975.
- 8 Aharon Cohen: *Israel and the Arab World*, Tel-Aviv 1964, p259 (in Hebrew).
- 9 R. Meinerzhagen, *Middle East Diary*, London 1958 p49.
- 10 *The diaries of Theodore Herzl*, Gollancz, London 1958 p6.
- 11 Leo Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*, New York 1948 p33 and M. Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem*, Tel-Aviv 1935 p25/26.
- 12 Cf Y. Elam in an article in 'Ot', organ of the Israeli Labour Party *Ma'arakh* no 2, Tel-Aviv 1967 (in Hebrew).
- 13 This quotation comes from a book which appeared in Berlin in 1934. The author was at that time one of the leading zionists in Germany and became a leading zionist in the USA and chairman of the international leadership of the – zionist controlled – World Jewish Congress.
- 14 Cf J. Prinz, *Wir Juden*, Berlin 1934 p154 (emphasis in original).
- 15 Cf *Die Nürnberger Gesetze*, 5. Auflage, Berlin 1939 p13/14 (our italics).
- 15 I. Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew*, London 1969 p67.
- 16 Y. Elam, *Introduction to Zionist History*, Tel-Aviv 1972 p113 and p122 (in Hebrew).
- 17 A. Tartakower, *The Jewish Worker's Way to Zionism: Zionism and Socialism*, New York 1954 p63.
- 18 Reprinted from the minutes of the meeting in Y. Elam, *loc cit*, p123.
- 19 Y. Elam, *loc cit*, p122: 'Yishuv' was the term for the Jewish community in Palestine, dominated by the zionist movement, before 1948. On the 'transfer' deal see Shaul Esh, *'Iunim beheqer ha-sho'ah ve-yahadut zmanenu*, Institute of Contemporary Judaism, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1973 p108ff.
- 20 Herberg Lucht from Vienna in: *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin) of 1 January 1975; and others.
- 21 Viktor Polski in: Dov Goldstein, Interview of the Week, in *Ma'ariv* of 27 December 1974.
- 22 Cf *Le Monde*, 20 December 1974 and *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin), 21 December 1974.
- 23 Cf A. Hoder, 'Russian Jews, Black Jews and Non-Jewish Jews', in *Israca* no 5, London 1973 p 16–25.
- 24 In *Ma'ariv* of 10 January 1973.
- 25 Quoted from Y. Elam, *loc cit*, p122.
- 26 Quoted from Y. Elam, *loc cit*, p111. The Israeli historian S. B. Beit-Zvi shows in his recently published monograph – *Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust*, Tel-Aviv, 1977 (in Hebrew) – how 'As a result of narrow-mindedness and fear of the danger of territorialism [ie, the "danger" that the Jewish problem might be solved by migration to some territory other than Palestine – *editor's note*] the zionist movement in a number of cases

acted against attempts of Jews and non-Jews to save the lives [of Europe's Jews]. As time went on this intervention [against salvation of Jews] grew in scope and energy . . . In fact, the intervention against attempts to save Jews, to the extent that they were not connected with immigration to Palestine, continued up to the end of the [second world] war.' (*ibid*, p458) Even Y. Grienbaum, who in 1935 had demanded that the Zionist movement participate in the struggle for the rights of Europe's Jews, opposed in 1942 demands that Zionist funds (devoted to the colonisation of Palestine) be used to finance projects for saving the lives of Jews. Beit-Zvi quotes Grienbaum as saying 'When I was asked whether the money of the Zionist Construction Fund may not be used for saving Jews, I said "No", and I now repeat, "No". I know that people wonder why I found it necessary to say this. Friends tell me that even if what I say is right, there are things which must not be revealed in a moment of sorrow and anxiety such as this. I cannot agree with this. In my view, the wave which relegates Zionist activities to second place must be resisted.' (*ibid*, p110).

On the same subject see also Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* New York 1961.

27 Quoted from Y. Elam, *loc cit*, p 125–26. The historical background was the revolt of the Arabs of Palestine against British rule, which Great Britain had a hard time putting down. The British government did not want to antagonise the indigenous Arab population too much at that time by allowing a large wave of Zionist colonisation and were supported in this by anti-Zionist Jews.

28 In *Davar*, 5 February 1945, emphasis in the original.

29 I. Deutsch, *loc cit*, p49–50.

30 A. Moos, *loc cit*.

31 Cf the reports in the weekly *Ha'olam Haze* 20 April 1966 and 1 June 1966. This operation is of course denied by Zionists. Cf Y. Me'ir, *Children of the Desert*, Underground Organisations in Iraq 1941–1951, Tel Aviv 1973 p 204f (in Hebrew).

32 A. Moos, *loc cit*.

33 Quoted from Y. Elam, *loc cit*, p73/74.

34 Quoted from: *The XII. Zionist Congress in Karlsbad from 1–14 September 1921*, Berlin 1922 p70.

35 L. Gaspar, *Histoire de la Palestine*, Paris 1970 p104 and p119.

36 See Sabri Jeries, *The Arabs in Israel*, Beirut 1969 pp55–90, where there is a fully verified description of this.

37 Ben-Gurion, *loc cit*, p117.

38 Cf the speech of Siskin, member of the subcommittee for colonisation in the Zionist Executive at the XII Zionist Congress, *Minutes*, *loc cit*, p104.

39 A. Bonné, *Palestine, Country and Economy*, Berlin 1935 p154/55.

40 Y. Meiersohn, *loc cit*.

41 Quoted from the statement of the Union Department of the PCP, October 1924, reprinted in: M. Offenberger, *loc cit*, p336–337.

42 D. Ben-Gurion, *loc cit*, p299/300, p275 and p339.

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47 A. Moos, *loc cit*.

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49 Cf C. Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel*, London 1965 p119. Details of the

complicated dodges used by the zionists to evade government regulations enacted to protect tenants are given by J. Weitz in the preface to his *Diaries*, Israel 1965 (in Hebrew), vol 1, ppxxii-xxviii. Many illustrations can be found throughout these *Diaries*.

50 Cf *A Survey of Palestine*, published by the Palestine government vol I, p296 and *Palestine Royal Commission Report 1937*, p239, 240.

51 General Moshé Dayan, in *Ma'ariv*, Tel-Aviv 7 July 1968.

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National formation in the Arab region: a critique of Samir Amin

Mohammad Ja'far

Introduction

Nationalist ideology of one form or another has been the central expression of Arab politics in the twentieth century. In its Nasserite, Ba'athist, Palestinian, Lebanese, Algerian, and pan-Arab varieties, it has moulded and shaped the consciousness of generation after generation of Arabs.

Working class political traditions – as opposed to economic trade unionism – have on the whole been of a stalinist variety. Historically such traditions have developed on a mass scale in only a few Arab countries, where mass communist parties managed to occupy the local political scene for short periods (Sudan or Iraq between 1958 and 1959). However even in the case of the Arab CPs, the influence of stalinism and the 'socialism in one country' thesis has meant that the CPs have either counterposed themselves to Arab nationalism because of their subservience to Moscow rather than out of a more profound understanding of the national question (as happened on the question of recognition of Israel in 1948); or else they simply adapted to local nationalist pressure (example: the Egyptian CP dissolving into Nasser's Arab Socialist Union, or the Iraqi CP supporting Qassem in Iraq). Such trajectories invariably ended in the same result: the Arab CPs were outflanked by nationalist formations and became marginalised. This has created a situation in which the process of radicalisation in the Arab countries, especially after 1948 has generally bypassed the traditional CPs and been channelled through fundamentally nationalist organizations like the Arab Nationalist Movement, the FLN in Algeria, the Ba'ath, and more recently the organizations of the Palestinian resistance. This is quite different from the situation in Southeast Asia, for example, where mass CPs in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand were at the forefront of both the victories and defeats of the post-World War II struggles in that part of the world.

Perhaps not surprisingly, an important victim of this hegemony of nationalism on the political and cultural formation of the Arab left is objectivity in understanding the phenomenon itself. The study of nationalism in the Arab world is immediately confronted with: (a) its deeprooted and almost 'instinctive' insertion into everyday life; and

(b) the absence of marxist/internationalist analytical traditions of any substance. Certainly many books and countless articles have been written on the subject by Arab left-wing intellectuals of all varieties. In recent years, coinciding with the rise and decline of the Palestinian resistance movement, the subject of Palestinian nationalism has come to the forefront in journals like *Shu'un Filistiniya*, *Dirasat 'Arabiya* and *Palestine Studies*. Unfortunately, this literature, while dealing with the history, origins and evolution of nationalist movements or political formations, is inadequate at a most fundamental level: it generally evades and mystifies the marxist distinction between nationalism (understood as an ideological and political phenomenon) on the one hand, and national formation (in the sense of the development of the objective socio-economic foundations for the nationalist phenomenon) on the other.

If we look at pan-Arabism, for example, a number of important questions are immediately posed. How is it that the Arab world is distinguished from regions like Southeast Asia or Latin America by the fact that pan-Arab nationalism played such a prominent role in more than one Arab country, in the form of Nasserism or, to a lesser extent, Ba'athism? Nowhere in Latin America, Southeast Asia, or even Africa, have regional or supra-country nationalisms played as far-reaching a role as in the Arab world. Peronism, unlike Nasserism, was above all else an Argentinian phenomenon. Its repercussions on Chile or Brazil were of a wholly different order of magnitude than, for example, Nasserism's impact on other Arab countries. What, then, is the basis in the actual history of the modern formation of social classes in the Arab region that explains this phenomenon? Or, to put the question more bluntly, is there a single Arab nation, or are there a multitude of different nations in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon . . . etc.?

A similar problem is posed in the case of a much more recent development: Palestinian nationalism. What are its roots in the social reality of the Arab region? How is it that this nationalism is strongest outside Palestine, where a Palestinian class structure and in particular bourgeoisie does not exist? Certainly there are Lebanese, Kuwaiti, and Egyptian bourgeois of Palestinian origin. But in no sense are they economically constituted as Palestinians. To what extent, therefore, is Palestinian nationalism something more basic, fundamental and lasting than simply the wishes and aspirations of intellectuals and about one and a half million refugees scattered in several Arab countries?

The scientific study of nationalism in the Arab world requires, as a methodological point of departure, research into the actual history of social formations. We must, in contrast with the nationalist standpoint, turn the problem right side up. It then becomes one of tracing and following through the mediations from the objective structures of Arabic-speaking countries to their reflections at the superstructural or ideological and political levels. It is only in this way that some of the

great problems facing Arab revolutionaries on both a theoretical and practical organisational plane can even begin to be resolved.

It is to the credit of Samir Amin that he has at least tried to tackle the problem of national formation in the Arab region from a marxist viewpoint. His book *La Nation Arabe: Nationalisme et Luttres de Classes* poses a number of stimulating and provocative problems and hypotheses.¹ It is in this sense an important first contribution to the debate on nationalism that sooner or later will have to take place amongst Arab revolutionaries.

However, we shall argue that Amin's central thesis regarding the historical foundations of national formation in the Arab region are in our opinion misleading because: (a) they rely on a partial and one-sided factual basis on matters to do with the pre-capitalist history of the Arab world; and (b) they separate national formation from its real roots in the development of capitalism.

We shall summarise Samir Amin's main ideas in the order in which they will be taken up in the following two sections:

(a) Amin argues that the social formations of the Arab world have been, with the exception of Egypt, 'trading formations', for more or less the entire stretch of its history.

'In order to understand the Arab world, it is necessary to see it in its context, as a great zone of passage, a sort of turntable between the major areas of civilisation in the Old World. This semi-arid zone separates the three zones of agrarian civilisation: Europe, Black Africa, Monsoon Asia. It has therefore always fulfilled a commercial function, bringing into contact, through its role as the only middleman, agricultural communities that had no direct awareness of each other. The social formations on the basis of which the Arab world's civilisations were erected were always commercial in character. This means that the surplus on which the cities lived was drawn in the main not from exploitation of the area's own rural inhabitants but from the profits of the long-distance trading activity that its monopoly role as intermediary ensured to it – that is, an income derived in the last analysis from the surpluses extracted from their peasantries by the ruling classes of the other civilisations.'²

The Arab region was unified according to this viewpoint by a class of merchant warriors in the first two centuries of Islam. The Islamic conquests allowed the Arabs to recapture long-distance trade routes which had shifted away from the Arabian peninsula, enabling them to revive once again a civilisation based on the profits of long-distance trade. The region was 'profoundly unified' by this merchant ruling class. Unlike feudal Europe, in which the ruling classes tended to diversify because of their dependence on a variety of local peasant populations, in the Arab world unity was preserved 'because the

peasants did not play this role'.³ Naturally, the vicissitudes of this externally generated surplus 'proved to be those also of Arab civilisation'. The decline of the Islamic Caliphate is thus attributed to a series of external catastrophes like the Crusades, the fall of Baghdad, and the shifting of trade routes.⁴ Egypt was always the 'great peasant exception' whose Arabisation remained superficial.⁵ The disappearance of the 'Arab nation' in the classical age of Islam 'gave back life to the nation that was able to live exclusively by the internal generation of a substantial surplus, namely, the eternal Egyptian nation'.⁶

(b) It can be seen from the previous quote that Amin postulates the existence of an 'eternal' Egyptian nation, and an Arab nation which he believes came into existence under the tutelage of a ruling class of merchant warriors in the first centuries of Islam.

'Nations founded in this way upon the merchant classes are unstable . . . This is why it can be said that if the nation is a social phenomenon that can appear at any stage in history and is not necessarily associated with the capitalist mode of production, the national phenomenon is reversible; it can flourish or it can disappear, depending on whether the unifying class strengthens its power or loses it.'⁷

A nation is understood by Samir Amin to appear when, over and above a shared geography and community of language and culture, 'a social class, controlling the central state machinery, ensures economic unity of the community's life – that is, when the organisation by this dominant class of the generation, the circulation, and distribution of the surplus, welds together into one the fates of the various provinces.' The classical marxist formulation that national formation begins with the very earliest stages of capitalism is 'unacceptable', 'for it is clear that imperial China or ancient Egypt were not mere conglomerations of peoples . . .'⁸

The pre-history of national formation

There is little doubt among historians of the Arab region that the original impetus behind the growth and development of many important pre-Islamic cities, in the Arabian peninsula (Mecca and Medina) and on the fringes of the Arabian desert and the Fertile Crescent (Petra and Palmyra), was the intermediary role played by central and northern Bedouin Arab tribes in long-distance commerce. The rise of Mecca epitomised this process. This is how Henri Lammens has described this city of merchants, brokers, and middlemen on the eve of Islam:

'It would be difficult to imagine a society in which capital enjoyed a more active circulation. The tājir, business man, was not engaged in

hoarding, in gathering wealth into his strong boxes. He had a blind faith in the unlimited productivity of capital, in the virtue of credit. Brokers and agents, the bulk of the population lived on credit . . .'⁹

For pre-Islamic Arabia, then, Amin's thesis accurately sums up an important aspect of Arab society. However, the surplus-producing civilisations whose existence nurtured early Bedouin society were neither Europe, Black Africa, or Monsoon Asia.¹⁰ They were in fact primarily the agrarianate, most ancient civilisations of Southwestern Arabia (Yemen), Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Mediterranean coastal regions of Syria.¹¹ The historical sequence seems to have gone something like this. Some time before the second millenium BC, semitic peoples, who might have been traders from the Eastern Mediterranean, filtered down the Red Sea coastline to settle in southwestern Arabia. They eventually established hydraulic agrarianate city-states, based on the ingenious qanat system of water collection and distribution. The most prominent of these was the kingdom of Saba. The establishment of these civilisations in the Yemen is thought to have preceded by several centuries the domestication of the camel and its use in long-distance commerce. Camel pastoralism – i.e. tribes living off the meat, milk and hides of their herds of camels – seems to have arisen at first on the fringes of these agrarianate civilisations and only *after* camels had been used in long-distance commerce. This was undoubtedly the great invention that made possible the colonisation of the desert interior and the formation of a highly specialised mode of life based on communities of camel users and breeders in the Arabian peninsula. It is quite firmly established today that pre-Islamic cities like Petra, Hira and Mecca were first established by sedentarised Bedouin nomads or people who had been arabised by them.

It appears to be the case that the rise of a flourishing and quite unique form of Bedouin society was closely associated with what can best be described as a commercial revolution in the Near East. Control of commerce going through the peninsula was at first in the hands of the ancient Yemenites, whose agrarianate civilisation gradually began to adapt itself to this long-distance trade. The agricultural produce and natural flora of the Yemen was anyway quite suitable for commerce, in particular the luxury spices, aromatics and perfumes, of which frankincense and myrrh are probably the most famous.

The introduction of the riding horse into the Arabian peninsula some time between 500 and 400 BC, seems to have stimulated the first truly *independent* evolution of northern and central Arabian nomadism. The horse-camel combination meant that the Bedouin Arab had to be reckoned with as an extremely efficient fighter who could cross long distances by camel and launch swift attacks on horseback. The hegemonic position of the ancient Yemenites over the peninsula began to weaken as their military superiority was in-

creasingly challenged. Control of the trade routes gradually slipped into the hands of their northern neighbours. This seems to have been how cities like Hira and later on Mecca established themselves.

The significance of the historic north-south divide between the Arabs of the Hijāz, Najd and Yamāma on the one hand, and the ancient agrarianate Yemenites on the other, should not be underestimated. It persisted in Arab mythology and even Muslim genealogical systems, according to which the Arabs constitute a single race whose members descend from one of two founding ancestors – Kahtān (who fathered the southern agrarian branch) and Adnān (who fathered the northern nomadic/urban branch). This duality in legends and mythology reflects, we would argue, a real duality inscribed in the original formation of the Arabs. The first Arabs were not some pre-historic community of primitive nomads or peasants, who somehow developed a remarkably expressive and flexible language and a unifying ideology that allowed them to conquer within a century all major centres of civilisation south and east of the Mediterranean. On the contrary, the original Arabs were products of the entire previous history of the semitic peoples, and their most ancient surplus-producing agricultural civilisations. In particular we would argue that the formation of northern Arab Bedouin society *was the expression of the emergence of a geographical division of labour between agriculture and commerce within the environmental conditions of the Arabian peninsula*. This division of labour, in the context of the entire Near East, is of the same historic significance as, say, the town-country division of classical agrarian regions. From this point of view, therefore, the formation of northern Arab society only became possible because of an upsurge in the social productivity of labour, through agricultural specialisation, in the Yemen for example, and important new 'technological' breakthroughs like the domestication of that remarkable 'ship of the desert', the camel. These developments both stimulated commerce and were stimulated by it, thereby allowing a completely new mode of life to branch off from hydraulic agriculture into the desert surroundings.

