



---

Reflections on October 2000: A Landmark in Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

Author(s): Azmi Bishara

Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Spring 2001), pp. 54-67

Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the Institute for Palestine Studies

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2001.30.3.54>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of California Press and Institute for Palestine Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Palestine Studies*

JSTOR



## REFLECTIONS ON OCTOBER 2000: A LANDMARK IN JEWISH-ARAB RELATIONS IN ISRAEL

AZMI BISHARA

*This article was written in response to the violence that took place in Israel during the first two weeks of October 2000. The first phase of these events, from 1 to 6 October, was marked by massive demonstrations in Arab localities throughout Israel in sympathy with the second intifada; in the course of these demonstrations, thirteen unarmed Arab citizens were shot dead by Israeli security forces, a thousand were wounded, and hundreds were arrested. The second phase, from 7 to 15 October, involved vigilante actions by Jewish citizens against Arab citizens, including attacks on mosques, clinics, stores, and homes (see Docs. A5, C1, and D2 in JPS 118, and Docs. C4 and C5 in this issue.)*

*In diagnostic rather than narrative mode, the piece analyzes Israel's conduct during the events and their repercussions. Its thrust is that Israel's measures reveal the hollowness of its democracy as far as its Arab citizens are concerned. It equally condemns the Israeli establishment (military and civilian), the Israeli Left, and the "Israelized Arabs" preoccupied with winning the approval of the Jewish majority. Among the main results of the October events, in the author's view, are the reversal of the trend toward "integration" and the confirmation of the Arab national identity of Israel's Arab citizens, an identity that is bound to be consolidated as Israel pursues its policies of separation in the occupied territories.*

FOLLOWING THE MASSIVE DEMONSTRATIONS of Israel's Arab citizens in October 2000, commentators have been vying with one another to come up with explanations for the events' unprecedented scope and the deep rage they revealed. These explanations have included (1) the racial discrimination to which the Arabs have been subjected; (2) disappointment in Ehud Barak's government; (3) the religious dimension of the al-Aqsa issue; (4) the Arab national dimension and empathy with the Palestinians of the occupied territories; and (5) the mounting anger at the Israeli police and their habitual practices against Arab citizens. But since these causes—however valid—are

---

**AZMI BISHARA**, a former professor of philosophy at Birzeit University, is one of thirteen Arab members of the Knesset and the head of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). A longer and earlier version of this article appeared in the winter 2001 issue of our sister publication, *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya*.

*Journal of Palestine Studies* XXX, no. 3 (Spring 2001), pp. 54-67.

old and the phenomenon they purport to explain is new, they are insufficient. An analysis of the October events and their implications, then, becomes imperative.

### THE OCTOBER EVENTS

Whatever their grievances about their status and the discrimination they endure, which undoubtedly formed a backdrop to the crisis, the reason the Arab citizens of Israel took to the streets in October was to express solidarity with their Palestinian compatriots in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Indeed, the High Follow-Up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel called the general strike as a strictly political or national protest, without any reference to issues concerning the Arab minority's own situation. The strike soon developed into unprecedentedly massive demonstrations that swept virtually every Arab locality in the country.

There is no doubt that all-encompassing popular civil disobedience by the Arabs of Israel over a political or national issue represents a new phenomenon: the only precedent in terms of scope—the Land Day demonstrations of April 1976 that resulted in the shooting deaths of six unarmed Palestinians by the security forces—was called in response to the specific grievance of Israel's ongoing expropriations of Arab-owned land. If anything, much of the Arab citizenry frequently complained (despite their growing politicization) that their leadership paid too much attention to broad political issues at the expense of their daily life and civil issues. What was new in October, then, was that a strike that had nothing to do with local interests per se fired the population to such an extent that the protestors soon deviated from the planned marches and spontaneously erupted into expressions of vehement anger that no one had anticipated. It is difficult to pinpoint what exactly triggered the escalation: Was it the al-Aqsa massacre that followed Sharon's provocative entry into the Haram al-Sharif on 28 September? The image of a murdered child in his father's arms? The unrelenting coverage of the bloodshed in the territories by the Arab satellite stations? Or was it all of these combined? Whatever the cause, the phenomenon, with its multiple political and social dimensions, was set in motion.