Very soon, however, this particular stage in the history of Arab social formation reached its limits. On the eve of Islam, Arab society was politically fragmented and riddled with conflict. It had come to maturity in a social vacuum – in the vast leftover desert spaces between the surplus-producing civilisations. Its coming into existence had been shaped by this 'world' context. At the end of the sixth century, or the beginning of the seventh, internal gradual development based purely on long-distance commerce was reaching a climax. No further expansion could reasonably be expected. It is not improbable in fact that a noticeable decline in the volume of commercial activity was just beginning to set in, either as a consequence of shifts in trade routes, as Amin argues, or more probably as a result of saturation and cutback

of demand in the surrounding empires. The last exhausting war between Byzantium and the Sassanians in the first quarter of the seventh century must have made the situation very bad.

At the same time, the accumulation of financial reserves in the shape of money capital in the cities of the desert hinterland, at first an end in itself, had now reached a point that called for new outlets. These could not exist in the peninsula where agriculture, the main source of actual surplus product, was barely adequate to feed the growing population. The peninsula was certainly over-populated and pressures for large-scale population movements outside its boundaries were building up, only to be periodically released in little trickles to Syria and Iraq.

Of all the cities of the peninsula, Mecca was by far the most important. It had succeeded in developing an economic role for itself that held most of the fragmented pieces of the peninsula together in a finely tuned system of military, commercial, and diplomatic alliances. But the system was under attack. Its very success in the poverty-ridden conditions of the then Arab world, hinted at much greater things.

The ruling class of big businessmen, merchants, bankers, usurers, landowners (in Ta'if), brokers and agents of all sorts, who ruled through the mala' (assembly of urban notables), had no vision. They were by their very nature conciliators and appeasers, concerned with the purely administrative, moneymaking side of affairs. Their ideological formation was primitive, not to be compared with the merchant classes of Egypt, Iraq, or Persia. Their gods were spirits (jinn) that populated the peninsula and were either invisible or dwelt in oddly shaped stones or trees. The statesmen amongst the ruling classes were renowned for their skills as arbitrators of disputes and negotiators of alliances. They worked *within* the framework of kinship relations and tribal rivalries and conflicts. The vast sums which had been amassed through trade in a few generations were creating a monopoly of big business in the hands of only a few of the Qurayshite clans, like the Umayyads and Makhzūmis.

The influential Hāshimīs, (Mohammed's tribe), although highly respected for their role in the establishment of Mecca, had lost the upper hand in the control of the city's commercial affairs to the Umayyads in particular. They numbered amongst their tribesmen many disgruntled and poor members. The lot of small brokers, retailers, small traders, craftsmen, artisans, and what few peasants there were, had never been very good. But it was threatening to get worse. These were former Bedouin with deep ties to the values of the desert. Consequently, their own conception of themselves bore little relation to the objective conditions of their poverty. Although the gap widened between the citizenry of Mecca, the mode of government remained the same. There was ample opportunity to vent grievances, much room for discontent to snowball, and yet not much of a chance that it would amount to anything.

Finally, there were the super-exploited, declassed social layers of the city – the lumpen elements including the slaves, both freed and unfreed, the so-called sa'ālīk (the scroungers, thieves and members of certain ostracised tribes), and former tribesmen who had been disowned by their tribe and no longer enjoyed its protection. They formed a mass of seething and unorganised discontent. In short, all the conditions were ripe in the city of Mecca, on the eve of Islam, for a social revolution.

The significance of the rise of Islam lies in the revolutionary transformations it wrought on the social and economic structures of the region. It is with Islam that the social content of the word 'Arab' first underwent its most concentrated and accelerated change. The meaning of the word 'Arab' has been revolutionised from one epoch to the next. It neither has, or ever will have, a constant social content which in some mysterious fashion stands above the historical process. It is only in the heads of nationalists and misguided theoreticians that such static shemas can survive. In a certain very important sense the changing meaning of the word 'Arab' – its etymology – captures all the essential landmarks in the history of the Arabs. The first such landmark coincided with the original formation of the Arab tribes in the Arabian peninsula which has been discussed above. The second coincided with the formation of the 'Islamic Umma' – the community of Muslims – in the first few centuries of Islam.

Marshall Hodgson has touched on this essence of the revolution introduced by Islam when he posed the hypothetical possibility that either the Roman or the Sassanian empires in, say, the fifth or sixth centuries AD, might have succeeded in capturing Syria and Egypt, thereby growing at the expense of its adversary.¹² In such an eventuality, the whole of Bedouin Arabia could have been bypassed historically and a not unlikely variant would have been the assimilation of the Arabs into the culture of the victorious and already established civilisation. The very special features of Islam, and the reason why the emergence of the community of Muslims marks a watershed in the history of the Arabs in particular, springs from the fact that this did not happen.

The formation of the Islamic Umma has its roots in its founder's move from Mecca to Medina – the Hegira. It was in Medina that Mohammed was given the first practical opportunity to structure social life in a new fashion. Medina was economically split between the Jewish Arab tribes who had developed it, and the more recently settled pagan Bedouin tribes (the Aws and the Khazraj). Mohammed was welcomed by the pagan tribes probably because they saw in his teachings an alternative form of monotheism capable of holding its own against Judaism, the adoption of which would strengthen them against their Judaised Arab competitors. The Muhājirūn were the other component of the first Muslim community. They were all those Meccan tribesmen who were recruited to Islam and who by leaving

Mecca had irrevocably broken their ties and social obligations to their own clans. The combination of these two groupings represented in essence the initial formation of a new 'tribe', which now had to forge an economic livelihood for itself. Almost immediately, Mohammed organised raids from Medina on Meccan caravans. These played a very important role in deepening the breach between the community of Muslims and the Meccan system as a whole.

The earliest document of Islam, which for lack of a better name has been called 'the constitution of Medina', defines all believers in Islam and their dependents, regardless of their tribal affiliations, to be members of a single community (umma). According to this document these members are to show complete solidarity against non-believers both in peace and war. It is interesting to note that according to Watt, in pre-Islamic Arabia there was 'little difference between the two words "qawm" and "umma"'. Both represented a natural group or community.¹³ It is with Islam that the word 'umma' is first revolutionised giving it the meaning of that greater tribe based not on tribal loyalties and blood relations, but on the acceptance of an idea – the prophecy of Mohammed and the existence of a single god – which was soon to be developed into a whole world view. The new shaikh of the umma, Mohammed, no longer ruled by conditional tribal consensus, but by an absolute religious prerogative.¹⁴ A new system had been born which represented a historically more advanced and 'higher' stage of social organisation and consciousness.

The Arab/Islamic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries essentially represented the mass migration of Islamicised Arab tribes, driven by the pressure of over-population in the peninsula, into the Fertile Crescent and North Africa – ie into the very same surplus-producing civilisations they had previously only traded with. These migrants formed – in the first period of Islam, when it was still an Arab religion and the Caliphate an Arab kingdom – the ethnically differentiated rulers of the mass of Syrians, Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Persians and other surplus-producing peoples. The whole economic basis behind the original constitution of the northern and central Arabian tribes was now being radically altered. Instead of an existence and mode of life as intermediaries straddling the vast unproductive deserts between other civilisations, the Arabs were now reaching out for those very same surplus-producing regions they had previously only traded with. It is this aspect of the history of the Arabs that Amin ignores.

With the Arab conquests, the social content of the word 'Arab' – that which defined the quality of being an Arab – began to change. The mass of Arab rulers originating from the Arabian peninsula began to assimilate with the indigenous conquered populations.¹⁵ The new cities founded by the conquering Arab armies – the Amsār – had started originally as garrison towns on the edge of the desert and cultivated areas. They became important

stepping stones in the process of arabisation.

The Amsār originated in the nomadic Bedouin tradition of founding cities along flourishing trade routes. However, their presence in the Fertile Crescent and North Africa made it possible for a minority of conquerors to maintain a certain independence from the peoples they were subjugating, who enjoyed a more advanced indigenous civilisation. It was through the Amsār, in which the Arabs at first formed a majority, that the Arabic language spread out to the countryside. Markets for agricultural produce and crafts quickly developed around the original garrison. Artisans, shopkeepers, clerks and peasants were attracted from nearby cities or the countryside. The concentration of booty in the Amsār attracted the indigenous population to the Muslim cities and thus made possible a combined process of assimilation. The Arabs were assimilated to the peoples they had conquered and gradually adopted many of their customs and ways. But at the same time the indigenous population were learning Arabic and becoming Muslim.

The generalisation of the Arabic language and Islamic ideology were very important factors in arabisation in the sense in which we are trying to define it. Of course the physical intermingling of different peoples, in the shape of population movements and intermarriage, was a necessary condition for arabisation. But the Arabs were too small a minority for this to have been the decisive factor. It was the establishment of a common cultural and ideological medium that broke down most of the barriers. Marx has put the matter most profoundly:

'Language itself is just as much the product of a community, as in another respect it is the existence of the community: it is, as it were, the communal being speaking for itself.'¹⁶

The Mawālī were the non-Arab converts to Islam. Their problems are very revealing of the nature of the arabisation process and the sorts of tensions it generated. In the first century of Islam, the Mawālī had to be attached to a tribe of Arab origin. Under the Umayyad Caliphate their numbers grew tremendously. Soon they even began to outnumber the Arabs in the Amsār. Theoretically the Mawālī were the equals of the Arabs. In practice they were discriminated against both socially and in taxation. During the governorship of Hajjāj in Iraq, for example, it was decreed that conversion to Islam would no longer release the indigenous population from paying the higher rate of tax on land known as Kharāj. The problem Hajjāj was addressing himself to was the decline in state revenue caused by mass conversions to Islam. It was fundamentally the problem of an economy transforming itself from one based on a minority of privileged Arab rulers, into that of an arabised majority of Muslims. This important and very revealing change is also shown by the fact that Hajjāj even took measures against Arabs by decreeing that henceforth when an Arab

bought Kharāj land, he would have to continue paying this higher tax and could no longer reduce the tax obligation to the much sought-after tithe called 'ushr'.¹⁷ Eventually the Mawālī became the social base of the opposition to the Umayyad Caliphate which culminated in the Abbasid revolution.

This period of Islamic history, following through to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, therefore witnessed mass migrations of populations accompanied by arabisation and islamisation within the confines of the region currently occupied by the different Arabic-speaking countries. These population movements took many diverse forms. They included: the settlement of nomads in cities or rural areas (especially in the early stages); the accelerated growth of new cities and a general increase in the level of urbanisation of the region; the conquest by town dwellers of far-off agricultural civilisations, starting from their conquered cities and working through to their rural and nomadic hinterlands; and the thrust of entire conquering populations into new regions and their assimilation among those they conquered.

With this background in mind, let us take a closer look at Samir Amin's conception of the Arab region under Islam as basically a 'trading formation' in which Egypt constitutes the 'sole peasant exception'. There are two problems with this idea. The first is that it is questionable on a purely factual basis. In the tenth century the cultivated area of the Mashreq was immensely more extensive than it is today.¹⁸ Apart from the Mesopotamian river valleys, the whole of the northern Syrian steppe curving round to the Mediterranean coastline, the fertile plains of Hama, Homs, the Bekaa, and Palestine – all this was fertile agricultural land. These are the regions, according to archaeologists, in which agriculture itself was invented, inaugurating the first food-producing epoch in human pre-history.¹⁹ To consider that 'these rural areas were too poor – despite the epithet "fertile" – to supply the surplus needed to support a brilliant civilisation', as Amin does in *Unequal Development* (p. 39) may be the result of an anachronistic reading back into history of a much later period of decline.

There is also no reason to believe that Egypt was in any way excluded from the social convulsions, upheavals and intermingling of populations which has already been described – and for which there was actually precedents before the seventh century AD. Syria, for example, began to be arabised earlier, as the infiltration of Arab tribes from the peninsula started on a small scale in the century or two before Islam. Yemen was certainly the first surplus-producing agrarian civilisation to be thoroughly and irreversibly arabised long before the unification of the Arab tribes and following the collapse of the famous dam of Ma'rib in the third century AD. The collapse of this dam, built in approximately 750 BC, is symbolically associated with the fall of the kingdom of Saba and the northward migration of its people and their assimilation into northern Arab/Bedouin society at its height.²⁰

The second problem with Amin's formulations has been alluded to earlier; it is his failure to grasp the qualitative change – the revolution – brought about in the life of the region as a result of the Arab conquests. This leads to Amin pinning on Arabs and especially Egyptians 'eternal', unchanging and therefore mystified qualities. The Arab/Islamic conquests seem to be for Amin purely military and political achievements that allowed the Arabs to continue with the same mode of economic existence that they had before Islam. The defeat of classical Arab/Islamic civilisation is thus logically attributable to a series of external events, related to wars and trade fluctuations, which are not structurally derived from the dominant mode of production prevailing in that epoch. In fact, in reference to 'trading formations' we can hardly talk of a mode of *production* of use values and surplus. Social classes presumably would have to arise from their relation to each other in the sphere of *circulation* of a surplus produced elsewhere. The Arab 'merchant-warrior ruling class' would be exercising hegemony over classes they were not exploiting in the sense of robbing them of their surplus. The result, according to Amin, is that in the classical period of Islamic civilisation 'an Arab nation did indeed come into existence' as a consequence of 'ethnic homogeneity . . . reinforced by economic unity . . . under the leadership of the ruling class of merchants and the military castes'.²¹

Apart from its only partial contact with reality, Amin's whole approach unwittingly panders to the prevailing Arab nationalist prejudice that ascribes to the quality of 'being an Arab' an ahistorical content. It sets up a schema in which Arabs do not exploit each other, and in which Arab-Islamic civilisation is made 'not responsible' for its own decline. The one-sidedness of this method, relying as it does on only the commercial function of the Arab/Islamic world, is revealed as soon as the actual history of the region is examined.

The notion that ethnic homogeneity, reinforced by an economic unity that originates in long-distance trade between far-off surplus-producing and consuming formations, can provide, under the leadership of a merchant ruling class, a sufficiently advanced social fabric for Arab *national* formation is contrary to both reason and the most elementary facts of Arab history in the first centuries of Islam. From a logical point of view, there is nothing particularly unifying in mere entrepôt commerce. Merchants simply buy and sell the products of completely separated producers. From a more factual point of view, however, Amin is apparently ignorant of the fact that the very extensive growth of commercial capital took place *within* the confines of the Arab/Islamic Caliphate, and on the basis of internally produced commodities. In its classical epoch, the cities of the Islamic world were great producers of commodities and they specialised in marketing agricultural products that were extensively traded between regions of the Islamic empire. In fact the onset of Europe's 'dark

ages', and the relapse into self-sufficient feudalism, cut off the Muslim world from the whole of the northern hemisphere. Maxime Rodinson in discussing this period notes that:

'It may be observed that despite all the uncertainty of our knowledge a level [of commerce] does seem to have been reached in the Muslim world which is not to be found either elsewhere at the same time, or earlier. The density of commercial relations within the Muslim world constituted a sort of world market . . . of unprecedented dimensions. The development of exchange had made possible regional specialisation in industry as well as in agriculture, bringing about relations of economic interdependence that sometimes extended over great distances. A world market of the same type was formed in the Roman empire, but the Muslim "common market" was very much bigger . . . Not only did the Muslim world know a capitalistic sector, but this sector was apparently the most extensive and highly developed in history before the establishment of the world market created by the western European bourgeoisie, and this did not outstrip it in importance until the sixteenth century.'²²

The extensive growth of petty commodity production based on artisans and craftsmen in the cities and agricultural specialisation during the first centuries of Islam is a subject worth dealing with at much greater length than is possible in a brief survey like this. It appears to us that, alongside food production, it represented the fundamental economic motor force of the Islamic world during its apogee.

For the present, however, we would note that the commercial integration of the Arab/Islamic world did not lead to two developments which are confusingly lumped together by Amin:

(1) It did not result in the political ascendancy of a ruling class of merchants. This is what the noted Islamic historian, Goitein, has to say on the matter:

'This class [the merchants] developed slowly during the first 150 years of the Muslim era, emerged into the full light of history at the end of the second century, became socially "admitted" during the third, and asserted itself as a most powerful socio-economic factor during the fourth. *However, it never became an organised body and, as a class, never obtained political power, although many of its members occupied positions as high and highest executives of the state.* The turn from the tenth to the eleventh centuries (the Muslim fourth and fifth) which witnessed the apogee of the Near Eastern bourgeoisie, also marks the complete ascendancy of castes of slave soldiers, mostly of Turkish extraction, which dominated the history of that part of the world for the next 800 years.'²³

(2) It did not lead to national formation in either the Mashreq, the Maghreb or Egypt. This point we shall take up in our critique of

Amin's whole methodological approach to the problem of nations and how they come into existence.

Nation formation and capitalism

In a number of his writings Samir Amin has forcefully posed the question: What is a nation? His answer is categorical: a nation is not necessarily a social derivative of the capitalist mode of production. It arises when *any* dominant social class (bourgeois, feudal, merchant . . .) ensures, through its control of the state apparatus, the economic unity of any ethnic group (*cf* the final paragraph of our introduction). When these conditions do not exist, the national phenomenon is 'reversible', as in the case of the 'Arab nation' in the first centuries of Islam. It is always dependent on how strongly political power is wielded by the ruling class. Thus the decline of the 'Arab nation' coincided with its political and economic fragmentation as the source of the external surplus dried up.

The first thing to be said is that this idea confuses a social category – national formation – with a political one the control of state power. Undoubtedly there is a very powerful relationship between the sociological processes behind the development of the various economically integrated classes whose totality comprise the nation or nationality in question, and the political struggles tending towards the establishment of a national state. A prerequisite for the maturation of the national process is the eventual establishment of a national state, the existence of which guarantees within its geographical boundaries the necessary conditions for the establishment of a truly national economy. But it is misleading and false to define something that can only be understood as a process – national formation – in terms of a specific political condition – control of state power. On the contrary, it is the nature of political power that has to be derived from the stage of social formation, and not the other way around.

The example of European national formation illustrates this point. Is it conceivable to argue that the Italian nation as such only came into being following the Garibaldian revolution of 1860? What about the centuries of social upheavals, class formation and political struggles which were the necessary social precursors for the success of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Italy? The breakup of the feudal order in Europe was a long drawn out affair, spreading over several centuries which were combined with the growth of the capitalist mode of production. In agriculture the peasants were forced off their lands. In England this took the form of the enclosure movement, which came in a number of long drawn out waves. The medieval corporations and guilds which protected the artisans and craftsmen of medieval cities were slowly dismantled, throwing their hitherto protected members onto the 'free' market in which all they had to sell was their labour

power. The ability to do work was thus transformed into a commodity, and a necessary condition for this was the separation of the producers (peasants and craftsmen) from their means of production. These social processes in the context of rising capitalism moulded and shaped over many centuries the human 'raw material' that was forming nations in Britain, France, Italy, Germany and other places.

There is also the problem of oppressed nationalities. How does Amin handle the fact that a Kurdish nationality exists, and has been fighting for independence from its Arab, Iranian and Turkish oppressors for over half a century? There has never been a Kurdish state. Surely, this cannot be taken to deny the fact that a Kurdish nationality has been in the process of formation for the better part of the twentieth century. How do we explain from a materialist viewpoint the persistence of a Kurdish nationalist movement, if not by relating it to real social and economic transformations in the Kurdish regions?

One could also take the example of the ruling classes of fully developed and industrialised nations who lose political power through war, for example, as happened in Europe in the second world war. What would have been the status of the French nation under Nazi occupation in Amin's terms? All of these examples demonstrate that there is a fundamental distinction between the political and super-structural ramifications of national formation, and its objective socio-economic basis.

It should also be pointed out that there is rarely a direct relationship between the economically dominant class and its political representation. In fact quite frequently there are completely different groups of people involved. In its whole history, the bourgeoisie has never once ruled politically as the identifiable sum of all its members occupying positions in the state apparatus. For this there are professional politicians or military men, who may not even be capitalists themselves, and who thrash out, in parliament for example, the differences and conflicts between various fractions of the economically dominant class. The merchants in the first four centuries of Islam were *not* in political control of the Islamic Caliphate, although their economic function and social position in petty commodity production was very important. In the case of all the more advanced social and economic formations the ruling class will generally tend to separate out the political function of exercising power from the economic function of extracting and distributing the surplus. This sets up a relative autonomy between the political sphere and the economic sphere which has very important implications for understanding the processes of *revolution* and *change* in social and economic formations.

This touches on what constitutes our most fundamental objection to Amin's thesis: namely his ahistorical conception of the nation. This, we shall argue in the remainder of this section, is linked to his

ahistorical notion of a mode of production. It results in the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs being rendered indistinguishable from the upheavals introduced by Islam. Nations come and go at all stages of history without reference to the processes of their formation. Frozen, formalistic definitions are introduced for complex and changing categories (like mode of production, nation, social formation etc) on a flimsy factual basis and stemming from a fixation with a single slice out of the historical process. The element of permanent historical transformation – as quantitative changes acquire a qualitative character – is absent. In short the whole approach utilises the language of marxism, while throwing away its method. It is to these aspects that we shall now direct our attention.

In many respects it was Marx's greatest achievement to have identified a progressive thread in the historical process. This progress occurs not only as the cumulative or chronological succession of events in technology, science, society or politics. Rather it affects the whole of society, and especially its innermost and 'hidden' structures – its modes of production, property forms, and social relations. For Marx each mode of production presupposed either one or more of its predecessors, but it did not (with the exception of capitalism) automatically negate them. Historical development, therefore, was expressed through the accumulation, coexistence and branching off of many different modes of production.²⁴ The ancient mode, for example, presupposed both primitive communalism and the invention and diffusion of slavery from the ancient Near East. Feudalism, on the other hand, arose in Western Europe out of a particular kind of synthesis of both the Germanic mode of production – a variant of the primitive communal mode – and the mode of production prevailing in the Roman empire until the north European tribal incursions and the fall of Rome in the fifth century. In contrast, independently generated capitalism grew out of the uniquely feudal town-country conflict that developed in Europe. Following the establishment of a world capitalist system – imperialism – the generalisation of commodity production forced the capitalist mode onto the various social formations of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

It has become fashionable amongst some marxists to deny the implicit historical order and trajectory that is of necessity tied up with the concept of a mode of production. This is what Samir Amin has to say on the subject:

'The concept of a "mode of production" is an abstract one, implying no historical order of sequence with respect to the entire period of history of civilisations that stretches from the first differentiated formations right down to capitalism.'²⁵

The debate with Amin on national formation and its relation to capitalism requires a rejection of this ahistorical treatment of modes

of production as so many 'models' of economic organisation. For it is only possible to understand national formation as the social counterpart of the capitalist mode of economic production by situating the latter historically, the very thing which Amin rejects.

Of course, it is also necessary to reject the notion of a *unique unilinear* sequence of modes of production, through which all societies must pass in the same order. Similar to the evolution of biological forms, different paths diverge from the same junction, branch off and sometimes converge again. But – just as in biological evolution – the various stages along each path, the sequence in which they occur, and the junctions at which different paths diverge or converge, are by no means arbitrary. Quite the reverse: they obey an inner logic of historical necessity. To deny a historical order among modes of production is just as erroneous as to deny order and direction in biological evolution.

'Human beings become individuals only through the process of history', Marx said in the *Grundrisse*. At the same time modes of production and property relations, while never existing in neat, packageable and universally applicable sequences, nevertheless represent moments in a historical process fundamentally shaped by the increasing control of human society over the 'objective conditions of its labour'. These are 'natural' conditions in human pre-history. With the advent of class society and private property, they become social conditions which, however, society itself is still not conscious of as such, and which appear 'objectively' in the various forms that property relations assume. But these are always subject to revolutionary change. The development of the productive forces is forever bringing into conflict the increased and more efficient production of more wealth on the one hand, and the inherited class relations of the old mode of production, which become obstacles to the expansion of production, on the other. The revolutionary moment which now becomes objectively possible hinges on the subjective manner in which society as a whole (with each class viewing the matter from its particular vantage point) conceives of itself in relation to this conflict.

Under capitalism the transformation of labour power itself into a commodity which is bought and sold on the market, and the permeation of exchange relations into all aspects of everyday life (food, lodging, clothes, necessities and leisure) has a twofold effect. The first is on the individuation of human beings. Not only their labour, but also the very core of their personality is transformed. The effects of the latter specifically can be seen in literature. A good example is the role of the 'hero' of the classic bourgeois novels of the nineteenth century, and the emphasis of writers like Dickens, Balzac, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy on the formation of the individualised human personality in the crucible of both great events and everyday life. This is in complete contrast with say the classic epics of ancient

civilisations, viewing individuals as so many different cogs in a great pre-ordained panoramic scheme of events (the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the epic of Gilgamesh etc). Individuation is reflected also in legal institutions and the perfection of laws for the 'protection' of individual rights over property and in civil society. The character of this process has been most profoundly stated by Marx:

'Exchange itself is a chief means of this individuation. It makes the herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it. Soon the matter has turned in such a way that as an individual he relates himself only to himself, while the means with which he posits himself as [an] individual have become the making of his generality and commonness.'²⁶

Another effect of capitalism on society is present in Marx's formulation. Parallel with individuation is the unprecedented level of socialisation of production. In no previous historical epoch have human beings become so utterly dependent on each other for their maintenance and the continual raising of their standard of life. Wage labour and the separation of the producers from their means of production transforms the value of every necessity and almost every product of human labour into a quantity determined by the functioning of the whole economic system. There is no precedent for this before capitalism.

These two social and ideological correlatives of capitalism are thoroughly irreversible. The triumph of socialism, from the vantage point adopted in this article, represents the arrival of the working class at a complete awareness of its own position in the historical process. Private ownership of the means of production, which is 'objectively' given by capitalism, has to be seen as a constraint, not only on production, but on the further cultural and individual formation of the working class. Individuation under capitalism is thus also expressed in the growing alienation and continuous psychological degradation of the producers. At the moment that this awareness is reached, the socialist revolution becomes a possibility, and its problems acquire a technical or military character, the final outcome of which can of course in no way be predetermined.

Socialisation of production and individuation of the human being are reflections of capitalism on society and consciousness. They are cornerstones of the national phenomenon, which make it possible to understand why national formation in the Arab region, for example, can only be a historically specific stage in the process of Arab social and ideological formation. The formation of nations presupposes that the disruption and tearing apart of the 'vegetative existence' of the production process through exchange has already commenced. This 'herd-like' existence, which arises from what Marx analyses in the *Grundrisse* as a 'self-sustaining unity' between the producer (peasant or artisan) and his/her means of production, is a central characteristic

of *all* precapitalist modes of production and sharply differentiates them from capitalism. It is only after this rude awakening of the labouring population that the individuation of human beings through the permeation of their everyday life by exchange relations of production, will dissolve the 'herd-like' existence and confront them with the reality of their insertion in a truly individualised and irreversibly socialised national economic framework, defined ultimately by ownership or exclusion from ownership of the means of production.

We would further argue that national consciousness is, in its original sense, a more primitive form of class consciousness, that first arose historically in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at a time when the bourgeoisie was still playing a progressive role. During this epoch of the growth of capitalism out of the petty commodity mode of production, the bourgeoisie was sociologically still quite close to the petty commodity producers in the post-medieval cities of the Renaissance. There was therefore a material basis for the ability of the bourgeoisie to speak in the name of all the labouring classes, against the parasitic feudal nobility. By the nineteenth century this was beginning to change, as was reflected in the European-wide revolutions of 1848 when, despite the bourgeois democratic content of these revolutions, the bourgeoisie sided with the most antiquated social layers in society and the state apparatus to crush the revolution primarily fuelled by the now thoroughly differentiated European working class. The clearly formulated conception of oneself as a member of, or associated with, the fate of the working class in counter-position to the bourgeoisie is therefore the later, historically more advanced, form of proletarian class consciousness.

It goes without saying that the development of petty commodity production, on no matter how extended a scale, did not accomplish such a historic transformation of consciousness in the classical centuries of Islam. In fact it could not do so – because the peasant and urban craft producers remained tied, either communally or individually, to their means of production. Exchange was limited to the sphere of circulation and did not permeate the productive process itself. Capital, in the sense of 'self expanding value', and not in the sense of usurer or money wealth, did not generalise itself (although interestingly enough there were isolated instances of wage labour). An economic unity based on the polarisation of classes from within the productive process – as distinct from commercial integration and partial regional specialisation – could not therefore develop.

Samir Amin, in his references to the development of an Arab nation in the first centuries of Islam, is in fact mixing up two very different things. He is confusing the formation of a pan-Arab merchant class (which most certainly took place, as the passage we have quoted from Goitein shows) with *nation* formation. The former emerged as an important distinguishing feature of the greater Community of

Islam – the Islamic Umma – whereas the latter emerges in the nineteenth century, parallel with the growth of capitalist economic penetration and trade with the advanced capitalist countries. In the twentieth century, the consciousness of having a national, social and economic fate historically superseded the consciousness of relating to one's fellow human beings through their relation to god and Islam, in much the same manner as Islam had superseded the individual, particularist tribal consciousness based on kinship relations that had dominated pre-Islamic Arab society. The centrepiece of Amin's whole analytical muddle – that which allows him to release nation formation from its firmly anchored roots in capitalism – is in our opinion the non-marxist notion of an abstract ahistorical mode of production. For once a mode of production loses its place in an ordered historical trajectory (which nevertheless may be much more complex than either Marx or Engels had thought), then those moments, or stages in the 'process of human individuation through exchange' – as they are captured in the social evolution of tribal, religious, communal and national formation – are forever lost. The modern secular bourgeois citizen has been reduced to a pious Moslem, or worse, to a pharaoh's subject. Even socialism and revolutionary internationalism become utopian shibboleths, and not fundamentally counterposed alternatives to nationalism in the epoch of imperialism.

Concluding Notes²⁷

1. National formation and nationalism are the social and ideological complements to the generalisation of the capitalist mode of production. They work through human 'raw material' inherited from previous historical epochs, whose own formation lies in the manner in which the social product was produced and consumed.
2. The new capitalist epoch, characterised by the new mode of production and consumption, is not only imposed from the outside – as was the case in the Arab world – but at the same time must structurally grow out of the preceding epoch despite the stilted framework provided by the capitalist impetus.
3. This staging ground for capitalism – the preparatory epoch immediately preceding the introduction of capitalism – captures in itself to a certain degree, the whole of the previous history of development of a given region, because it is in itself the product of a formative process intimately associated with its own past and the epoch from which it was structurally derived.

In the Arab region the pre-history of national formation, especially the epoch of classical Islamic civilisation, is of special importance. This results from the manner in which the formation of the community of Islam, based on adherence to a religious idea, combined

with arabisation, completely overhauled the pre-Islamic tribal structures of Arabia. With Islam the Arab region was definitively wrenched out of its past, and a new petty commodity mode of production flourished in the cities, as in no previous epoch in the history of the ancient world.

4. A rising new epoch – as the rise of capitalism in the Arab world – can also *reappropriate* its distant past in a new way. Thus, for example, the rise of capitalism in Western Europe, while growing out of the contradictions of the feudal mode of production, at the same time reappropriated during the Renaissance the heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. In a similar manner, we think it can be shown that Arab nationalism represents a form (albeit less dramatic) of reappropriation of a past associated with the arabisation and islamisation of the region in the classical epoch of Islam.

5. National formation in the Arab region is a highly uneven process that started in Egypt and on the Mediterranean coastline very early in the nineteenth century. It started under the Ottoman empire, and long before the political fragmentation of the Arab world by imperialism in the twentieth century.

6. The scale of the economic, social and cultural decline of the Arab region between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries puts into historical perspective the enormous transformations wrought on the region by the development of capitalism. For example, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the cultivated area of the Fertile Crescent had shrunk to a fraction of what it was in the tenth century. The estimated population of the present territory of Iraq in 1867 was 1.28 million, whereas it has been suggested that between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries it supported a population of some 20 million!²⁸ Greater Syria under the Romans is estimated by some orientalists to have had a population of ten million. By the end of the eighteenth century this had shrunk to two million. Egypt's population, estimated at eight million in Roman times, collapsed to four million by the fourteenth century, and to 2.5 million in the early nineteenth century.²⁹

7. Capitalism revolutionised the social structure of the Arab region, but not its productive capacities. At first population levels remained either very low, or declined significantly, but temporarily, as in the case of the brutal French colonisation of Algeria in 1830. The impact of manufactured products from Europe on artisan employment also led to an absolute and relative decline of population in some Arab cities like Fez, Damascus, and Marrakesh. Later, however, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the most pronounced expressions of the development of capitalism became the reversal of the historic decline in population previously noted. Iraq's population today is just under ten times what it was in 1867. Egypt's

population, which began to increase much earlier in the nineteenth century, is 13–14 times what it was in 1800. In Syria and Iraq, a steady rate of increase really only began to take hold in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

8. In the nineteenth century other great social transformations were taking place alongside the increase in population:

(a) The settlement of what had once been very large and politically important nomadic populations, so that by the first world war the phenomenon of the Bedouin way of life was for all practical purposes eliminated.³⁰

(b) The breakup of traditional agrarian relations in the countryside and the emergence of private land ownership, including the formation of a very important class of large landowners, and landless peasants whose produce was now being exchanged on the world market.³¹

(c) Urbanisation-without-industrialisation, which began in the late nineteenth century, but accelerated tremendously in the twentieth.

(d) Finally, the incipient formation of modern social classes, including an urban proletariat, in infrastructure and services (ports, railways etc).

9. It is very important to realise that it was out of these social upheavals that there began to emerge the basic human material which was to forge and shape national development and nationalist ideology in all its varieties. The nineteenth century can therefore be called the critical first century of national formation in the Arab region. The development of capitalism and its social ramifications were taking place under the common political, military, administrative and economic structures of the Ottoman empire, which had held sway for several hundred years over all the Arabic-speaking countries. They were terminated in 1830 in the Maghreb with the French invasion, and in 1882 in Egypt with the British occupation. Otherwise, direct Ottoman control was maintained over the rest of the Mashreq until the first world war. The strength and vitality of pan-arabism, which was not only sustained in the twentieth century, but also flourished after the second world war with nasserism, should be viewed in relation to this more or less unified transformation of the Arab region in the nineteenth century. Arab nationalism therefore has its beginnings in these social and economic convulsions which gripped the region until the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

10. From as early as the nineteenth century, capitalism was developing in a highly uneven fashion in the Arab region. There was therefore from the very beginning a tendency to national differentiation within the Arab world (ie a tendency to the formation of separate nations in Egypt, Syria, Iraq etc) which was combined with the tendency to Arab national formation. In the twentieth century, following the Sykes-Picot agreement and the establishment by im-

perialism of what were completely artificial political entities, the countervailing tendency to the formation of a single Arab nation was reinforced. The development of separate bourgeoisies and working classes, linked independently of each other to imperialism, was fostered. However, the artificiality of imperialism's economic and political creations remained very pronounced until at least the 1960s in most Arab countries. It can be concluded, therefore, that local nationalisms in the Arab countries (Syrian, Egyptian, Lebanese etc) are rooted objectively in the unevenness of development of capitalism in the nineteenth century and more importantly in the twentieth century history of class formation in the politically fragmented and economically unintegrated modern economies of the Arab countries.

11. In the imperialist epoch, capitalism in the underdeveloped countries breaks up the old social order and introduces a new one, without, however, revolutionising the forces of production. In the nineteenth century, industrialisation in the Arab region was virtually limited to Egypt. The formation of pan-Arab bourgeoisies and working classes did not take place. However, national formation begins long before the actual physical formation of the two main classes of capitalism – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – has been completed. It began in Europe several centuries before the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also began in the Arab world in the nineteenth century, whereas until today, the social structure of the Arab countries is characterised by a dependent bourgeoisie, a growing working class, and a large petty-bourgeois mass.

If it is correct to call the nineteenth century 'the critical first century of national formation', then it is even more true to say that the twentieth century is *the century of permanent revolution in the Arab region*. The Arab ruling classes, which were composed of comprador bourgeoisies and big landowners up to the first half of the twentieth century, are today in the process of transforming themselves. The accumulation of vast financial reserves in the oil-producing countries is now creating a bourgeoisie of a cosmopolitan character whose arena for investment is the world capitalist market. At the same time, powerful local bourgeoisies have been or are being greatly strengthened by the experiences of state capitalism that countries like Egypt, Algeria and Iraq have been going through. One thing, however, remains as true for the new Arab bourgeoisies as it was for the old: their utter and increasing dependence on the world capitalist system and on the imperialist bourgeoisie in particular, and their inability to solve the democratic tasks facing Arab society – including, in particular, the problem of unification and struggle against zionism. From this point of view the significance of the change from Nasser to Sadat in Egypt becomes the extent to which it holds up a mirror into the future of all the nationalist regimes in the Middle East.

12. The pivot around which the national phenomenon is crystallised, reflecting not only the actual course of historical development but also how society itself conceives of this development, is the establishment of the nationalist movement. The weakness of the bourgeoisies of the colonial and semi-colonial countries meant that at their origin, most third-world nationalisms generally appeared to express nothing more than a reaction of the masses to imperialism and to their brutalisation by capitalism. Arab nationalism and the formation of pan-Arab organisations (Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab, and the Ba'ath) was based on such a mass reaction to the conscious policy of imperialism to fragment the Arab region. Similarly Palestinian nationalism, along with Arab nationalism, crystallised around the Zionist colonisation process and the suffering it wreaked on the Arab population of Palestine and the surrounding region.