One of the most crucial aspects of the October crisis as it unfolded in Israel proper was the behavior of the Israeli security forces; indeed, the strikes on the days following the general strike were protests against its bloody suppression. The security forces, which dealt with the angry political protests of the Arab citizens as hostile acts in the fullest sense of the term, appeared to be implementing a well-studied policy. For the preceding two years, the political and security apparatuses of the Hebrew state had been engaged in a debate about how to deal with the Arab citizens, who had been becoming more active and self-confident as a political force. The Israeli political apparatus had tended toward a policy of co-optation through gradual integration, but as a result of "security" considerations during the demonstra-

tions, the security apparatus was apparently given the green light to deal with the protestors as it saw fit.

Thus the Israeli security apparatus, including the police, the border guards, the Shabak, and the *musta'ribin* (undercover agents posing as Arabs), occupied Arab villages and towns where the protests were going on and used live ammunition against them. It is true that in some cases protesters had resorted to closing main thoroughfares, but the authorities' response of firing with intent to kill has remained, since Land Day, a response reserved exclusively for Arab demonstrators. Indeed, hardly any demonstration in the Arab sector passes without shooting by the security forces, whereas it is well known that Jewish citizens can demonstrate and close down streets without being shot at or even have tear gas thrown at them; during the recent events, Israeli security forces actually protected bands of Jewish hooligans while they were attacking Arabs and Arab property in Nazareth. In contrast, a number of Arab citizens were killed without participating in a single demonstration or protest.

The behavior of the Israeli security forces had the effect of legitimizing the killing of Arabs, thereby placing them outside the protection of the law. The fact that this took place under the rule of the Zionist Left and "the forces of peace"—as was the case both with Land Day and with the Kafr Qasim massacre in 1956, when forty-seven unarmed Arab citizens were gunned down in cold blood as they returned from their fields, unaware that a curfew had been imposed—sent an important signal: if this is the behavior of the Labor party, what is to prevent the followers of the political Right from going out looking for Arabs—any Arabs—to teach them a lesson? What is to prevent Zionist riffraff from destroying Arab shops in the mixed cities or attacking Arabs in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods? The mask concealing Jewish racism has fallen, exposing what is festering in the depths of Israeli Jewish society and its lowest classes. The findings of Israeli public opinion polls, which over the decades have shown persistent racism among the majority of the Jewish population, have now left the realm of statistics and materialized on the streets.

Another feature of the October events was the absence of self-criticism or introspection within the Israeli media, traditionally known for its contentiousness. Liberal intellectuals, too, were silent, "pained" as a result of their "disappointment" in the Arabs. With their overseer's mentality, many of these intellectuals joined the chorus not only against the Palestinian Authority (PA) for having rejected the peace that was "offered," but also against the Arab citizens of Israel for having rebelled against the space provided them within the framework of "coexistence." This "coexistence" is itself based on internal discrimination and on the transformation of the Arabs into a reserve vote for Labor party coalitions. The liberal intellectuals took a stand only when the Israeli Right started rampaging through the streets against Arabs. Only when the Left felt the danger from the Right did critical voices begin to be raised against the murder of Arab citizens. The liberals expressed this newfound

solidarity by organizing condolence visits to the families of the martyrs, whose deaths until then had elicited only silence and anti-Arab incitement by the Zionist Left. Moreover, the Israeli leftists' self-criticism was tempered by the doubts they cast on the loyalty of the Arabs, accused of having allowed themselves to be led by "provocateurs."