13. But with or without the physical economic presence of a bourgeoisie to actually lead them, all purely nationalist movements in the imperialist epoch are saddled with the limitations of their own viewpoint. It is in their very nature to appear to adopt the interests of *all* classes of the oppressed nation or nationality as a priority over the interests of all classes of other national formations. Given the weakness or absence of the bourgeoisie, this can impart great revolutionary impetus to the nationalist struggle. This has been the central feature of the post-World War II struggles in the Arab region, including the experience of the Palestinian resistance movement. Very soon, however, as the struggle for national demands itself necessitates a struggle against the local bourgeoisie or its petty-bourgeois ideologues, and the active assistance of other exploited classes outside the national entity in question, the inherent limits of a nationalist point of departure make themselves felt.

14. It is only the exploiting classes under capitalism that have a stake in presenting the interests of their own class as if they were those of the nation – the sum of all classes. It is only the exploited classes who have an interest in rejecting this identification. Nationalism therefore, in the capitalist colonial and semi-colonial countries, as much as in the advanced countries, represents in its essence a bourgeois ideology. It is either the ideology of a bourgeoisie which is very powerful (as in the imperialist countries), or a bourgeoisie which is in process of formation (the various Arab bourgeoisies), or even a bourgeoisie which may not yet exist as such (a pan-Arab bourgeoisie), but which could in principle emerge if a pan-Arab nationalist movement were capable of uniting the Arab countries.

15. Proletarian internationalism is the highest expression of working-class consciousness. In a most fundamental sense it is counterposed to and transcends all forms of nationalism and particularism. In the Arab region the proletarian internationalist viewpoint is that which

takes as its point of departure the fact of capitalist exploitation, imperialist fragmentation and zionist colonisation. If, as we have argued, there are *two* opposing tendencies in the process of national formation in the Arab region, then this does not obviate the need for marxists to choose between them. This choice is expressed in the struggle for the unification of the Arab countries, and in the combined interest that the Arab workers have in the overthrow of all their own ruling classes and the zionist state.

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- 2 S. Amin, *La Nation Arabe* p14. The identical formulation can be found also in *Unequal Development* p38.
- 3 S. Amin, *Unequal Development*, pp47-48.
- 4 'A series of major historical events marked the stages in this [Arab] national regression: the Crusades and the transfer of the centre of gravity of trade from the Arab cities to those of Italy; the fall of Baghdad under the blows of the Mongols in the 13th Century; then the Ottoman conquest in the 16th Century, with the transfer of trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic in the same period and correlatively, the direct contact established by Europe with Monsoon Asia and Black Africa, which deprived the Arabs of their role as middlemen.' S. Amin, *Unequal Development* p28. Exactly the same point is argued in his introduction to K. Vergoupoulos, *Le Capitalisme Difformé*, p8 and in *La Nation Arabe* p109.
- 5 'In becoming Arabised, however, the Egyptian people kept a very firm sense of their distinctiveness. They never called themselves "Arabs", a word that remained for them synonymous with "barbarians", but always "Egyptians". And Egypt has retained its originality, not on the linguistic plane but on that of culture and values, which in Egypt are peasant values.' S. Amin, *Unequal Development* p46.
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solidarity of tribe and clan. Islam may be said to have restored communal solidarity but to have attached it to the total community of Muslims rather than to any smaller unit . . . It is indeed the solidarity of the umma or community which is the chief contribution of the Islamic religion in the political sphere.' W. M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* p29.

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19 We refer the reader to the excellent books by Gordon Childe, in particular *What Happened in History*, *Man Makes Himself* and *New Light on the Most Ancient Near East*.

20 A famous Pre-Islamic poet, al-A'sha from the Yamāma, is said to have sung:

*Let this warn whoever a warning will take:
And Ma'rib withal, which the Dam fortified.
Of Marble did Himyar construct it so high,
The waters recoiled when to reach it they tried.
It watered their acres and vineyards, and hour
By hour, did a portion among them divide.
So lived they in fortune and plenty until
Therefrom turned away by a ravaging tide.
Then wandered their princes and noblemen through
Mirage-shrouded deserts that baffle the guide.*

R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, London 1941, p17.

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Israel and the new order in the Middle East

Moshe Machover

Once upon a time – many wars and revolutions ago, when royal thrones were still standing in palaces on the banks of the Tigris and the Nile – the editor of *Ha'aretz* wrote an article¹ in which he explained why imperialism supported Israel. An important motive for this support, he wrote '... is the fact that the West is not very happy about its relations with the other states in the Middle East. The feudal regimes in those states are forced to pay heed to nationalist movements (both secular and religious) – which in some cases have an unmistakable left-wing social tinge – to such a great extent that those states are no longer prepared to put their natural resources at the disposal of Britain and America, or to allow them to use their countries as military bases in case of war.

'The ruling circles in the countries of the Middle East do know that in the case of a social revolution or Soviet occupation they are certain to be physically liquidated, but the immediate fear of a political assassin's bullet for the time being outweighs the unreal fear of annexation to the communist world. All these states are ... militarily weak; Israel proved its military strength in the War of Independence against the Arab states and because of this, a certain strengthening of Israel is, for the western powers, a convenient way of preserving a political balance of forces in the Middle East.

'According to this view, Israel has been assigned the role of a sort of watchdog. There is no fear that it will adopt an aggressive policy towards the Arab states if that is against the wish of America and Britain. But if the western powers ever prefer, for one reason or another, to shut their eyes, Israel can be relied upon to punish properly one or several of her neighbouring states whose lack of manners towards the West has exceeded the permitted limits.'

A very shrewd and accurate assessment. And with certain obvious modifications – for example, Britain no longer counts as a big power in the Middle East, or anywhere else – it is still substantially correct. As a distinguished American political analyst pointed out not long ago: 'A strong and confident Israel is a vital factor in any programme to protect our own legitimate interests and those of Europe, Japan and many other countries in the independence and openness and stability of the region.'² (Glossary: 'independence' = dependence on imperialism; 'openness' = openness to capitalist exploitation; 'stability' = stability of oppressive regimes.) And the same point is put even

more bluntly by the Zionist Organisation of America: 'Israel is the only democracy in the area. It is the only stable nation in the Middle East. It is also the only loyal and effective ally of the United States in the region. The United States has in Israel a strong base for overseeing and guarding American national interests in this vital area.'³

This role of Israel is indeed a fact of Middle-Eastern life – and yet it is a fact which nowadays needs to be spelt out (just as it needed to be in the early 1950s) because it is no longer quite as obvious and straightforward as it was in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. In the heyday of nasserism and left-wing ba'athism, Israel was virtually the only important ally of western imperialism in the Arab East. (Saudi Arabia was then far less important in economic, political and military terms than it is today, and did not play an active part in the affairs of the region.) Faced with radical Arab regimes closely allied with the Soviet Union, Israel's expansionism could be given full sway. Rather than stand guard over the stability of the Arab East, the Zionist state's task was to *destabilise* it. It did this by confronting not only the Arab popular masses but also the radical regimes.

Since the early 1970s things have changed. 'New ruling classes, new bourgeoisies, have crystallised the come to power in the Arab East. In Saudi Arabia this bourgeoisie has grown under the wings of the old tribal pre-capitalist ruling stratum. In the "progressive" Arab countries, which had undergone revolutions of the nasserist type, the new bourgeoisie has crystallised out of the military juntas, the bureaucratic strata, the remnants of the old exploiting classes, to which are added the new bourgeois who have been fostered by state aid.'⁴ The new ruling classes ousted the Soviet Union from most of its positions of influence in the region and forged a neo-colonial alliance with western – mainly American – capitalism.

The new role – continuity and change

Superficial observers leaped to the conclusion that since US imperialism has now found such important allies – the new ruling classes in the Arab countries – it would no longer require the expensive services of the Zionist state. This error resulted from a failure to see that in the American scheme of things the Arab countries and Israel play not similar but *complementary* roles. The neo-colonial arrangement with the Arab bourgeoisies is not of the same kind as, and cannot replace, the special relationship of the US with Israel.

'Like all neo-colonialist bonds, [the alliance between US imperialism and the Arab ruling classes] is essentially a partnership – in which the local ruling classes and foreign imperialism are respectively junior and senior partners – for the joint exploitation of the local working classes. And like all such alliances it is inherently problematic; it is in continual danger of being upset by two different

forces. First, the local ruling class – the junior partner – may make a bid to increase its share of the cake. Second, the exploited masses may rise against both local and foreign masters.

‘American-Israeli relations, on the other hand, are quite different. Far from these relations being based on economic exploitation, Israel is actually subsidised by the US to the tune of about \$3000m (ie about \$1000 for each Israel-Jewish man, woman and child) per annum. In return, Israel is expected to serve as an armed guard, defending and protecting imperialist interests in the region. In contrast to the Arab ruling classes, the Zionist establishment is therefore a really reliable and secure ally of the US. Thus the new links forged between the US and the Arab ruling classes are not going to replace the special relationship with Israel. On the contrary – because of the fragility of these neo-colonial links, the services of the trustworthy Israeli gendarme are if anything of greater value now for American capital than they have been so far.’⁵

There is therefore an unmistakable *continuity* in Israel’s role as imperialist ‘watchdog’ in the Arab East, a continuity that spans the whole period from the early 1950s to the present. Naturally, the services that Israel renders are not free of charge; they have to be paid for in financial subsidies,⁶ military aid⁷ and political backing. American policy is firmly committed not only to securing the existence of the Zionist state but also to furnishing it with the means for doing its job properly. These means are not only material ones, money and weapons. If the US were to break the spirit of Israel by compelling it to accept something that the vast majority of Zionists regard as absolutely and categorically unacceptable, then it would transform Israel from a bully-boy into a sullen and docile dependent. American policy must therefore respect the most deep-seated and fundamental Zionist tenets.

For example, while from a purely American point of view the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state – suitably shackled and emasculated – might not be such a bad idea as part of the pacification of the region, American policy must respect the absolutely fundamental Zionist rejection of this idea.

‘This opposition is not based on short-term military considerations but on long-term historical ones, which concern the very nature of the Zionist claim over Palestine. This claim is absolutely exclusive – “A land without a people (Palestine!) to a people without a land (the Jews)” – and cannot be reconciled with the recognition of Palestinian Arab national rights over, or even *in*, the Holy Land. For unavoidable reasons of *realpolitik*, Israel may agree to concede sovereignty over part of Palestine to an external power, say Jordan. Such a concession, as far as Zionism is concerned, is in any case purely pragmatic and temporary; and Israel always reserves the right to “liberate” such conceded territories as the need or possibility arises. But to allow the establishment within Palestine of a sovereign national entity of the

indigenous people – that would undermine the whole self-justification and legitimization of the zionist enterprise.

A concession of this kind would be historically ‘irreversible. Moreover, though that state may initially be small and weak, there is no telling what changes might take place in the more distant future. The balance of forces, and the borders, between that state and Israel – like any other balance of forces, and any borders between states – would be subject to the vicissitudes of future history. After all, had Israel itself not started as a small state, and later expanded by sword and fire to dominate the whole of Cisjordanian Palestine, the Sinai peninsula and the Syrian Golan heights?’⁸

American policy must heed this very deep-seated zionist rejection of the idea of creating even a small Palestinian state between Israel and Jordan. For this reason a sovereign Palestinian mini-state is not part of the American blueprint for a Middle East settlement – a fact that has by now become unmistakably clear.⁹

But in Israel’s role in the American scheme of things, there is not only continuity; there must be change as well. As the ruling class in one Arab country after another moves into the American sphere of domination, there is a growing need for ‘stability’. Whereas in the heyday of nasserism Israel could be allowed (and even encouraged) to confront and threaten the Arab East as a whole, in a socially undifferentiated way, US interests now require that the zionist state should learn to collaborate peacefully with the Arab ruling classes, while continuing to bare its teeth to the Arab masses. It is this need to normalise relations between the Israeli state and the Arab regimes, to institutionalise the former’s role as guarantor and protector of the latter against their own working classes, that has motivated American imperialism in the quest for comprehensive Middle East settlement.

The path to such a settlement is anything but smooth. The main obstacle is the expansionist appetite of the zionist state – an appetite which is inherent in zionism, and which has been sharpened and become prodigiously voracious since 1967. As time has passed and as the cancerous growth of Israeli settlements has spread further into the newly occupied territories, most zionist leaders and their followers have become accustomed to regarding these territories (except perhaps parts of Sinai) as their own, not only by divine right but also by possession, which is nine points of the law. And yet, if there is to be a settlement, Israel must be made to hand back the bulk of these territories; hand them back to Egypt, to Jordan and – provided the Syrian regime behaves itself and toes the American line – to Syria. If the regimes of these countries were to sign away the occupied territories in a humiliating peace settlement, that would jeopardise their own stability – and defeat the American purpose of the whole exercise.

The Sadat spectacle

The Zionist state is not a mere instrument which American policy can simply switch on and off at will. Of course, the US has, in principle, a tremendous economic, military and political leverage on Israel. But in practice, American pressure on Israel is subject to very real constraints.

First, there is the formidable pro-Israeli lobby in the Congress and the mass media. This goes far beyond the so-called 'Jewish vote' and in fact includes many politicians and 'opinion makers' who do not really depend on Jewish votes. Secondly, there is the weakness of the present American administration. It is not just that Carter has proved to be less forceful than had been widely believed, and has taken inordinately long to come to grips with the major issues of American policy; it is mainly that the White House as an institution has been weakened by Watergate and its aftermath. But beyond all this, there is an inherent constraint: American policy does not aim to crush Israel, humiliate it or cast it away. As already explained, a powerful and confident Israel is an essential linchpin in the new American hegemonic structure in the Middle East. Therefore Israel and the pro-Israel lobby must not be brutally browbeaten but rather coaxed, cajoled or at most, subjected to polite pressure.

While Carter and his advisers were wondering how on earth they were going to impose a comprehensive settlement without putting excessive pressure on Israel, the latter had a change of government; the extremists of the Ma'arakh were replaced by the fanatics of the Likud. This made Carter's task both harder and easier: harder in the short term, because Begin is not open to gentle persuasion; but easier in the long term, because Begin's very intransigence might be exploited to create fissures in the hitherto monolithic pro-Israel lobby.

Begin, who is no simpleton, of course realised all this. On his first visit to the US, in the early summer of 1977, he exuded charm – without actually giving anything away. The pro-Israeli lobby was duly won over, and solidly closed ranks behind him. In order to call Begin's bluff, something very spectacular was required.

Something very spectacular indeed soon took place. The world-wide TV-viewing public was treated to the most sensational performance in the annals of political show business, starring Sadat in the Israeli Knesset.

Let petty-bourgeois Arab nationalists fulminate and denounce Sadat's 'betrayal of the Arab cause'. By this they are only exposing their own illusion that there exists such a thing as a classless Arab national cause. Sadat did not 'betray' anything; he simply blew away the cobwebs of a musty petty-bourgeois nationalist myth, and acted brazenly in the best interest of the new class whose power he represents.

We, revolutionary socialists of the region, must sadly admit that

Sadat has put us to shame. If he had the audacity to put his class interest first and befriend his potential class allies across the national borders – could we not be at least equally audacious in forging our own internationalist solidarity against these oppressors? If Sadat, to save his own skin and avert the danger of a socialist Arab revolution, made a dramatic appeal to the Israeli people – should we not be more forward in appealing to the Israeli masses *for* the revolution?

The invasion of Lebanon

It is difficult to say whether Sadat really hoped that the zionist leaders would continue to clasp his outstretched hand and agree to conclude a peace settlement that, while of course defrauding the Palestinian people of their national rights, would save the face of the Arab ruling classes. If he did, then events were soon to disabuse him.

Sadat's performance in the Knesset was directed not only at the Israeli stalls; he was most certainly playing to the American gallery. And there he was duly applauded. While the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations predictably ran aground on the rocks of zionist intransigence, the pro-Israeli lobby in the US was beginning to show clear signs of strain, and the Carter administration felt able to be a little bolder with the Begin government.

Begin was scheduled to go to Washington on 12 March 1978; and as that date approached, there were unmistakable signs that his reception there would be less than cordial and that a confrontation between him and Carter was imminent. The Israeli government was desperately looking for a diversion. A pretext was handed to them just in time, in the form of the indiscriminate Palestinian bus raid of 11 March, which united the Israeli people behind the government and momentarily revived the waning support for Israel in world public opinion. Begin immediately postponed his US trip, and after a few days' delay, caused by the bad weather, the Israeli army invaded the south of Lebanon up to the Litani river.

The Palestinian bus raid was of course only a pretext. The raiders had come not from the south of Lebanon but almost certainly from a small port close to Beirut. What were the real motives for the invasion?

First, there was the need to create a diversion. Begin hoped that American attention would be diverted from the older zionist occupation and colonisation of the West Bank, Gaza and Sinai. This tactic had been used successfully by Israel several times in the past. Secondly, the Israeli leaders had long been waiting for a chance to exterminate the Palestinian guerrilla forces concentrated in southern Lebanon.

But beyond this, the zionist state has always coveted the waters of the Litani, as well as the lands south of that river, which are part of

the biblical Promised Land, and are considered fair game for expansion and colonisation. Thus, in a secret plan which Ben-Gurion proposed to the French just before the Suez war of 1956, he demanded that southern Lebanon (as well as the West Bank of Jordan) be annexed to Israel. Syria was to annex another part, and the remainder would be turned into a Maronite Christian state.¹⁰ The military strategy employed in the invasion also suggests that it was part of a long-term colonisation plan.

If the main aim had been to exterminate the Palestinian forces, then it would have made better sense to start by landing strong forces along the Litani, thus sealing off the guerrillas' escape route, and then to proceed and occupy the area between the river and the international border by a pincer movement. In the event, the Israeli army advanced slowly towards the river, leaving the escape routes open not only for the guerrillas, but also for the local peasant population. The peasants were encouraged to flee by being subjected to barbaric Vietnam-style bombing. A quarter of a million people fled, leaving the land vacant for colonisation.

However, the Israeli invasion failed to achieve any of its major aims. The Palestinians managed to extricate and preserve most of their forces. It is true that the introduction of UN forces to police the area may severely restrict the guerrillas' freedom of movement and operations, but the presence of these UN forces will also partly inhibit Israeli military incursions. The international reaction to the invasion – especially after its scale and brutality were realised – was quick and angry. The pressure that forced Israel to withdraw was very great. Finally, the invasion failed to create a diversion. When Begin arrived in Washington, Carter refused to be distracted by the Lebanese events and insisted that they conduct their talks according to the previously arranged agenda. The atmosphere was icy.

In Israel itself, even inside the army, the invasion gave rise not to a greater feeling of national unity, but to a very noticeable malaise. Some Israelis were appalled by the large number of civilian casualties and the enormous scale of devastation. Many more were simply disappointed by the failure of the invasion to achieve any far-reaching result.¹¹

What next?

As signs of American pressure began to increase, internal dissent became more visible in the Zionist camp, both inside Israel and in the pro-Israeli lobby. The Peace Now movement, which held a fairly impressive demonstration in Tel-Aviv, is certainly made up of very loyal (and very middle class) Zionists, and only a small minority within it would accept Palestinian self-determination in any real sense. But it expresses a widespread feeling that Begin's fanaticism is leading Israel

towards a dangerous confrontation with the US. This feeling was clearly articulated by none other than Yehoshafat Harkavi, a former Chief of Military Intelligence turned academic expert on Arab affairs.¹² Harkavi started by pointing out that in any case Israel would not be able to rule indefinitely over a large Arab population; the West Bank must revert to Arab rule. No half measures, like Begin's plan for 'self administration' would be able to prevent that in the long run. While Arab rule over the West Bank would certainly constitute a danger for Israel, he continued, this must be weighed against the greater danger that would arise in the absence of a settlement.

'If peace is not achieved, the conflict will not return to its previous level, but to a much graver situation. And in that case one has to realise that sooner or later a war will break, out. Even if we win it, we shall not be allowed to turn military achievements into long-lasting political gains . . . We shall need to restock our arsenal; but if the peace process were to collapse and the US were to blame that on us, it would not hurry to arm us as in the past, without an obligation on our part to accept the very same conditions that we now reject.

'I hope that I shall be proved wrong, but I believe that we shall have to evacuate the West Bank, either while our arsenals are full as they are today, or after a war and many casualties, when our arsenals are empty. Certainly, territory has a great military value. But *arms* are no less important militarily. The basic problem facing us is that our holding on to territory which the US is opposed to letting us rule, is inconsistent with obtaining arms.'

Harkavi is well aware of the fundamental American commitment to Israel: 'True, the US will not abandon us completely, and will continue to arm us in a conventional way. But our problem is that in order to confront the Arab states . . . we need the US to take exceptional measures to arm us, as it did after 1973, since modern warfare requires huge quantities of equipment and arms. For this we shall need the goodwill of the US, but by quarreling with it we are destroying that goodwill with our own hands.'

Of course Harkavi, like the vast majority of Zionists, is totally opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank. The plan he recommends is quite different. 'Instead of adhering to the policy of remaining in the West Bank – which cannot last – it is better for us to think of how to minimise the damage of handing it over. The possibility is still open that the West Bank will become part of Jordan, whose power and stability are incomparably greater than those of all the Palestinian organisations, and whose effectiveness in suppressing the PLO it proved in 1970. This effectiveness is superior to all the Israeli efforts against the PLO. It should also be remembered that in 1970 Jordan acted alone, whereas now it can gain Arab support, for example from Egypt.'

This fissure inside Israel, clearly induced by signs of American pressure, itself encouraged a split in the pro-Israeli lobby on Capitol

Hill. This, in turn, will enable the White House to apply still more pressure. In mid-May, Carter had his first important victory in the Washington tug-of-war. The significance of the package deal, whereby the sale of American war-planes to Israel was made conditional on sales of war-planes to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, was largely symbolic – but symbols are very important indeed. Moreover, the size of the majority in the Senate against the attempt to block the deal was very encouraging for Carter and his advisors.

American pressure on Israel will almost certainly intensify, but one should not rush into unwarranted predictions. As explained above, the constraints to which such pressure is subject are quite considerable, and it is therefore not clear how far that pressure will go, or how soon.

Even if great pressure is applied, its effects on Israel are difficult to predict. After a long period of remarkable stability, the Israeli party system has begun to undergo a series of upheavals.¹³ These are not over by any means, and new splits and realignments are likely to occur before an equilibrium is reached. The Begin government is already under considerable internal pressure: in addition to the small but significant middle-class opposition to his foreign policy, there is a deepening working-class resentment against the worsening economic situation (rapid inflation – 50 per cent in one year – and a sharp decline in real wages).

In these circumstances, intensive American pressure can perhaps lead to the isolation of Begin and his fanatical close supporters, and the formation of a new government based on a new alignment of forces, and more responsive to US needs.

On the other hand, as Harkavi points out, the acceptance of the policy proposed by him 'will involve a *psychological upheaval* in Israel, when it wakes up to see that its hopes of becoming a large country are frustrated. The bitter soul-searching – with which Israel will be afflicted when it sobers up and realises how, since 1967, it has flown from the ground of reality to illusions which it found pleasant to regard as a policy – may severely damage its self-image.'¹⁴

Precisely because of the present instability of Israel's political scene, there is a very real danger that in order to avert this painful 'psychological revolution' the more fanatic section of the Israeli leadership will try to reverse the whole situation in the Middle East, by embarking on a huge military adventure – compared to which the invasion of Lebanon will seem like child's play.

May, 1978

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- 1 *Hazonah mikrakey hayam ve'anahnu* (The harlot from the cities of the seas and we) in *Ha'aretz*, 30 September 1951.
- 2 Eugene V. Rostow, 'The American stake in Israel', in *Commentary*, April 1977.

3 'Playing Russian roulette in the Middle East', full-page advertisement by ZOA in the *New York Times*, 2 May 1978.

4 Socialist Organisation in Israel, 'On the current situation in Israel and the Middle East', September 1977, in *Matzpen* 83, November 1977.

5 Musa Hadida, 'The Middle East – what kind of settlement?' in *Revolutionary Socialism* (Big Flame journal), July 1977.

6 Israel's services to imperialism in fact constitute its most important 'export industry'. This is recognised by that cynical reactionary economist, Milton Friedman: 'American aid is provided in exchange for the foothold that Israel provides for the US in the Middle East. This aid must therefore be regarded as payment for the export of interests, which falls under the export of services.' (Quoted in *Ha'aretz*, overseas edition, 8 July 1977.)

7 The extent of the military aid which Israel receives from the US is of course truly prodigious and absolutely unparalleled. For some interesting comments, see David Nes, 'America's very special relationship with Israel', in the earlier editions of *The Times*, 5 February 1971. (This article, written by a veteran American diplomat, mysteriously disappeared in later editions of the same day.)

8 Musa Hadida, *op cit*.

9 Failure to grasp this fact early enough greatly added to the confusion of the split in the Palestinian movement between 'acceptists' and 'rejectionists'. Both among those who were ready to capitulate to an imperialist-imposed diplomatic settlement and among those who were determined to oppose it, there were many who believed that such a settlement was likely to lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Acceptance or rejection of the idea of such a state was therefore conflated with acceptance or rejection of a *pax americana*. The demand for the immediate creation of a sovereign Palestinian state was widely regarded – by many of those who raised it as well as by their opponents – not as a challenge to the proposed imperialist settlement, but rather as an application for membership in the diplomatic club. (In this regard, see my letter in *Khamsin* 2; also note correction to that letter in *Khamsin* 3.)

10 M. Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion, a political biography*, vol. 3, p1234. (Hebrew), Tel-Aviv, 1977. Bar-Zohar's information is taken directly from Ben-Gurion's diaries.

11 Yisra'el Har'el reports in *Yedi'ot Aharonot* (31 March 1978) on conversations he had with Israeli soldiers in Lebanon. 'They told me about young terrorists, some of them 13 or 14 years old, and even a young girl, found dead next to some Kalachnikov machine guns and hand grenades. These kids had not carried out any raids deep inside Israel. Those who had, managed to get away. Why was this not foreseen and prevented? The conversation turned to what they [the soldiers] felt when they discovered against whom they had been fighting and whom they had killed. And they said their feeling was lousy. Nevertheless, they hope that they have killed the vipers when these were still small and less harmful. But they cannot see much purpose in the whole war. The UN will replace them; the terrorists will infiltrate through the UN ranks or return openly as "inhabitants coming back to their villages", and the whole story will begin again.'

This report is fairly typical of many that were published in the Israeli press at the time.

12 Y. Harkavi, 'Policy in the place of illusions', in *Ma'ariv*, 31 March 1978.

13 For an analysis of the background of this process, see A. Ehrlich, 'The crisis in Israel – danger of fascism?' in *Khamsin* 5.

14 Y. Harkavi, *op cit*.

Ideology without revolution: Jewish women in Israel

Dina Hecht and Nira Yuval-Davis

'In the State of Israel almost every woman is a working woman.

'You meet the working woman on your way to Israel – stewardesses aboard planes and on the ground (the supervisor in the airport's control tower is also likely to be a woman). Often a policewoman will be the one to stamp your passport, and a pert young woman will greet you at the reception desk of your hotel . . .

'[Women] are the most dextrous in packing orange crates or strawberry baskets, and they are most expeditious in packaging colourful flowers . . . and they take part in growing them . . .

*'True, only one out of every three adult women works outside her own household and is designated statistically as "belongs to the work force", but those who stay at home work at their daily chores, taking care of their family and rearing their children . . . none will deny that the work they do is vital and that they are contributing directly both to the welfare of their family and to the image of Israel's society.'*²

A state that relies to the extent that Israel does on outside financial and human resources has to produce a comprehensive public relations policy which is conducted abroad even more vigorously than at home. The brazenness of this venture determines the constant high pitch at which Zionist propaganda is maintained.

With the resurgence of Western feminism Israeli propaganda has found not only a new market abroad but also many enthusiastic mouthpieces to further laud the so-called advances and achievements of Israeli women. Indeed women play a considerable role in the export image of Israel: women conscripts, women in the kibbutz, a woman prime minister and 'dextrous orange-crate packers' – all have become successful propaganda currency, and the myth of the equal, liberated or emancipated Israeli woman, although weakening in Israel, is still potent abroad.

In an article 'Revolution Without Ideology: the changing place of women in America', C. N. Degler laments:

*'that in America the soil is thin and the climate uncongenial for the growth of any seedlings of ideology . . . and so long as [American working women] do not advance such an ideology, American society surely will not do so, though other societies, like Israel's and the Soviet Union's, which are more ideological than ours, obviously have.'*³

That is as may be; but the myth of the supposed liberation and equality of Israeli women, while perhaps gratifying a deep-seated need for feminists in search of identity, cajoles most Israeli women into a state of spirited resignation – content with a public image that bears little or no resemblance to their actual situation.

The dextrous [female] orange-crate packer today is likely to earn 40 per cent less than her male counterpart, and that despite the equal pay law of 1964.

During the premiership of Mrs Meir, there were only nine women among the 120 members of the Knesset; at present there are eight. There is not a single woman city mayor, and in the civil service – the largest employer of the female labour force – 40 per cent of employees are women, but in the highest grade only 4 per cent are women.⁴

Some women are indeed conscripted into the army, but in recent years about half of those reaching conscription age have been exempted – a far higher proportion than in the case of men. Of those taken into the army, 60 per cent are employed in clerical occupations; only 30 per cent of army job classifications are open to women.

'*Chen*, the Hebrew acronym for Women's Corps means (as a word) "Charm". And indeed *chen* adds to the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] the grace and charm which makes it also a medium for humanitarian and social activities.

'Today, of course, the goals of *chen* have changed and *chen* girls play purely non-combatant – though thoroughly essential – roles within the IDF framework.

'The *raison d'être* for women's present-day service in the IDF is threefold:

'1. Indirect reinforcement of the IDF's combat forces, by fulfilling a variety of administrative, professional and service duties, *thus releasing a larger number of male soldiers for fighting missions.*

'2. Preparing women to defend themselves, their families and homes, due to the unique security circumstances of Israel.

3. Assisting in the IDF's educational and social enterprises . . . and participating in the national extra-military missions of the IDF as an *absorbent of immigration*, tutor and *rehabilitator of socially disadvantaged youth*, etc.'⁵

The verbiage of the official propaganda deserves to be quoted extensively, not only to contrast the myth which it propagates about women in Israel with their actual situation, but also to expose the underlying Zionist ideology and overt political priorities.

The recent change of leadership implies no qualitative change in the Zionist character of Israel. The new government's first year in office was marked by an intensification of the old policies of territorial expansion, perpetuating the traditional Zionist conflict with the Arab world and the indigenous Palestinians. The added *Lebensraum* reinforces Israel's dependence on immigration of new settlers.

There has clearly been an increase in the degree of fanatic militancy with which the same zionist aims are pursued. But more important is the further crystallisation of the innate structural and ideological relationship between zionism and the Jewish religion. The role of religion in Israel is, on the one hand, to confirm and reinforce the hegemony of the zionist state over all the Jews in the world, and on the other to legitimise the zionist claim on 'the Land of Israel', that is, Palestine, as the homeland of the Jews and their exclusive estate. Under the patronage of the coalition of the Likud and the National Religious Party, the aims of zionism are given not merely a religious endorsement but also the fresh impetus of literal biblical justification.

It is only against this background that a coherent exposition and analysis of women's lot in Israel is possible.

Women's role in the early colonisation period

The distinguishing features of Israel as a zionist state are reflected in the distinctive situation of Israeli women compared to that of women elsewhere in the capitalist world.

It is true that the issue of the role of women in the zionist enterprise was and still is a prominent one. The pressure to bolster the position of women started in the early years of this century with women settlers for whom 'the commandment of settling the land was sacred'.² Throughout the history of the Jewish settlement in Palestine, the zionist movement has undertaken tasks for which it was undermanned; the 'conquest of labour' and the 'conquest of the land' (euphemisms in Hebrew for agricultural colonisation and the eviction and displacement of Arab peasants and workers in order to provide jobs for Jewish workers) required the active participation and backing of women. Indeed, these were the first 'lucky breaks' for those women settlers whose zionist ideology was tinged with feminist notions – some did MEN's jobs. The rest were duly despatched to the communal kitchen or laundry. However, both received their proper plaudits as each in turn fulfilled her designated role – to release more men for frontier duty.

The frontiers of Israel can hardly be described as fixed, either physically or metaphorically. Within their ever-expanding domain, zionist objectives may vary and the words used to describe them may change, but the role of women remains the same – to man the rear.

From the beginning, in order to create a socio-economic base from which zionism could expand, a rapid increase of the Jewish population was required. The Jewish communities abroad furnished the enterprise with both economic and human resources, which in turn enabled zionism to expand territorially, absorb more immigrants and command further financial support. This process inevitably escalated the economic conflict with the indigenous population into a political-

military one, which in turn has required further resources from abroad and has thus tied zionism irrevocably to the production and reproduction potential of the Jewish world outside. The embryonic Jewish society in Palestine has suspended, so it appears, the tasks of generational reproduction and rearing, and relegated them to the Diaspora – the rear.

Palestine was the frontier outpost; this defined the demographic characteristics of the early waves of Jewish immigration – '*aliyot* – especially the second wave (1904–1914) and the third (1919–1923). Scarcity of women – not an unusual feature of a colonial process – was but one aspect of it. Most of the immigrants were young and single, or childless couples; the proportion of children under 14 was exceptionally low. In other words, there was a very low ratio of dependants to economically active adults. In effect the zionist settler population in Palestine was almost entirely a combatant labour force. These characteristics were even more accentuated in the kibbutzim and work brigades (*plugot 'avodah*) which were, so to speak, the spearhead of the zionist effort to establish exclusively Jewish agricultural structures. There, men outnumbered women by four or five to one.

Such disparities in the sex ratio might have created a favourable attitude towards women, maybe even a feminist bias. But in Palestine this was not the case. In her book 'Fifty years of the Working Women's Movement' Ada Maimon cites many instances of discrimination and ridicule of women, especially those for whom 'The New Socialism', 'Proletarianisation', and 'Productive Jewish Labour' were values inextricably connected with equality between the sexes.

Sexist attitudes prevalent among the settlers in the collectives were reinforced by the zionist form of colonisation. Kibbutzim and other collectives, where the majority of members were men, refused persistently to accept more than a limited number of women – just enough to maintain the necessary services. Some collectives had women not as full members but only as hired help. The women in Degania – in the early years before this collective became a kibbutz – were not considered members with equal rights. They were not registered in the annual contract which the collective made with the Palestine Office of the zionist movement, as the male members were, and did not receive the monthly salary which the Office paid to the men both in Degania and in neighbouring Kineret. When the women demanded to be included in the contract the retort was that 'women work for the men, not for the Palestine Office of the zionist movement'.⁶

A brief 'History of the Working Women in Israel' published by the Women Workers' Council provides a partial picture and numerous rationalisations of the state of affairs.

'... These were women of strong character and marvellous emotional

powers, and they knew how to translate faith and enthusiasm into deeds. This is the sole explanation of their ability to go out daily and do "a man's job" when they were really delicate damsels only recently separated from their parents' loving care and from their university desks. Their hope was that the formation of the pioneers into specific settlement units, in an independent but co-operative framework . . . would also solve the problems of the working woman . . . it soon became apparent that even in the new life context which she had helped form the woman was put into her traditional place. Most of the women worked in the kitchen, in the laundry and in the children's quarters.

'The situation of the women who arrived with the third wave of immigration (after the first world war) was much the same. These belonged to the "labour brigades" and the co-operative groups engaged in public works – road-building and construction. They fought for their right to break up gravel, to hew stones, to work on scaffolding and to *take part in literally building the country. However, since there wasn't enough work to go round, it was first given to the males in the group.*

'Many reasons for this were offered: these jobs were not for a woman; her productivity was doubtful, since soon she would give birth and would be out of the work circle; the *woman's wage was lower than the man's*, so that her contribution to the commune was smaller; and to begin with, why should she work on construction when she could earn money doing other, more *feminine*, things . . . Some of the agriculture groups decided to open laundries or restaurants in the cities, as a means of providing their women with employment; they would also serve the group members working in the cities. In other groups, the women went out to do paid housework, so as to be able to add their share to the common till.'² (Our italics.)

The missing pieces in this picture puzzle are those depicting the indigenous population; unlike other immigrant-settler forms of colonisation, zionism sought not to exploit the local inhabitants but to displace them. Thus Jewish settlers found themselves in direct economic competition with the Arab labouring classes in the productive sector. In the mode of production that existed in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, the Arab wage labourer was often a seasonal migrant or part-time worker, who earned wages only to supplement his family produce and who could rely in return on the supportive service and maintenance functions that the extended family provided.

Compared to these Arab workers, Jewish members of collectives, co-operatives, work brigades or kibbutzim were at a considerable disadvantage; not only were they novices who lacked any experience in manual labour, but in addition they had no comparable servicing and maintenance support, and were completely dependent on the higher-cost market economy for consumption.