## THE BACKGROUND

The massive demonstrations that swept the Arab towns and villages and the mixed cities did not simply erupt in a moment of anger or as part of a wave of spontaneous solidarity. Rather, they were the culmination of a national reawakening that had been gathering momentum for some time, especially since national democratic and modernist elements in Israel's Arab society began to offer an alternative to what they termed the "Israelization" of the Arab citizenry. This process, which had been developing gradually, is based on an "integration" or "assimilation" that is undergirded by the erroneous (though seldom articulated) notion that the Arab national identity must be suppressed for the Arabs to obtain civil rights. The alternative proposed included both an assertive national democratic identity and an insistence that civil equality is possible only in a state that is for *all* its citizens. Despite opposition by the traditional parties, including the Islamic movement and the Communist party—not to mention by the Israeli establishment, both liberal and conservative—the new discourse caught on because it addressed real needs of Arab society in Israel. After the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) proved that it was possible to adopt such a stance within the context of Israeli citizenship, and even to use Israeli political and electoral arenas to promote Arab national ideas, other political parties began to embrace these positions, at least verbally. At the popular level, the new political culture manifested itself in a number of ways, including refusing to put out Israeli flags on "independence day" and insisting on commemorating the Nakba (the Catastrophe of 1948) instead, and the new insistence by Arab university students on affirming their national identity (for example, by openly memorializing the Nakba) after long years of quietism. In general, the Arab population became far more assertive in demanding civil equality, which was no longer seen as a "favor" but as a "right."

While the Arab actions of October were not the product of a passing anger, neither were the actions of the Israeli police. In recent years, the Israeli authorities have been repeatedly warned about the worsening of police practices against Arab citizens, including unprovoked attacks. No arrests were made last June when an Arab member of the Knesset (MK) was shot at in a demonstration against house demolitions in Lydda. No investigation was made into two separate incidents the previous month when police officers shot at unarmed Arab drivers who allegedly violated traffic rules. In the recent past, Arab citizens protesting land confiscations, house demolitions, and military maneuvers near Arab neighborhoods have been shot at in Lydda, al-

Ruha, Umm al-Sahali, and even in front of the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem in November 1999, where police forces violently attacked Arab MKs

and mayors demonstrating for equal budgets for Arab villages. The police commander of the Northern Districts, Alik Ron, who was responsible for the anti-Arab repressive measures and whose resignation was repeatedly demanded, was consistently protected by Interior Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami.

Police brutality during the October events, then, was not a function of the political nature of the protests or of the fact that their focus was the Palestinian

cause. It was not an aberration but rather a reflection of the Hebrew state's view of the Arabs during times of crisis not as its citizens—not even as second- or third-class citizens—but quite simply as adversaries and enemies.

---

*Police brutality during the October events reflected Israel's consideration of the Arabs in times of crisis not even as second-class citizens, but quite simply as enemies.*

---

### THE ILLUSION OF INTEGRATION

One of the most important effects of the October events has been the collapse of the "integration" thesis, which until recently represented for many the best possible relationship between the state and its Arab citizens, both individually and collectively. The clichéd "integration of Arabs into the political life of the Israeli State and society" has long been the preferred formula for political action of many of Israel's leading Arab political forces as well as of the various Jewish-Arab associations devoted to coexistence and dialogue. It has also been the goal of many individual Arab citizens. The illusory nature of this formula lies in its presumption that integration will lead to equality and that the obstacle to integration is the absence of Palestinian-Israeli peace.

This is precisely what made many supporters of the integration thesis push for any agreement that could be reached between the Palestinians and Israel regardless of whether it approximated justice. In keeping with their belief that the obstacle to integration is the external tension between Israel and the Arab world, these individuals even rushed to support the 17 October Sharm al-Shaykh understandings reached immediately after the bloody suppression of the Arab protests in Israel. And while striving to "correct" the Jewish community's negative impressions of the Arabs caused by the October events, they intensified their calls for renewed efforts to reach an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. It should be emphasized that their eagerness for compromise does not stem from their belief in the need to reach a just peace or solve the Palestinian problem for its own sake, but from their desire to remove all obstacles standing in the way of their integration into Israeli life. But the real obstacle to integration is not the absence of Palestinian-Israeli peace but the Jewishness of the state, to which we can add (in light of the October events) the Arabs' insistence on holding on to their Arab identity. Experience

has shown, moreover, that in situations when the “peace process” advances, it is not integration that advances, but the *illusion* of integration.

At all events, what happened in October has struck a fatal blow to the integration thesis for the great majority of Israel’s Arabs: when the state resorts reflexively to the gun in dealing with its Arab citizens, it becomes difficult even for the Arab supporters of the Zionist parties to see themselves as integrated members of a pluralistic Israeli society. It is now clear that integration, which is at the heart of the “Israelization” process that had been undermining Arab identity, does not lead to equality (for there can be no equality for Arabs in a “Jewish” state) or to an Israeli (as opposed to a Jewish) nation, but only to a distorted, marginalized Arab identity.