It is in this economic context that the collectivised forms of Jewish settlements evolved and that the division of labour within them, as well as the socialisation of domestic labour, can be explained. The status of individuals within the group was directly correlated with their earning ability; their earning ability was measured against the productivity of the Arab male wage labourer.⁷ The arbiters were employers such as the mandatory authorities in public works and the Jewish farmers (early settler – land owners) in agricultural work who had little or no stake either in the successes of the Zionist enterprise or in the achievement of the equality of women. The collective fear that ‘women’s work will will cause a deficit’, induced by the Palestine Office of the Zionist movement which provided financial support, and shared by women members of the collectives, was reinforced by the plain fact that at the time women’s wages in the labour market were lower than men’s wages. In consequence, the sexual division of labour found its use in the economic battle against the local population. The combatant forces at the front were the all-male Jewish collectives, contending with the Arab wage labourers. The women formed auxiliary forces in the rear to match the challenge of the Arab extended family.

Surrogate emancipation

The token few who crossed the sexual divide did so obsessed with the need to live down their femininity, or as Golda Meir put it, ‘rights – they had in abundance; [they struggled] for equality in duties . . . road construction, hoeing in the fields, house building or guard duties . . . and not to be condemned to kitchen work . . . I for one continued to be more concerned with the quality of our food than with women’s liberation’.⁸

In 1921, a year after the establishment of the *Histadrut* (Zionist trade union federation), the first conference of working women resolved – not surprisingly – that:

‘. . . the *Women Workers’ Council* is mandatory in order to arouse the members to action, and to stimulate and move the various factors to *find work for the working woman* . . . We have come to the Land of Israel to work, to devote all our energy and dedication to labour, and this pioneering work is *not to be measured by the worker’s output*; everything according to capability, and we are to have equal rights in life and at work . . .’⁹ (our italics).

Equal rights in life and at work they have not achieved to this day, but the Women Workers’ Council (Mo‘etzet Hapo‘alot) took the lead, with other women’s organisations following suit, and became on the one hand a centre of surrogate emancipation and on the other, one of the principal agents of Zionism in the development of an alternative to

the real emancipation of Jewish women.

The scope, structure, activities and power of those women's organisations are outside the scope of this article. It will suffice to say that they offered a wide enough framework within zionism to a large number of suitably-disposed women to train, improve, help, advise, absorb, educate, propagandise and plan for other women, thus not eliminating women from public life but rather confining them to what is broadly known as 'women's affairs'. In the early stages of zionism such activities mean channelling and controlling the growing number of disillusioned or unemployed women into so-called 'teaching farms' and other training courses and sharing the burden of *qlita* (absorption) of single female immigrants.⁹

Then as now, their ideological role was to reconcile the inherent conflict between zionism and the accomplishment of women's emancipation. By addressing themselves to the very reasons for women's discontent and glorifying their sacrifices as contributions to national unity and other zionist expediencies, these organisations and their women leaders have succeeded time and again in taming the militancy of their members. The same zionist expediencies provided Israeli women and their organisations with new challenges which could be misconstrued as real feminist opportunities.

The challenge of military needs

If women were deprived of their 'rightful' share in the 'conquest of labour' and 'the conquest of the land', the escalation into war of the conflict with the Palestinian population and the neighbouring Arab countries appeared to spell a 'real chance' for aspiring feminist-zionist women – for once they were needed.

The early Jewish settler women – it was alleged – had to masquerade as Arab women, veil and all, whenever they walked in the streets, so great was their fear of the Arab population. Not until 1907, when a defence organisation 'Bar Giora' was founded by Y. Ben Tzvi (later the second Israeli president), did Jewish women unveil and walk about 'with a whip or a stick in hand'. Regional 'defence' organs like 'Bar Giora' sprang up across the country as Arab opposition to zionism grew. These organs later fused into what was known as the 'Hagana' (= defence), the embryonic IDF. The skills of Jewish women in disguising themselves came in handy when the Hagana sent oriental Arabic-speaking Jewish women, dressed up in Arab garb, into Arab neighbourhoods to obtain information, while 'elegant ladies transported arms in their cars'. Apart from such daring pursuits women were allotted essentially auxiliary tasks: quartermasters, nurses, drivers, signallers, messengers and guards.

By 1942, when the women in the Hagana numbered 10,000, the men 50,000, a special department for women was set up and a principle

enacted that women should 'be part of the defence force, also in the [military] posts, so that a considerable number of men in defence duties could be released for field forces and Palmah' (Hebrew acronym for *plugot mahatz* = shock troops).¹⁰

Here too, as on the economic battleground, *some* women did cross the sexual divide, but this was the exception, not the rule. The exception was blown up out of all proportion in a myth prevalent both inside Israel and outside. The rule, not the exception, was reinforced in 1943 when Jewish volunteers formed the 'Jewish Brigade' in the British Army; Jewish women were urged to volunteer for the ATS. Four thousand did just that and slotted neatly into the British Army structure and its idea of a women's corps, in addition to which 'they excelled . . . especially in their concern for the Jewish soldier, cut off from his family . . . among strangers. They organised clubs for cultural activities and instilled the atmosphere of the land of Israel in the camps, they celebrated Jewish festivals, produced a Hebrew leaflet and made pleasant the life of the Jewish soldier.'¹¹

During the early stages of colonisation, zionism almost failed in the efficient utilisation of Jewish women's enthusiasm and willingness to take part in the enterprise. The long period of enforced unemployment to which Jewish women had been subjected reached its peak, at the height of the economic crisis in 1940-41, with the Histadrut directive that no Jewish family should have more than one breadwinner (the head of the family). As the war progressed, this trend came to an end. 'Mo'etzet Hapo'alot' was beside itself to find women who would work in the labour camps set up to provide for the war effort. One thousand eight hundred worked in those camps; 'they worked for the war effort and infiltrated new occupations'.¹⁰

At the end of the war, the participation of women intensified. Jewish women were sent from Palestine to Europe as *shlihot* (emissaries). How many were sent is obscure but their tasks were clear; nurses, social workers, nannies, domestic science instructors and teachers were sent to refugee camps in Sweden and Italy and in the American, British and French zones in Germany. They 'opened Hebrew schools in the camps . . . organised public life . . . administered health education and youth training, and bore the responsibility for running the camps,' but most importantly they were entrusted with carrying out tasks that required a real commitment to zionism: 'the selection of candidates for *ha'apalah*' (= upwards struggle, a Hebrew euphemism for illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine). They trained, equipped and transported those candidates to ports where others took over.¹⁰ The processing and absorption of displaced Jewish immigrants occupied women before and during the so-called 'war of independence'.

The British mandate's policy of restricting the admission of Jews into Palestine, in order to appease the growing opposition of the indigenous and neighbouring Arabs, triggered off in response bitter

anti-British violence. Jewish immigration assumed, despite its illegality, the scale of a powerful national movement. The British intercepted thousands of displaced Jews en route to Palestine and sent them to camps in Cyprus where again the internal operation was organised by *shlihot* who, as in the European camps, prepared the immigrants for the tasks awaiting them in Palestine.¹⁰

The dual role of women in Israel

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish immigration was finally under Zionist control, a control that asserted itself through one of the first laws to be enacted in Israel – the Law of Return. This law provided the legal basis for the demographic objectives of the Zionist leadership; to achieve a high Jewish population growth in Israel through mass immigration of Jews, and so enable them to 'survive' in the heart of the Arab world whose population numbered well over 70 million, and to contain a 14 per cent Arab minority having a high rate of natural increase. Hundreds of thousands of Jews arrived between 1948 and 1951, during which time Israel's population more than doubled.

It was then that the principal duality of Israeli women's role was crystallised and found its expression. It mirrored the duality in the attitude of the Zionist leadership towards demographic issues, epitomised in the official euphemistic terminology '*aliyah pnimit* or '*aliyah hitzonit* (internal or external ascent¹¹) used in the ongoing debate on the respective roles of natural growth and immigration in securing Zionist demographic aims.

The military service law, which was passed in 1949, exempted from conscription married women, pregnant women and mothers (as well as women who for conscientious or religious reasons did not wish to be conscripted), thus in effect categorising Israeli women into mothers who carry out their 'demographic duty to the nation' – '*aliyah-pnimit* – and surrogate mothers who carry out their duty to the nation by mothering Jewish immigration – '*aliyah hitzonit*. In the self-image of the IDF as a 'melting pot', women soldiers are the stirring spoon. Men soldiers from 'backward countries' (Oriental Jews) receive a fairly comprehensive training programme in the army where they acquire a knowledge of Hebrew and basic education and skills. The trainers are almost exclusively women, while women who do not possess these skills, possibly arriving from similar 'backward countries' are not even recruited, for reasons of 'low quality'. Throughout the fifties, women soldiers often 'volunteered' to work in transit camps for immigrants, 'pitching tents, digging drainage ditches, . . . [providing] medical care, general instruction, [and] education of children – humane activities that carry a blessing for the State as a whole'.¹⁰ The accent on the absorption of immigrants shifted, as the

waves of emigration ebbed; this did not change the essence of women's role in the army, but merely redirected it.

Surrogate motherhood is, of course, not confined to immigrants but is the underlying theme of a woman's life in the army irrespective of her occupation, be it regimental quartermaster or radar operator, and is a consequence of the manifest need for 'normalisation' that is evident in the wake of every war, the more so in Israel where war and the eventuality of war recur periodically.

Yet the army is no mere melting pot and its main function is still to further Israel's territorial expansion by military means. Women are not left out, and as well as manning the traditional rear – clerical, administrative and light technical occupations – some are required to do even more.

In September 1977, '... on one historic evening ... the Israeli navy commissioned nine girls as seawomen, the first in the navy, the first perhaps in any navy in the world ... The original idea', said the (male) commander of the training base, 'was to train girls for these duties in order to release boys for sea duties, all this in the framework of the general utilisation of manpower ...' He went on: 'Dear (female) officers, the work is not behind you but in front of you ... You are not designated for warfare duties, but the duty you will carry out from tomorrow was carried out until yesterday by a (male) commander'.¹³ Other women in yet another first course 'were qualified as tank drivers, gunners, and tank commanders'.¹⁴

This in no way implies that sexual divisions in the army have finally disappeared, but rather that the rearrangement of the map of Israel has taxed the already stretched manpower at the front to the extent that a reappraisal of what constitutes the rear is urgently required. Neither seawomen nor women tank commanders will see combat. The female sailors will patrol the home shores, as no doubt they did during the recent invasion, while the navy was bombarding targets in Lebanon from the sea. Similarly, the female tank unit will be engaged only as instructors, 'thus releasing [male] soldiers for combat duties' (*ibid*).

In the same vein, but in other words, an interim report presented by the 'Committee for woman's status in Israel', headed by Knesset member Orah Namir, states that 'conscription and regular [army] services do not exhaust the possible contribution of women, especially not in technological areas. Women are capable of carrying out more duties and thus alleviating the [current] manpower shortage'.

Internal and external growth – reproduction and immigration

That women both work and at the same time produce children is regarded as necessary to the continued survival of the Jewish state; and for those who might have lost sight of the future shortage of

cannon fodder, the Koenig report is one reminder. This secret memorandum, 'Handling the Arabs of Israel', submitted to Prime Minister Rabin in 1976, was leaked in the newspaper *'Al-Hamishmar* on 7 September 1976. Its author, Israel Koenig, Northern District Commissioner for the Ministry of the Interior, and as such in charge of Arab affairs in the Galilee, points out that 'the rate of natural growth of the Arab population is 5.9 per cent per annum, in comparison with 1.5 per cent for the Jewish population . . . On this basis, by 1978 the Arabs will constitute over 51 per cent of the population in the [northern] district . . . Their growth in the Galilee is dangerous to our very control over the district . . .'. The report purports to evaluate, and suggests ways to counteract, the so-called threat implied in such a ratio. One telling proposal is that 'the government should find a way to neutralise the granting of allowances to Arab families with many children, which could be done either by linking it to economic status or by taking [the administration of] these allowances away from the national insurance and transferring them to the Jewish Agency . . . for Jews only'.

The double bind is that while in Zionist theory the *raison d'être* of the state of Israel is asserted to be the provision of a haven for all the Jews of the world, in Zionist practice the *raison d'être* of Jews is to maintain the state of Israel. In other words, the very existence of the Zionist state supersedes the supposed values of its ideology, chiefly the well-being of Jews.

As early as 1943, at a Mapai (Labour) party conference on the 'labour force' Ben-Gurion expressed his concern that the Jewish population in Palestine was in a state of demographic and moral decline. He suggested that the majority of Jews in Palestine did not fulfil their reproductive commitments to the nation, that the average of 2.2 per family was not enough, especially when there is no immigration (there was very little immigration at the time) and if this went on, the Jewish community would extinguish itself.^{15, 16} In the school of 'Jewish demographic decay', Ben-Gurion was but one pupil. Attention to the question was called by Roberto Bachi, a professor of statistics, who, in a series of articles published between 1939 and 1944, pointed out the threatening implications of the difference between Arab and Jewish rates of natural increase, and called for formulation of a population policy to curb the fertility decline among Jews in Palestine that would be in keeping with the political objectives of the Jewish community. His was the 'liberal' suggestion that families should have, ideally, three, four or even more children and that financial inducements be offered in the form of family allowances and easy credit facilities for big families.¹⁷

The overtly reactionary voice in this school was that of the late Abraham Adolf Fraenkel, a professor of mathematics at the Hebrew University, who, in a number of articles published between 1942 and 1944, translated the mathematics of the indefinite continuation of

differential demographic patterns between Jews and Arabs into Hebrew journalistic terrorism. That Jewish families should be urged to have children was not enough; definite policies to achieve this objective should be implemented. 'Total war' should be waged against gynaecologists who performed abortions. Abortion, according to Fraenkel, was not only immoral, a terrible crime tantamount to murder, but also a major reason for the low Jewish birth rate. To substantiate his assertion that controlling the number of abortions would effectively increase the dwindling birth rate he argued that 'Among the many means by which Hitler attempted in 1933 to increase the German birth rate the one effective measure was the war against abortions'. In this vein he proposed that persons involved in the illegal act of induced abortion be liable to heavy punitive measures.¹⁸

The same reasons underlying those discussions of the early 1940s underlie also the recent concern over population growth in Israel. After the establishment of the state, developments in population policy were shaped generally according to the relatively liberal view, but it was the nationalist-religious camp that kept the issues alive and brought pressure to bear at all levels, especially and most effectively in the administrative machine, where the religious parties had considerable power (as partners in most government coalitions). They fought systematically against the establishment of public family planning services, and campaigned against existing abortion regulations and against women's service in the armed forces.

A 'natality committee', headed by Bachi, was appointed on 1 April 1962 by the then Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. The committee was to undertake research and advise the government on matters concerning natality policies and consider means by which large families could be assisted. Of all the recommendations which the committee submitted in April 1966, only one was implemented – the establishment of the 'Demographic Centre' in 1968 to act as an administrative unit in the Prime Minister's Office. The aim of the centre is 'to act systematically in carrying out a natality policy intended to create a psychologically favourable climate, such that natality will be encouraged and stimulated, an increase in natality in Israel being crucial for the whole future of the Jewish people'.¹⁵

According to Zina Harman, its first director, the centre is now undergoing 'a period of reappraisal and reorganisation of its aims'.¹⁹ This is hardly surprising; until now the activities of the centre have not gone beyond 'research, publicity and experimentation'. 'Research' means an enquiry into Israeli attitudes towards having a third and fourth child. 'Publicity' means promoting the image of large families through the media; and 'experimentation' is merely a small-scale programme whereby couples intending to have another child may, under certain conditions, apply for a low-interest loan for the purpose of acquiring a larger apartment.¹⁵

What transpires is that Israel cannot afford the investment in a 'demographic revival of the nation' which, according to calculations made for the natality committee, would cost about 12 per cent of the gross national product (1969 figures). What remains are the cheap solutions; to continue the orchestrated ideological onslaught on small families, to publicise the large ones, to hope for a renewed flow of immigration, and perhaps to declare 'total war' on abortions.¹⁵

'Fetal wastage'

The relative 'ideological pluralism' that was tolerated in the first thirty years of the state brought about a situation where family planning services were absent in an otherwise extensive public health service, and expertly performed abortion could be obtained for a fee which was easily within the means of the well-to-do. Thus despite severe legal penalties, abortion became a common method of family planning – more so after 1952, when the Attorney General recommended that a blind eye should be turned to abortions, and abortionists not prosecuted, provided that the abortion was expertly performed. This practice went on with only one exception.²⁰ In 1963 the Attorney General's 'recommendations were cancelled as a result of their dubious legality but in practice the same principles apply'.²¹

In 1972, unofficial 'committees for pregnancy termination' were set up in some Qupat Holim hospitals. Their function was to consider cases where abortion was demanded by a patient. These committees and the criteria which they followed in deciding for or against abortion were not endorsed by law.⁽²¹⁾

The voice of the Zionist demographic warriors was only subdued, not silenced. Thus in 1974 Professor Y. Helbrecht of Hasharon Hospital wrote, expressing a 'professional' opinion, that 'the future of the State of Israel depends on the number of its Jewish inhabitants and on their quality . . . Immigration and natural growth are the basis of our existence in this country and should supplement one another . . . Even if we succeed to gather in the remnants of our diasporas, we shall remain few in number in the great sea of the neighbours surrounding us, and it is therefore imperative that we direct all our attention to the maximal reduction of what is called "fetal wastage" . . .'²¹

This state of affairs, riddled with contradictions, continued until February 1977, when the Knesset passed the Abortion Law amendment that permits abortion on the following grounds:

- '1. That continuation of pregnancy constitutes danger to the woman's life.
- '2. That a danger exists that the continuation of the pregnancy will cause physical or mental damage.
- '3. That a danger exists that the child will be a physical or mental cripple.

- '4. That the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.
- '5. That the woman is under marriageable age or over 45.
- '6. That severe damage might be caused to the woman or her children as a result of difficult social conditions of the women's environment, for example that a great number of children reside with her.'⁽²¹⁾

This amendment – a temporary victory for the pro-abortion lobby – was due to come into effect in February 1978, but four months after it was passed the right-wing Likud NRP coalition came to power. One of the main points in the coalition pact was a pledge to repeal the amendment. At a press conference held in February 1978, it was announced that the coalition was preparing a counter-amendment which will only allow abortion on grounds permitted by Jewish religious law; social and economic grounds will not be taken into consideration.⁽²²⁾ This might appear as merely another exaction of a price by a religious party for its participation in a coalition, again at the expense of women; but in fact it is a tightening up of Zionist demographic policy.

Convergence of Zionism and religion

In Israel, the religious parties get only 12.5 per cent of the votes, and only 22 per cent of all Israelis regard themselves as religious.²³ Moreover, it is often officially declared that 'Israel is a state of [temporal] law, not of religious law.' In fact, the body of laws in Israel is derived from as diverse and non-religious origins as British statute and common law and relics of Ottoman legislation; there is also a considerable volume of laws that have been passed since that state was established.

But these are not the only binding laws. 'Like the British regime that preceded it [the State of Israel] has maintained . . . the rule of the autonomy of religious communities in all [matters] concerning family law, and although laws passed by the Knesset have reduced the application of this rule it is still firm and established in matters of marriage and divorce.'²⁴ 'In these matters the biblical law applies to Jews and their own religious laws apply to Muslims and to Christians';²⁴ and to this day, according to the law of Israel, everyone is born into some religious community and is subject in issues of personal status to the religious establishment of his or her community and to its traditional laws. On identity cards there is no mention of citizenship, only of religious-ethnic grouping.

In other words, 'The legislature conceded almost complete non-interference in the existing state of affairs . . . In these matters [marriage, divorce and most aspects of marital relations], not only is the rule which is applied not a law passed by the Knesset, but the civil courts have no jurisdiction . . . disputing parties have to address their pleas to the rabbinical courts.'²⁴ One of the published 'basic prin-

ciples' of the last (Rabin) government asserts that 'the Government will safeguard the *status quo* in the State as regards religious matters.'²⁴

The fact is that many aspects in the lives of *all* citizens are governed by religious dogma. The nationalist quest for identity coerces the non-religious population into submission and explains the recurring tactical coalitions between ruling parties and religious parties.

In 1970 the Knesset passed an amendment to the Law of Return which turned this collusion into a permanent covenant. The amendment concluded another chapter in the debate about 'Who is a Jew'. The answer was couched in terms of religious dogma: A Jew is either a person whose *mother* is Jewish, or a convert to Judaism. This had come about, despite the secular origin of the Zionist movement, when it became clear that any attempt to define 'Jewishness' for all Jews, wherever they were, in different places and diverse cultures, without resorting to religion, or any attempt to found a secular state, would necessarily have caused a rift between the movement and a considerable number of Jewish communities, thus weakening Zionism and reducing its appeal. For this reason, the new Jewish state had to define 'Who is a Jew' within religious constraints and guarantee Jewish religious culture, legislation and traditional values in all matters where these are not in direct conflict with Zionist aims and especially where they reinforce them.

Conversely, the religious sector, and more specifically the NRP, see the state as an instrument best suited to impose the biblical law on the Jewish nation. Their intentions were clearly formulated by Chief Rabbi Goren, who in the anthology 'Religion and the State' (NRP publication 1964) wrote:

'When it comes to determining the quality of life for the whole nation, we are bound by the Torah [= religious law] and the teaching of the prophets [to use] state compulsion . . . We are bound therefore by [religious] dogma and common sense to use the machinery of the state in order to maintain the laws and values of the Torah.'²⁵

Women in Israel carry the brunt of the pact between religion and Zionism. This may be inferred from the substantial body of law, mainly but not exclusively concerning family, marriage and divorce, which discriminates explicitly against them. According to Jewish religious law, women have an inferior status. Thus, for example, women are not even allowed as witnesses in rabbinical courts, which have jurisdiction on all matters of personal law.

Yet Israeli women are not merely pawns in a callous political game. Nor does Israel's order of priorities, in which women come far down, result from a paternalistic oversight or neglect. It is, on the contrary, a reflection of the convergence of religious and Zionist aims.

The principle that 'a woman is her husband's property', coupled with the imperative to 'be fruitful and multiply', expresses the Jewish religious attitude towards women as instruments for ensuring

generational reproduction of the husband individually and of the race collectively. That 'a woman is her husband's property' is stated in the binding law of the State of Israel.²⁶ That, and the promise of the then Prime Minister, Y. Rabin, to the Minister of Religious Affairs, Y. Raphael, in July 1975, that 'the [proposed] basic law concerning women's rights shall never be allowed to pass'²⁶ exemplify the two principal parameters determining the present mode of oppression of women.

The guiding Mishnaic principle of the law, which dates from the end of the second century, states that a woman becomes her husband's property in marriage – that is to say, in one of three ways: by a payment, by contract, or by coition. From then on she is forbidden to all except her husband and cannot sever the tie until he dies or divorces her. Although she may ask for it, she can only be the passive recipient of the divorce (the term in Hebrew is banishment). The principle that a woman is her husband's property does not extend only to the husband. If a man dies leaving his wife childless, she cannot remarry until her husband's brother has had an opportunity to claim her.

The consequences of this range from the tragic to the obscene. Although in modern Israel it is seldom carried to its logical conclusion, in 1967 a case occurred in which both the brother and the widow were deaf mutes. The ancient ceremony called *halitza*, whereby the brother and the widow exchange prescribed phrases and a spit for a shoe, which releases the brother from the obligation, could not therefore be carried out, and the couple were required instead to perform *yibum* (= levirate marriage). However the brother was married already, so in order to avoid an intercourse that was mere fornication, the Rabbinical Court, armed with permission from both the Chief Rabbis as a protection against bigamy, sanctified a marriage for a night. A hotel room was hired by the court, intercourse took place in front of male witnesses, and divorce was given the following morning, leaving the woman free to marry whom she pleased.²⁶

The religious concern with the reproduction of the race will even allow polygamy in 'modern' Israel: if the marriage fails to produce children, if the wife is committed to an institution for the insane, or if she is declared 'rebellious', which means that she leaves her husband against his express wish.¹⁹ The same concern marks the persistent opposition of the religious sector, headed by the National Religious Party, to women's conscription into the army. As early as 1959 the NRP protested that conscription was a major reason for the decline of the Jewish birth rate.¹⁵ The protest paid off; one of the points in the coalition agreement between the ruling Likud and the NRP is the relaxation of the procedures according to which women are exempted from army service. The exemption of women on religious grounds is currently automatic.²⁷

Preservation of ethnic purity is just as important to the religious sector as it is in keeping with Zionist aims. In Israel a variety of

marriages are prohibited. In the first place, marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew is not possible. (If a mixed marriage takes place abroad, it is not valid according to the binding religious law.) Within the Jewish community, there are various complicated prohibitions. The offspring of certain categories of prohibited unions are condemned to be labelled as bastards, down to the tenth generation. This label in turn carries with it its own marital restrictions. The penalty of bastardy is the one to which the majority of the conformist population is vulnerable.

A vast network of self-appointed informers ensures that the rabbinical authorities have up-to-date lists of culprits and potential culprits. These lists, known as 'the blacklists', are computerised and distributed by the Ministry for Religious Affairs. In 1975, through a press leak, the existence of 144 such lists became public knowledge. They include names of bastards, suspected bastards, divorcees and their lovers, suspect converts, and persons whose Jewishness is 'doubtful' – all are *psulei-hitun* (= unfit for marriage).¹⁹

The instances in which the religious minority has succeeded in affecting the situation of women in Israel adversely are too many to enumerate; to the detriment of women and the alarm of secular Zionists this influence is growing, especially since the inception of *Gush Emunim*, a vociferous nationalistic-religious movement whose supporters are to be found in most Zionist parties. For such people Israel is none but the 'Greater Israel' promised by the Scripture. For them religion is an endorsement of racist and nationalist demagoguery, and women are tools for the preservation of ethnic purity.

Against this background the non-religious majority tries in private life to regard the religious aspects of the law as an extension of the bureaucracy, everyone hoping that his or her own case is routine, not one of the horror-story exceptions. In recent years, immigration of Russian Jews of 'suspicious' marital circumstances and the increasing number of war widows, have made the exceptions more and more common, and one can observe a growing discontent among the non-religious sections of the population, expressed by various movements and platforms which call for liberalisation of the law.

The Zionist feminists

Recent years have seen the budding of an Israeli feminist movement. Realising the gap between the myth of their supposed liberation and the reality of their imprisonment, Israeli feminists have set out to challenge the status quo.

Emigrées from English-speaking countries have provided the impetus to the Israeli women's movement as well as the model on which it operates. The movement concentrates its activities in large cities, where consciousness-raising groups operate in Hebrew and in

English – a telling fact about both the class nature and the national composition of these groups.

The 1973 war, too, provided Israeli feminism with a considerable boost, judging by repeated references to it as the occasion when Israeli women realised that they had been cheated, so to speak, of their fair share in the national burden. Shulamit Aloni, campaigner for human rights, champion of 'groups which are discriminated against', describes in her book 'Women as Humans' how 'the shock came after the Yom Kippur war; only then did it become apparent how far Israeli society had regressed in all that concerns the inclusion of women in responsible roles in the economy, in the community, in national security, and in the alleviation of the burden in a time of national emergency. The consequences of this shock continued to be felt well into the elections to the eighth Knesset in December 1973.'²⁶

This kind of feminist writing is essentially at odds not with the ethos of the regime but with the way it functions. It contends with the regime not over its policy of territorial expansion and military aggression, but over how best to carry out this policy with women's aid. This is not a new school but a variation of the old feminist-zionist theme: the desire to 'share the duties required by the Zionist enterprise.

When Bar-Lev, Minister for Commerce and Industry, declared (19 November 1973) that 'more workers will be required in the economy; they will come from among the *'olim* (= Jewish immigrants) and volunteers from abroad',²⁸ he incurred the wrath of the feminist movement and of one Pnina Kreindle in particular. She responded in the feminist movement's organ *Nilahem* (Hebrew acronym for 'Women for a Renewed Society' which also means 'we shall fight'): 'Is this possible? How has the big work potential of women in Israel been forgotten?'²⁸

In Ms Kreindle's opinion the answer is illustrated by the news ('Yom-Yom' an economic magazine, 20 November 1973) that Cabinet Minister Sapir established an emergency economic committee which is composed of 48 men 'and not a single woman!' 'It is clear, therefore, that with such "balanced" composition the existence of women could easily have been forgotten.'²⁸

Kreindle is no pessimist. True, she is furious that 'during the war and after it, "Africa" was a closed club for "men only"'. Women were kept in "cotton wool" and their wings were clipped'. And she doubts 'whether an appropriate justification exists for the brushing-aside of women in the army especially at a time of acute shortage of good manpower'.²⁸ Yet she thinks that 'something does "move" in Israeli society' and cites the example of another feminist – Dr Dorit Padan-Eizenshtark (head of the Department of Behavioural Sciences in the Ben-Gurion University) who leads a team planning a 'women's reserve service'. 'The team is charged with inserting women into "masculine" professional domains, so that during emergencies the economy can [go on] functioning in a normal fashion'. She and other

feminists congratulate the Ministry of Labour on its intention to further implement its policy of encouraging women's work by 'training 60,000 housewives . . . especially in technical jobs, so that in an emergency they can be integrated into the manpower structure, and re-activate the economy as a whole, not just the vital plants'.²⁸

This brand of feminism lends its unqualified support and gives its uncritical consent to a regime whose own policies induce an accumulation of internal socio-economic and political strains, a regime which is in the process of losing control over the economy to an extent that could very well impede its future expansion and retard its war abilities. The sterner face that zionism has acquired as a result of the May 1977 elections may if nothing else help the women's movement to lose this particular contingent of feminists.

Others in the movement, most prominently Knesset members Shulamit Aloni and Marcia Freedman, set out to charge at the religious flank of zionism, proposing liberal laws and amendments that would make possible civil marriage, abortion and 'equal rights for women', the latter by a new basic law. This light brigade sets out to wrench from the legislature a host of reforms in women's status at work, welfare tax and other domains in which women come under the repressive thumb of the religious authorities.

Although they succeeded in inserting such women's issues as clauses in various party political programmes, they were defeated time and again in the Knesset and its committees, where strategically situated National Religious Party politicians blocked every proposal, while other politicians clamoured for 'national unity'.

National unity, in this context, is no mere empty phrase, but an expression of the need shared by both 'left' and 'right' wings of zionism for a cohesive ideological framework that will prop it up and provide it with the righteous posture necessary for accomplishment of its policies. The Jewish religion is such a framework; its imperatives and prohibitions – especially but not exclusively in matters concerning women – are in keeping with 'demographic-national needs'. To 'be fruitful and multiply' as well as the penalties (bastardy) designed to prevent 'racial impurity' are in harmony with the zionist exclusivist claim over Palestine.

Some feminists are misguided enough to think that a trade-off is possible – that zionism will exchange 'liberal' laws for women's political consent and for their active economic support, at the price of giving up the benefits which collusion with the religious sector provides. The mainstream of the movement and its front runners in particular have no qualms about the aims of zionism, only concern for the best ways of achieving those aims.

In the most thorough critique to date, Lesley Hazleton's *Israeli Women – the Reality Behind the Myth* the author provides a comprehensive exposition of just what the title promises, but stops short of carrying it to its logical anti-zionist conclusion. In the concluding

chapter 'The political challenge', she plays her very own Zionist card: she complains that Y. Yadin – Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the new Democratic Movement – is reluctant to come out against the 'superficial symbolism of Judaism' when he could in his capacity as archaeologist and leader of the Masada dig . . . 'erect an alternative to religiousness in the form of a strong and concrete historical bond [that will link] the Jews to their political and cultural heritage in their own country'. In tune with the rest of the Zionist doves she coos:

'Security is a central problem . . . it is involved with the existential security of the state in all its aspects: Security in its Jewishness, security in its existence and continued survival . . .'¹⁹

On similar lines, Israeli feminist Joan Yaron, addressing the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels in March 1976, enumerated a list of Jewish women's grievances, describing their inferior position in the economy and their subordinate social status. 'The question could be asked', she said, 'how is it that in a modern democratic state based on socialist [sic] principles, such anomalies could be possible?'²⁰ In the rest of her testimony she proceeded to put the blame squarely on the religious law, but even her thorough exposition of the malpractices which take place in Israel, with religious blessing, does not disguise the fact that Ms. Yaron, like the rest of the feminist movement, is in the end no threat to Zionist Israel, and that she accepts the self-portrait of the state in the fashion of early 1976 – 'modern democratic and socialist'.

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- 6 A. Maimon, *Fifty Years of the Working Woman's Movement*, Ayanot Publication or Am Oved.
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- 8 G. Meir, 'My Life' *Ma'ariv* Publication, 1975 (Hebrew).
- 9 On these farms, unemployed women were engaged in growing vegetables. The produce was sold mainly to the British Army. On no account, even at the price of failure of the enterprise, was the produce sold to Arab town merchants ('Isha Va'em Beyisrael', *Woman and mother in Israel*, p353).

- 10 See 'Isha Va'em Beyisrael', *Woman and Mother in Israel*, Masada Publication (Hebrew).
- 11 *ibid*, from a report by Hana Levine, a Jewish woman officer.
- 12 The Hebrew words *hagirah* (migration) and *mehagrim* (migrants) are used by Zionists to describe all migratory movements of gentiles, as well as those of Jews who go from and to places other than Palestine. The Hebrew words *'aliyah* and *ha'apalah* (ascent and upward struggle) are used to describe Jewish immigration to Palestine. Conversely, the Hebrew word *yeridah*, used by Zionists to describe the emigration of Jews from Palestine, means descent.
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Book review

Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement, from Riots to Rebellion*, vol 2 (1929–1939), London, Frank Cass 1977.

The history of the Palestinian Arab national movement during the years of the British Mandate has not yet been written. What has appeared until now, both in Arabic and English, can be grouped together under three main headings: popular journalism, propaganda, apologetics. There are two reasons for this. The first and more important is that the Palestine problem remains a political issue, exciting great passions and political disagreements; and the history of the Palestine national movement over the last sixty years remains a central theme in the political struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise their right of national self-determination and to establish their own national state. The second is the dispersal of source material and the absence, or reticence, of most of the Palestinian national leaders who played a prominent part during Mandatory times, and whose few contributions to the history of the period can only be classified as falling within the realm of apologia. Y. Porath of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has written what will undoubtedly become the standard reference work of the history of the Palestinian national movement, and deservedly so: this despite the fact that at times he seems unable to free himself from his political prejudices, and abdicates his professed role of detached historian to don the mantle of the partisan adversary.

The Three Stages of the Palestinian National Movement

Three broad and distinct stages can be perceived in the development of the national movement from 1917 to 1948. The first, starting with the beginning of the Mandate and stretching to 1935–6, was a period characterised by the attempts of the Arab national leadership to arrive at an accommodation with British imperialism. Prominent members of the national movement continued as office holders in the Mandatory administration, and the movement's main thrust was directed against what was perceived to be the main enemy and threat; the increasing influx of Jewish immigrants, and the Zionist movement. (At no time was the national leadership able to distinguish between the Jewish inhabitants of the country and the Zionist movement and its

activities.) This is best exemplified by the massacres which accompanied the uprising of 1929, when the main slogan of the Arab demonstrators was 'the Government is with us'. The Arab leadership was at pains to point out to the British imperialists that the Arab opposition was not directed against the Mandate as such, let alone the British presence in Palestine, but solely against the national home clause in the Mandate provisions, and the consequent threat posed by the expanding Jewish presence in the country. Gradually, there was a realisation that struggling against the Jews alone would not, and indeed had not, produced any positive results. This led to the second stage in the development of the national movement, when the British themselves became the main object of the national struggle.

Here it is important to note two points. Firstly, the national movement was not unified in its resolve to struggle against the British, and a sizeable faction, represented by the Nashashibis and their supporters, still favoured the old tactics of confining the struggle to the Jews and persisting in the attempts to come to an understanding with the British (the oft discussed Legislative Council was the Nashashibis' favourite hobby horse). Secondly, the national leaders who realised the imperative of taking up the struggle against the British saw this as a way to exercise pressure on the Mandatory authorities to retreat from their support of the national home policy, and this was not directed against British imperialism as such. Throughout the years of armed struggle, 1936-39, the Palestinian Arab leadership tried, through the small group of 'independent' Arab states, to exert pressure on Britain. Thus the British imperialist presence was never seen as the central target of the armed struggle. The main enemy remained the Zionist movement and armed activity against British symbols of authority was merely a tactic to exert pressure.

The demonstrations of 1933, predominantly directed against the British, foreshadowed the advent of the armed struggle initiated by the band of Shaikh al Kassam, and the general strike of April 1936 and the armed rebellion which ensued. Although the rebellion was crushed by the military, it had a positive outcome in the shape of the 1939 White Paper. Yet this relatively positive result of the rebellion, and the Palestinians' success in bringing in the Arab states to put 'pressure' on Britain, was accompanied by the disintegration of the Palestine Arab leadership, the exhaustion of the national movement, and the replacement of Palestine's Arab inhabitants by the Arab states as the arbiters of the fate of the country. This last, as events were to show in 1948, proved to be a most unhappy change.