Even on a purely material plane, the Arabs discovered the extent to which their daily lives and consumer life-styles inside Israel are dependent on the political whims of the Jewish street and vulnerable to government punishment. After the demonstrations had been suppressed, the Israeli telephone monopoly Bezek suddenly stopped providing services or repairing phone lines in Arab villages, as did the countrywide electric company. Moreover, a number of companies stopped delivering foodstuffs to Arab villages. The “security” argument was used to explain these boycotts, but the explanation is not plausible as they continued after calm had been restored and people were trying to go back to their normal lives. Even the rabbinate flexed its muscles with regard to the Arabs, suddenly revoking Kosher certification from fourteen small Arab food factories, forcing their closure for days until new terms of Kosher certification were devised (these entailed expensive security precautions to protect the rabbinate’s inspectors). This situation, however temporary, brought home to the Arabs the extent to which their situation in Israel was not one of integration, but of utter dependency.

### THE POLICY OF INCITEMENT AGAINST POLITICS

No sooner had the violence ended than the official media (particularly its Arabic section) and research institutions began their “search” for the culprits responsible for the events. Certain Arabic newspapers with links to the government Information Department, Zionist parties, and Israeli ministries began inciting their readers against the Arab leadership and opening their editorial pages to Israeli Jewish former intelligence agents, who began to write entire articles blaming the repression on the national movement of the Arab citizens.

At a more sophisticated level and under an academic guise, meetings were held in Israeli universities to assess what happened. Indeed, the October events have shaken perceptions of the relationship between the Arab community and the Hebrew state, leading to the disintegration of the theories propounded over the years by university centers and their Arab and Jewish research teams. Since the October events, academic theorization about the Arabs in Israel has gone back to the drawing board with new ma-

terial. What is troubling about this phenomenon is that some of the Arab researchers working for Israeli research institutions could come up with nothing better than the conclusion that the true cause of the events was not Israeli policies toward the Arab citizens but the poor quality of the Arab leadership. It is interesting how perfectly this finding (which, however true, has no bearing on the events) dovetails with the Israeli system that seeks to neutralize any authentic Arab political leadership while attempting (unsuccessfully, as it turns out) to revive local municipal and traditional leadership structures. As a result of these notions of leadership as being ahistorical and apolitical, divorced from existing forces or social structures, Arab political parties and politicians have been excluded from the debates taking place under the auspices of government agencies; instead, the Arabs are “represented” on Israeli podiums by “acceptable” mayors and by Arab Ph.D.s “accredited” as experts in Arab affairs. In the wake of the events, it was such individuals, along with Jewish chairs of councils and associations and other important personalities, who began showering the Arab populace with summaries of what had happened and prescriptions of what should be done.

The Zionists hold the Arab leadership responsible for pushing the otherwise contented “Israeli Arabs” into the melee of politics. But there is no *one* Arab leadership. In the atmosphere of anti-Arab incitement that followed the October events, certain Arab politicians began to retreat from the positions they took in the heat of the events and reaffirmed their calls for integration, branding politicians espousing other views as “agitators” and “extremists.” Indeed, one of the characteristics of a skewed power relationship is the tendency of some members of the weaker party, the Arab minority in this case, to incite against their own national movement in an effort to curry favor with the dominant party, be it the Israeli establishment or the Jewish majority. Meanwhile, the political parties and activists who insist on Arab equality, the preservation of national identity, and a just Palestinian-Israeli peace are presented as “secessionists” opposing Arab-Jewish cooperation.

Such behavior reinforces a colonizer/colonized dimension of relations between Israel and its Arab citizens. It feeds into the colonialist’s superior perspective and confirms the image of the Arab that is ingrained in racist minds, namely that Arabs are self-interested cowards who think with their degraded instincts. This facilitates the task of the authorities, who use such individuals against their own people.