The third stage of the national movement, stretching from the end of the rebellion in 1939 to the partition of Palestine in 1948, was characterised by an internal vacuum as far as the leadership of the Arab national movement was concerned. The movement had been crushed, the Arab masses were exhausted, and the leaders had either been deported or fled into exile. The Mufti, aligning himself with the

Nazis during the second world war, provided the British with a perfect excuse to maintain their ban on Arab political activity. When, after the end of the war, they allowed the reconstitution of some political activity, it was the Arab states which played the main role in establishing the new political leadership of the Palestinian national movement. It is important in this context to remember that the Arab League was the brainchild of British colonial political strategy, and that the most important Arab states who played a role in determining the future of Palestine (Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia) enjoyed only the semblance of independence and were under the control of British imperialism.

When partition was decreed, the Arab inhabitants of Palestine played a secondary role in the conflict which ensued. The initiative had long been seized by the neighbouring Arab states; and these, while verbally opposing partition, actually consecrated it by sending their armies to annex those parts of the country which under the partition scheme had been allocated to the Arabs, and to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian Arab state. Until recently – and, some would argue quite credibly, even now – the initiative has remained in the hands of the Arab states; the Palestinians themselves have been able to play a role only in so far as they can exploit the differences and contradictions between the various Arab states.

Porath's History of the National Movement

The present work is a continuation of Porath's previous study which dealt with the national movement from 1917 to 1929. It continues the story up to the end of the 1939 rebellion. The author has amassed an enormous amount of information and pursues the development of events in great, perhaps excessive, detail. He provides a 'blow by blow' account of events which at times tends to obscure rather than elucidate the subject. The book also suffers from an excessive reliance on Jewish intelligence sources which, by the nature of the conflict in Palestine, cannot but be politically suspect.

Without minimising the wealth of information that the book provides, it nevertheless must be said that there is an absence of analysis; this is substituted for an implicit conspiracy theory which makes the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Husseini, the arch-villain of the piece. In addition, Porath chooses to see the Arab national movement in religious terms, and hence to separate Palestinian Arab Christians and Palestinian Arab Druze from the mainstream of the national movement. The book is also occasionally marred by the author's attempts to don the mantle of a partisan adversary, by colourful anecdotes of 'Arab anti-semitism', 'the rape of Christian girls' and 'Arab cowardice'.

On the positive side, the book brings into focus the activity of Ragheb Nashashibi and his supporters, composed of large landowners and the heads of the various Arab municipalities. As Porath rightly explains, the latter's election was almost automatically ensured by the limitation of the franchise to the propertied classes. From the outset of the Mandate, Ragheb Nashashibi and his followers were opposed to the more radical elements within the national movement and advocated the pursuit of a 'positive policy' exhibiting readiness to co-operate with the British imperialist authorities. In the 1920s they were in favour of a nominated legislative council, while in 1928 they dominated the proceedings of the Seventh Palestine National Congress – a congress which was described by one of the radical delegates from Gaza, Hamdi Husseini, as being 'made up of British police agents and land brokers'. Remaining faithful to their line, they came out in opposition to the anti-British demonstrations which broke out in 1933.

While in their public statements Ragheb Nashashibi and other members of the opposition paid lip service to nationalist aims, Porath documents their private conversations with various Zionist leaders, where they showed themselves ready to come to an accommodation with the Zionist movement. Among those leaders who maintained contact with Zionist functionaries, Porath records the names of Ragheb and his nephew Fakhri Nashashibi, Hassan Sidki Dajani, Boulous Shihadeh, Shaikh Abdullah Qalqili, and Mughanam Elias Mughanam. Many of the opposition leaders solicited funds from the Jewish Agency, and a number of newspapers, among them *Miraat al Shark*, received some form of financial backing from Zionist circles.

The opposition policy of attempting to thwart the progress of the national movement was a hallmark of their activity throughout the years of the Arab Revolt (1936–1939). Ragheb Nashashibi himself had resigned from the Higher Arab Committee in July 1937, though he had stopped attending its meetings some time before, a step which Porath explains as being taken at the prompting of Prince Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, with whom the opposition in Palestine enjoyed a close rapport.

Although initially the opposition party had felt impelled to support the strike, and one of its supporters, Fakhri Abdul Hadi, commanded an armed group in the Jenin region, it was opposed to the continuation of the armed struggle after the ending of the strike. Not satisfied with verbal opposition, Porath records that Ragheb Nashashibi approached the Jewish Agency in December 1937 with demands for a financial subvention to establish an armed band to fight against the rebels. Although Porath does not tell us the outcome of this revealing episode, Fakhri Hashashibi organised the 'Peace Gangs', armed and financed by the British Army, which played an active role in fighting against the Arab guerrilla bands in the mountains. Two men who played a prominent role as leaders of this mercenary group were

Fakhri Abdul Hadi (who returned to Palestine from his exile in Damascus after being pardoned by the British for his role in the first phase of the rebellion), and Farid Irshed; both were members of prominent landowning families in the Jenin area.

The other corollary of the Nashashibis' good relations with Prince Abdullah was the cordiality which existed between Abdullah and the Jewish Agency. Porath records that Abdullah had enjoyed friendly relations with the leaders of the Jewish Agency since the 1920s, and that from 1933 private consultations and regular meetings became a matter of course. In 1935 Abdullah offered to sell to the Zionists lands in Ghour al Kabed on the East Bank of the Jordan. The British objected to the sale and the scheme fell through. Nevertheless, in return for his consent to keep the Jewish Agency's option on the land open, Abdullah received a generous financial reward. His contact with the Jewish Agency continued during the years of the revolt. An incident which took place in the closing stages of the revolt highlights Abdullah's real attitude to what was going on in Palestine. Shaikh Yussuf Abu Durrah, a prominent military leader of the revolt, took refuge in Transjordan after the defeat of the movement. He was arrested by Abdullah's forces during the middle of 1939 and was later extradited to the British authorities in Palestine, where he was tried and hanged. The French in Syria, on the other hand, when faced with a similar situation concerning Aref Abdul Razik, refused to extradite him and put him under house arrest in Palmyra. Porath correctly explains that it was in the immediate interest not only of Abdullah but also of the neighbouring Arab countries, where anti-British feeling had been aroused as a result of the struggle of the Palestine Arabs, to put an end to this struggle as soon as possible. It was with this in mind that the Arab states tried to exercise a moderating influence, often successfully, on the leadership of the Palestinian national movement, urging it not to burn its bridges with British imperialism and to trust in its good intentions.

The means employed by the British army to crush the Arab Revolt have become familiar methods of 'counter insurgency'; yet some of these were so harsh and barbaric that it is difficult to find parallels to them even now. The British authorities used the 'iron fist' policy immediately after the murder of Andrews (a government official in Galilee) in October 1937. They unleashed a wave of arrests and deportations, the local national committees were declared illegal, warrants were issued for the arrest of Higher Arab Committee members, the Mufti of Jerusalem was removed from his office as head of the Supreme Moslem Council and the entire leadership and active cadres of the national movement were put under arrest or forced to flee the country. All these steps, however, proved to be of no avail; by September 1938, Porath records, the rebels were in control of most of the mountainous part of Palestine, and civil administration and control of the country had for all practical purposes ceased to exist.

Eventually, the British army inflicted heavy military defeats on the rebels. To achieve this it waged an all-out war on the Palestinian countryside: collective punishments were imposed on villages; villages were bombed from the air; a hundred people were hanged between 1937 and 1939; in October 1938 the British Army entered the Old City of Jerusalem, using local Arabs as 'human shields'; special police stations were established in villages at the expense of the local inhabitants; and to safeguard trains from being blown up by rebels, relatives of known guerrilla commanders were often made to ride on the inspection trolley which preceded the engine. Unfortunately, Porath gives little detail on the activity of Wingate's Special Night Squads (where a number of future Israeli generals received their early training in 'counter terrorism'), nor does he examine the role played by the Nashashibis' 'Peace Gangs' in weakening the revolt.

When dealing with the land problem, Porath gives the curious impression that he does not agree with the results of his own findings. The only possible explanation is that they run counter to his political prejudices. Although he states that the British administration's figures of dispossessed peasants were rather conservative, and gives the lie to zionist claims that Jewish land purchases did not lead to the dispossession and eviction of large numbers of Arab peasants, at the same time he insists that only 'a few thousands were evicted'. He explains land sales as the result of a desire by Arab landowners to get capital for irrigation and modernisation projects. The figures he produces show that of total land sales during 1936-39, 52.6 per cent were by non-Palestinian landowners, 24.6 per cent by Palestinian landowners, and only 9.4 per cent by peasant owners. He explains peasant land sales as being the outcome of indebtedness to urban landlords; the exorbitant rate of interest charged forced peasants to sell their lands to pay off their creditors. While ignoring the political aspect of land acquisition by the various zionist bodies, Porath nevertheless arrives at the conclusion that the economic results were harmful to the Arab economy and contributed to the creation of a stratum of landless peasants who were forced to drift into the towns and become casual labourers.

The movement of Al Kassam has been referred to by many writers; none however gives it the weight and importance which Porath assigns to it as part of the Palestinian national movement. Going beyond the death of Al Kassam, which is where most writers begin and end, he attempts to trace the role of the various members of Kassam's original band during the years of the revolt, and provides us with a breakdown of the social and geographical origin of both Kassamites and other leading military cadres of the rebellion. The lack of source material, the secrecy and the 'grass roots' nature of Kassam's organising efforts have led most writers to dismiss Kassam, or to hail him as a rather romantic figure who has become important only in historical retrospect, but who does not belong to the mainstream of the

Palestinian national movement. Porath evidently does not share this belief. If anything, his account suffers from an over-emphasis on the role of Kassam's followers, and the extent of Kassam's own activity, which is not fully warranted by the sources at our disposal.

In an article written a few years ago, Porath said that with the exception of the National Liberation League (the organisation of the Arab communists in Palestine), there were no modern (on the western model) political parties in the Arab section of Palestine. Despite some mention of Arab political parties in this book, the discussion does not rise above the level of generalities, and the treatment of the subject is not comprehensive. Porath does not provide a social breakdown of party supporters, nor the extent of support the various parties enjoyed. The impression he gives of political parties during this period is that they were little more than collections of notables with no grass-roots organisation, and completely reliant on family and clan support. Indeed Porath implies this by emphasising the extent of traditional family rivalries and inter-factional struggle, but he does not attempt to give an explanation of this phenomenon nor to relate it to the course of political developments.

In his attempts to explain the radicalisation of the national movement in the 1930s Porath emphasises the role played by *Istiklal* party members. However, he ignores some pertinent facts: that the *Istiklal* movement was initially pro-Hashemite in origin, that its existence as an organised group was very short-lived indeed, that prominent *Istiklal* members drifted towards the Mufti's camp and some became functionaries of the Waqf administration. The emphasis on *Istiklal* radicals as the harbingers of radicalisation seems to be misplaced and unwarranted.

While attempting to show that the Mufti of Jerusalem was double faced and the leader of the radical faction within the national movement, Porath ignores his own findings yet again, and is forced to rely on such unreliable sources as Emil Ghouri. He fails however to show that the Mufti used the Supreme Moslem Council funds to further his own political aims, or more importantly, those of the national movement; and he fails to explain why, until 1936, the Mufti was opposed to any direct clash with British imperialism and persisted in his rejection of a policy of non-cooperation with the British, exemplified by his lack of support for the policy of resignation of Arab government officials.

While giving a comprehensive factual account of the progress of the national movement, Porath does not attempt to provide any analysis of the movement and its component parts, nor to account for the aims and possible reasons for the consequent failures of this movement. Basic to this is his failure to face up to the all-important question of whether one could speak of the existence of an organised Palestinian national movement (in the same sense as for example one could speak of the existence of a Zionist movement). Despite the appearance of

parties, organisations and conferences, the Palestinian national movement remained composed of a leadership without an organised following. It was a movement of traditional notables with feudal family support who were deeply divided among themselves, whose policies were governed by short-term self-interest, and who were incapable, as events were to prove, of facing up to the tasks of the national independence struggle.

Musa Budeiri

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Letter

M. Ja'far's polemic (Discussion forum, *Khamsin* 5) against the main divergent tendencies within the PLO provides a sharp and illuminating exposition of the contradictions in the Palestine resistance, but his suggestions for the way out of the present crisis seem to me more incoherent than the positions he had set himself to demolish.

Essentially he levels two main criticisms at the present leadership of the movement: one, that despite appearances, the rejectionists share the same class politics (or rather 'abstention from class politics') as the mainstream PLO. This is demonstrated in their implicit programmatic acceptance of the project for a secular democratic state, while rejecting the methods (diplomacy, etc) for achieving it. Second, he criticises the rejectionists for elevating a method of struggle, armed combat, to the status of an end in itself (p119).

While the PLO/Arafat line is seen as consistent with the creation of 'its own state as one more addition to the League of Arab states' (p121), the author criticises the rejectionists, correctly I believe, as lacking in political perspective. Their opposition to the creation of a 'ministate' is regarded as a post-1973 aberration rather than a central tenet of their position, as it is often presented. Ja'far regards the October 1973 war as providing the key moment in the present dilemma of the resistance: 'The role of the Palestinian organisations during October 1973 was completely marginal. A confusing situation was created, in which organisations whose sole and only reason for existence was the liberation of Palestine had achieved on this particular front less than the normal bourgeois armies whose reasons for existence was defence of the interests of their respective ruling classes.' (p117).

But what is the way out of the present impasses? Ja'far questions the idea of the PLO's legitimacy as the 'sole . . . representative of the Palestinian people' as leading to the paralysis of the 'organisational activity and independence of the revolutionary currents emerging at the base of the Palestinian organisations' (p122). He calls for a 'complete overhaul of all the traditional formulas and slogans (as) a prerequisite to the building of a genuinely new revolutionary organisation in the region.' This time however based on 'a new theoretical divide' – that of 'the reality of class politics in the region' (p123). But the writer does not seem to make up his mind whether the new organisation is to be *Arab* (ie inter-regional), or a new Palestinian

organisation; and if the former, then what is the relationship between the Palestinians and the parent group. Moreover it strikes me as a call for the substitution of a 'bourgeois' *programme* (for a state) by a socialist *slogan* (for class politics). For just as the Palestinian state can be a fetish within the Palestinian movement, so can the call for class struggle by the left opposition.

Underlying Ja'far's criticism of the PLO is the notion, very deep-rooted within the Arab left – and in substantial sections of the international left – that the Palestinian resistance is the advance guard and detonator of the 'Arab Revolution' (ie the coming, or 'almost coming' socialist explosion in the Arab East). Ja'far does not actually hold this position, but his preoccupation with 'class politics' brings his issue into question; and it is on this central dilemma, which permeates his whole critique, that I hope you will allow me to make the following comments.

1. To act as a class force, as Ja'far demands (as opposed to a nationalist force) Palestinians living outside the occupied territories and Israel have two options: either to subordinate their struggle to the overall strategy of each particular revolutionary movement in each 'host' country where they have taken refuge, or to act as a surrogate proletariat (a vanguard) on behalf of the Arab left. It seems that Ja'far's disappointment with Palestinian failures (eg his critique of their policy of non-interference in Arab internal politics) in Lebanon and Jordan betrays a preference for this second conception. (In actual fact, however, while the PLO had a *policy* of non-interference, they followed a *practice* of intervention on the side of the left; but this is the pitfall of judging a movement by its pronouncements rather than its daily activity. Where the writer is correct, however, is in pointing to the persistent tendency of regionalism and sectarianism within the PLO as a whole). One consequence of this vanguardist conception of the PLO is to hold it responsible for the stagnation of the Arab left in general, and accountable for the failure of the left in each confrontation with the Arab regimes that the Palestinians have encountered.

2. With such a monumental task facing the Palestinians, we are compelled to seek the social base which establishes the PLO as a viable political force. In all the Arab countries where Palestinians have resided (with the exception of the Gulf states) this social base is marginal – consisting of a refugee population – as Ja'far himself has noted (p119). How can a declassed community then struggle along class lines? Perhaps through intervention in the occupied territories, or 'amongst the very large Palestinian population living outside the camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Kuwait'? (p119). But it is not clear how the non-refugee population in those three last countries (a very large proportion of whom is made up of professionals, state bureaucrats and small businessmen) will act in a more progressive manner than the refugee population. If anything they have shown themselves to be either upholders of the status quo (in Jordan),

pawns in confessional politics (Lebanon), or money-grabbing careerists (Kuwait).

3. Only in the occupied territories (and Israel) do Palestinians have a 'proper' (though dislocated) and differentiated class structure. But there all forms of class consciousness are being submerged by the realities of national oppression in the daily confrontation with the occupier. Economically, half the working class is integrated into the Israeli economy and finds itself in the dubious position of having to bite the hand that 'feeds' it by asking for separation. (Nevertheless it does bite, and it is separatist – all workers' unions in the West Bank and Gaza support the demand for a Palestinian state). Resistance in those territories is clearly being led, for those whose eyes can see, not by the working class, and least of all by the peasants, but by the urban petty bourgeoisie in all its varieties (shopkeepers, municipal councils, professionals, and of course students).

4. It seems, therefore, that the writer is ignoring an important 'ideological divide' by seeing only the bourgeois character of the proposed state (a possibility which hardly needs stressing). Namely he ignores that a Palestinian state will provide the necessary prerequisite for the transformation of an essentially *national* conflict, based on national oppression, into one in which the conditions for class emancipation (on both the Arab and Jewish side) can obtain for the first time. This requires, from our point of view, that Palestinians have the opportunity to live in a stable community, in which their national culture and physical security can be protected; ie in a state of their own.

It should be obvious that this project requires a prolonged and patient struggle against Israeli expansionism, and involves a careful strategy of unity and alliances with Arab progressive movements. But it also involves a reassessment of the 'vanguard role' allocated by the Arab left to the Palestinian revolution. Above all it requires a realistic perspective of what the Palestinians can do and of what they cannot do in the present balance of forces. It is totally unclear how Ja'far can avoid confining himself to 'revolutionary' 'individuals and little grouplets' (p122), while calling for the 'transcendence' of the PLO in the name of such an abstract socialist programme and class perspective. This particular blind spot in his analysis tends to obscure an otherwise deep insight into the present dilemmas of the PLO.

Fate (assisted by Zionism) has led the Palestinians to play a dynamic and occasionally revolutionary role in Arab politics. Now that the Jordanian civil war and the Lebanese civil war are part of history – whose lessons have not been completely assimilated – should we insist that they are reassigned to become the cannon fodder for the realisation of the dreams of failed Arab revolutionaries?

Salim Tamari – June 1978

NOTE M. Ja'far will reply to this letter in our next issue. Other readers are invited to join the debate.