Official Israel’s attempt to delink the October events from their real causes has latched onto the following explanation: the “neglect” suffered by the Arab minority with regard to their rights and the lower living standards caused by the absence of state investment in Arab villages and towns have been exploited by certain Arab political forces to incite the people against the state and coexistence. This being the case, the situation can be rectified by following two parallel paths: (1) improving and developing government dealings with the Arab community and (2) isolating the extremist politicians at the popular level, or, even better, isolating the entire Arab community



from politics apart from what takes place inside the officially sponsored “co-existence tents.” These coexistence tents, at which Arab delicacies can be sampled and declarations of Arab-Jewish goodwill and friendship exchanged, have sprung up like fungi at road intersections in the wake of the events. (A Jewish former MK who attended one of these tent gatherings recently called to tell me how an Arab politician had spoken for brotherhood and against extremism so movingly that he almost wept. He then proceeded to shower me with advice on how the “extremists” should learn from this man’s example.)

### COEXISTENCE AND EQUALITY

Following the logic of the official position, if Israel’s Arabs do not support the “peace process” dictated by the Labor party and the Zionist Left, then they must be against peace—for the very concept of a “just peace” lies outside the Zionist consensus on “peace” and is therefore unacceptable. In similar fashion, if the Arab citizens fail to affirm unequivocally their support for a coexistence based on the Jewishness of the state, they must be against “coexistence” altogether—for, once again, the concept of equality based on the principles of full citizenship lies outside the Zionist concept of “coexistence.” For most Jews, who would prefer to see the Arab carrying a hand drum and spontaneously breaking into a folkloric *dabka*, coexistence based on equality would actually undermine Arab-Jewish brotherhood insofar as it would arouse in them feelings of anger. Following the October events, the Haifa municipality ran advertisements aimed at the Jewish citizens suggesting that they continue to visit Wadi Nisnas and other Arab neighborhoods, which Jews had been avoiding, and urging them to participate in hospitality programs involving visits to Arab households. So far, no one has raised the question of why coexistence should involve Jews being invited to visit Arab homes in Wadi Nisnas but not Wadi Nisnas’s inhabitants being invited to Jewish households in Ramat Aviv.

It is clear, however, that coexistence tents and hospitality visits cannot provide the basis for a meaningful coexistence any more than they can effectively shelter Arabs who are being shot at in times of crisis. Coexistence in equality is achieved through a struggle for equality, just as coexistence in the context of a just peace is achieved through a struggle for a just peace. As a result of the October events, most Arab citizens seem to realize that their long-term protection cannot be assured by efforts to please the majority or flatter the dominant conception of coexistence, but only by building a national democratic movement and Arab institutions capable of proposing a comprehensive option for the Jews and Arabs of Israel: a state for *all* citizens that acknowledges and respects two national affiliations in one country.

It should be emphasized that the goal of equality has survived the loss of illusions concerning integration. Indeed, the October events demonstrated what we have always asserted: that without equal citizenship on a national

basis—that is, without recognition of the Arabs as a national minority—the “integration” of the individual is illusory and can collapse overnight, which is exactly what happened in October. Without equal citizenship within this national context, the state’s treatment of its Arab citizens can change instantaneously from “tolerating” individuals demanding equality within the existing Zionist framework to seeing them as enemies who can be shot at when they dare to challenge the margin of maneuver allotted to them within this framework.

As a result of the new awareness following the October events, it is now possible to reinvigorate the struggle for equality on proper bases, i.e., through holding on to Palestinian and Arab identities and building Arab national institutions. Retreating from national positions in order to win the approval of the state and Jewish public opinion means destroying national gains and returning to a relationship based on groveling in exchange for crumbs, which can hardly be considered a strategy for equality.

### THE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

In trying to assess the impact of the October events, it is instructive to look back on the aftermath of Land Day, 30 March 1976, when Arab citizens mounted a unified action against the government policy of land confiscations and were attacked by the Israeli police and border guard. After the events, a wide incitement campaign—even more virulent than what was witnessed recently—was launched in which the entire Hebrew press was united against the Arabs. Then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, whose police had just shot dead six Arab citizens and wounded hundreds more in a single day, refused to see a delegation from the National Committee of the Heads of Local Councils (even though most of the Arab heads of local councils on the committee had refused to support the general strike called for Land Day). A flurry of societies and associations of “mutual understanding and coexistence” were created together with research centers specializing in “Arab issues.” Arab and Jewish specialists in the Arab minority proliferated.

Arab political power increased remarkably following the strike and protests for the simple reason that they expressed the possibility of unified political action by the Arabs as a national minority. Subsequently, certain Arab demands were met by the state, though the government used these “concessions” to co-opt and absorb the movement in a classic maneuver whereby achievements won by the “extremists” are granted to the “moderates” so as to prevent the extremists from gaining more power. (The “moderates,” for their part, start believing that it was they who had brought about these achievements by having reached an understanding with a racist occupying authority.)

As for the October 2000 events, the Israeli official response was quite different despite the campaign against both the “extremist forces” and the Arab MKs (who in fact were unfairly targeted, as many of them publicly de-

clared—in Hebrew and sometimes even in Arabic—their support for integration and their hostility toward the new national democratic discourse). During the events themselves, the Prime Minister's Office held a meeting with representatives of the Committee of the Heads of Arab Local Councils, and a minister was dispatched to the Galilee and spent several weeks there. The prime minister also approved the establishment of an official commission of inquiry—the first time such a commission has ever been formed in response to an Arab demand. While Arabs may reject the notion that a body presided over by an Israeli judge is in a position to pronounce upon the solidarity of the Arab citizens with their Palestinian brethren across the Green Line, or even on their “violations” of Israeli law in an expression of legitimate anger, it is clear that the government's appointment of the commission was a concession to the Arabs, as well as an attempt to neutralize the rising influence of the “extremists” in the wake of the October events. (Indeed, a *Ha'Aretz* editorial of 6 November 2000 called for the establishment of an official commission of inquiry on the grounds that failure to do so would lead to the ascendance once again of the nationalist elements, i.e., “extremists,” within the Arab minority.) Not surprisingly, the Arab politicians and academics who had urged people not to participate in the general strike immediately hastened to sing Israel's praises, hailing it as the very exemplar of democracy for forming the commission, as if in so doing Israel had discharged its duty and all that remained was for the Arab citizens to pay the price for their violations of the law—their “illegal” demonstrations being put on a par with the sniping and shooting by the police.

### THE DEMOTION OF THE “ISRAELIZED” ARABS

Despite all that has happened, there is still no shortage of elements eager to placate the Jewish majority and curry favor with the state. But the defeatist attitude of glorifying the oppressor while blaming the victims (an attitude that in the past enjoyed some legitimacy in the Arab sector) is no longer tenable, and the remnants of integration have been reduced to caricatures of their former selves, inspiring only sadness and ridicule. Thus, exchanging pleasantries with Barak during a chance encounter in the corridors of the Knesset was for one Arab MK a source of such pride that he immediately issued a press release announcing it.

This is a crude example of Israelization, but there are other, more complicated ones, that do not necessarily result from bad intentions, although they are attempts to evade the true struggle through recourse to symbols. What is the point, for example, of the Arab MKs' insisting that the Israeli parliament stand for a minute of silence to honor the Arab dead? Is this not asking the murderers to honor their victims, when even during the minute of silence orders to kill yet more Arabs in the territories were being issued, orders that the great majority of the parliament heartily endorsed? This is nothing but

symbolic embarrassment that swaps meaningful confrontation with the intent to influence or persuade with a politics of shaming.

Up until the October events, there was hardly an Israeli institution or television talk show whose decor did not include an “Israelized” Arab adept at benefiting from Israeli liberals anxious to establish their nonracist credentials. This distorted relationship created the images of the moderate and the extremist Arab, the cute one and the not-so-cute one. It also led some to forsake Arab nationalism within the context of Israeli citizenship as well as to tolerate the Zionist nature of the state and the type of citizenship that resulted. But the polarization brought about by the recent events has disturbed the smooth surface of these talk shows and wreaked havoc on the dominant rules of the game. It also ruined the ambience created by using the Arab as “friend” and “guest” or as a type of folklore—not to mention the coddled existence of those Arabs consenting to play such a role. How could such Arabs, who were thrown off course by the October events, go back to their former status after their people had angered the establishment and the “Jewish majority” to such an extent that even domesticated Arabs like themselves became unacceptable? These individuals are in a bind, for even within their own communities they have become marginalized.

### THE POLITICIZATION OF THE ARAB MINORITY

The general strike of 1 October was called by a leadership generally known for caution in dealing with the Israeli state, but it soon unleashed an unprecedentedly concentrated politicization of the Arab citizenry. In the wake of the events, the unity of the Arab national minority reached levels not known before, including the emergence of a completely unaccustomed solidarity between village and town, as well as a strengthening of national and

human bonds spanning the Green Line. In sum, the October events fostered a level of national awareness and a solidity of national identity that the national movement would have required years to develop in ordinary times. They have also provided the movement with a momentum and collective experience saturated with symbols and narratives.

---

*The October events fostered a level of Arab national awareness that would have required years to develop in ordinary times.*

---

But the central achievements of the October events—the unprecedented daring of the Arab citizens in confronting Israeli repression and a new solidarity between the villages and the towns—cannot be preserved unless political bases to nurture them are speedily built. They also cannot be preserved without building up national institutions in all fields: education, health, research, and planning. Popular committees must be organized at the grass-roots level in Arab neighborhoods, towns, and villages that would be linked hierarchically to a countrywide leadership.

Such popular committees, in the event of protests and demonstrations, would be able to draw clear lines between the legitimate yet angry political

protests and the violent acts that occasionally occur. For there is no doubt that the sabotage and destruction of public or private property has nothing whatsoever to do with the struggle. (It seems incomprehensible, for example, that traffic lights, which the public struggled for years to have installed at dangerous intersections in villages and towns, would become targets for so-called acts of struggle.) Such acts, which amount to hooliganism at the moment when the law retreats from the streets, also allow the criminal element to appear to be on the same side of the barricades as the law-abiding youth, who in turn could be tempted by acts of arson and destruction that harm the struggle.

Much needs to be done in the economic sphere as well. The October events made clear that Israel's Arab minority does not have even the minimal requirements to sustain itself economically. With the massive land expropriations, the traditional agricultural economy has long since been replaced by wage earning in the services and industrial sectors of the Jewish economy. The weak, subsistence Arab economy was not replaced by a modern Arab economy but by no economy at all. There is not a single Arab bank with Arab capital in the country, not a single Arab insurance company, not a single Arab press capable of printing a newspaper. Neither the Arab-owned stores providing services to Jewish travelers along the main thoroughfares nor the various Arab businesses nor the wedding halls (the only Arab "industry" that is wholly dependent on the Arab market) constitute a real economic base, and there are no signs of any developing.

Arab investors, though they obviously cannot build totally independent institutions, should begin to think of local economic ventures with their own structures, market, and labor, even if of necessity it will be linked to the Israeli economy. This cannot replace the wage work in Jewish cities, but at least it would add a new dimension. To this end, cooperation with Arab businessmen from the West Bank and Gaza should be considered. If the Israeli market can insist that our food factories be Kosher-certified, why can we not think of redirecting this sector to the markets of the West Bank and Gaza? After all, the Arabs of Israel constitute the main market for some economic sectors in the West Bank, such as the sweets manufacturers and shoe factories in Hebron, among others. Why should the converse not be possible?

### **THE SPECTER OF APARTHEID**

The October events expressed both the Arab citizens' genuine solidarity as a national movement and their alienation from the institutions of the Hebrew state. They should also send an important message to the Israeli leadership: when Israel imposes a system of demographic separation without minimal justice in the West Bank and Gaza, it cannot avoid importing this same system into Israel proper.

The al-Aqsa intifada has led to the exhaustion of Israel's strategic choices: neither direct reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza nor a return to the

old negotiating terms are viable options, and even bombardment and siege are not real options in the long term given the high cost they impose even on Israel. Yet Israel so far refuses to accept a fourth possibility, namely, a comprehensive reassessment of its vision of a final settlement and acceptance of a historic compromise with the Palestinian people. For the first time, Israel has gone from making strategic choices to crisis management. This has been the traditional situation of the Palestinian leadership. Now it is also the situation of the Israeli leadership as well.

We are now confronted with a tense apartheid situation in the territories characterized by siege, blockades preventing freedom of movement (including the freedom of movement of the Palestinian leadership), the unilateral imposition of borders, and so on. This situation will only be strengthened by the prospect of an extended transitional period and the cessation of the quest for a permanent settlement. This apartheid situation in the territories precludes any possible “coexistence” or “integration” for the Arab citizens of Israel, for it will inevitably exacerbate tensions and suspicions and banish them outside the circle of political loyalty. Nor can it be hoped that the establishment of a Palestinian state would improve the situation, for in the present circumstances such a state would be on Israel’s terms, or, if unilaterally declared, its options would be entirely controlled by Israel. Apartheid in the West Bank and Gaza, whether overt or *de facto*, cannot continue without involving the Arabs of Israel. It is for this reason that the struggle against apartheid in the territories must be their struggle as well.

#### AFTERWORD

This essay was written in October and November 2000 under the immediate impact of the events, but the trends it delineates have been borne out in the intervening months. The totally unprecedented Arab boycott of the Israeli elections for prime minister in February—when a full 82 percent of the Arab electorate stayed away from the polls despite a veritable intimidation campaign launched by the state-controlled Arabic media and various forms of blackmail from Israeli politicians—is testimony to a new unity and resolve.

A few words need to be said about the boycott. It was not, as has been claimed, a reflection of “emotional and irrational thinking” in which the Arabs sacrificed their real interests in order to vent their feelings of rage and frustration. Nor was it “revenge” for the thirteen martyrs.

Rather, the boycott was based on a calculated decision. Those calling for the boycott did not use the populist arguments that there is no difference between Labor and the Likud. They emphasized the difference but called for the boycott in spite of it. Voting for Labor, after all that happened, would have sent the clear message that Labor can do exactly as it pleases—that it can treat the Arab citizens as enemies, shoot them, oppress them—and that, though the Arabs will make angry speeches, at the end of the day they will vote Labor.

The national movement has its own agenda. Despite recent progress, “Israelization,” involving the marginalization or loss of our very identity, remains a serious threat. Our first priority—which is to build on the upsurge of national awareness that followed the October events in order to constitute an organized national minority—would have been seriously compromised by voting for Barak under the circumstances. Building the national movement and strengthening the national identity is far more important to the Arabs than Barak, and far more important than the difference between Labor and Likud. (In any case, it had already become clear that Barak was unable to solve the Palestinian tragedy but would only add to it; not to mention the fact that he had publicly stated his intention, if he won, of forming a national unity government with Ariel Sharon, which would have meant a government not much different from the one Sharon put together.)

Finally, it must be emphasized that the boycott was never meant to give up the all-important civil right of the vote. Only those who have a right to vote have the right to abstain. The boycott did not intend to give up this right, but to make it more meaningful; future elections will find the Arabs, strengthened in their identity and civil status as citizens, better able to utilize their vote effectively. The logic of the argument has already been borne out: Sharon did not choose to include an Arab minister in his government for considerations of image only. He did so because he felt the need to co-opt the Arab minority, which, by its stance during the elections, had already grown in political weight. The significance here is not that he appointed an Arab minister—who will have no bearing—but that he felt obliged to do so.

Indeed, Sharon’s nomination is an act of co-option that should not be praised or accepted. Some Arab MKs protested that the first Arab to be named minister in an Israeli cabinet belongs to a Zionist party, not an Arab party, and that he has never been elected by Arabs. But in fact, the presence in the cabinet of a “legitimate” Arab would be even worse, because it would mean accepting the co-option. Participating in a government whose ideology and policies are unacceptable (whether or not it includes Arabs) would mean accepting responsibility for that government’s policies and actions in Israel and in the occupied territories. The new minister, who served in the army and participated in wars against Arabs and who stated in Hebrew that he is “proud to have protected Israel’s borders for eight years,” is presented in Arabic as an “Arab” and in Hebrew as a “non-Jew,” in other words, as “one of the minorities.” He himself presents two different opinions and identities in two different languages—an excellent reminder that integration without equality can only mean, for the Arabs, a deeply distorted identity.