

# 'Ethnocracy': The Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine

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During Israel's fiftieth year of independence (1997-98), the country's High Court of Justice was grappling with an appeal known as Qa'adan Vs Katzir. It was lodged by a Palestinian-Arab citizen who was prevented from leasing state land in the suburban locality of Katzir – built entirely on state lands -- on grounds of not being a Jew.<sup>2</sup> The court deferred decision on the case as much as it could. Its President, Justice Aharon Barak, known widely as a champion of civil rights, noted that this case has been among the most strenuous in his legal career, and pressured the sides to settle out of court.

In March 2000 the court ruled in favor of Qa'adan, and noted that Israel's policies towards the Arab minority were discriminatory and illegal. Yet, the court did not issue an order to Katzir to let Qa'adan lease the land, and was very careful to limit the ruling to this specific case, so as not to create a precedent. In addition, the local Jewish community continued to raise administrative and social obstacles and frustrate Qa'adan's plans to join the locality. By mid 2005 the family has not moved as yet to Katzir.

The fact that in Israel's fiftieth year, the state's highest legal authority still finds it difficult to protect a basic civil right such as equal access of all citizens to state land, provides a telling starting point for pursuing the goals of this paper. In the pages below I wish to offer a new conceptual prism through which the formation of Israel's regime and its ethnic relations can be explained. A theoretical and empirical examination of the Israeli regime leads me to argue that it should be classified as an 'ethnocracy'.

The paper begins with a theoretical account of ethnocratic regimes, which are neither authoritarian nor democratic. Such regimes are states that maintain a relatively open government, yet facilitate a non-democratic seizure of the country and polity by one ethnic group. A key conceptual distinction is elaborated in the paper between ethnocratic and democratic regimes. Ethnocracies, despite exhibiting several democratic features, lack a democratic structure. As such, they tend to breach key democratic tenets, such as equal citizenship, the existence of a territorial political community (*demos*), universal suffrage, and protection against the tyranny of the majority.

Following the theoretical discussion, the paper traces the making of the Israeli ethnocracy, focussing on the major Zionist project of *Judaizing Israel/Palestine*. The predominance of the Judaization project has spawned an institutional and political structure that undermines the common perception that Israel is both Jewish and democratic.<sup>3</sup> The Judaization process is also a major axis along which relations between various Jewish and Arab ethno-classes can be explained. The empirical

sections of the paper elaborate on the consequences of the ethnocratic Judaization project on three major Israeli societal cleavages: Arab-Jewish, Ashkenazi-Mizrahi,<sup>4</sup> and secular-orthodox.

The analysis below places particular emphasis on Israel's political geography. This perspective draws attention to the material context of geographical change, holding that discourse and space constitute one another in a ceaseless process of social construction.<sup>5</sup> The critical political-geographical perspective problematizes issues often taken for granted among analysts of Israel, such as settlement, segregation, borders, and sovereignty. As such it aims to complement other critical analyses of Israeli society.

### **Theorizing Ethnocracy**

The theorization of ethnocracy draws on the main political and historical forces that have shaped the politics and territory of this regime. It focuses on three major political-historical processes: (a) the formation of a (colonial) settler society; (b) the mobilizing power of ethno-nationalism; and (c) the 'ethnic logic' of capital. The fusion of the three key forces in Israel/Palestine has resulted in the establishment of the Israeli ethnocracy and determined its specific features. But the formation of ethnocracy is not unique to Israel. It is found in other settings where one ethno-nation attempts to extend or preserve its disproportional control over contested territories and rival nation(s). This political system also typically results in the creation of stratified ethno-classes within each nation. Other notable cases include Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Estonia, Latvia, Northern Ireland (pre-1972), and Serbia. Let us turn now in brief to the three structural forces identified above.

#### *A Settler Society*

Settler societies, such as the Jewish community in Israel/Palestine, pursue a deliberate strategy of ethnic migration and settlement that aims to alter the country's ethnic structure. Colonial settler societies have traditionally facilitated European migration into other continents, and legitimized the exploitation of indigenous land, labour, and natural resources. Other settler societies, mainly non-European, create internal migration and resettlement in order to change the demographic balance of specific regions. In all types of settler societies a 'frontier culture' develops, glorifying and augmenting the settlement and expanding the control of the dominant group into neighbouring regions.<sup>6</sup>

One common type of colonial-settler society has been described as the 'pure settlement colony', which has been shown to be most appropriate to the Israeli-Zionist case.<sup>7</sup> Further studies have shown that 'pure' settler societies are generally marked by a broad stratification into three main ethno-classes: (a) a founding charter group, such as Protestant-Anglos in North America and Australia; (b) a group of later migrants, such as southern Europeans in North America; and (c) dispossessed indigenous groups, such as the Aborigines in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand, Amerindians in North America, and Palestinians in Israel/Palestine.<sup>8</sup> The charter group establishes the state in its 'own vision', institutionalizes its dominance, and creates a system which segregates it from the other ethno-classes. But the pattern of control

and segregation is not even, as immigrants are gradually assimilated into the charter group in a process described by Soysal as 'uneven incorporation'.<sup>9</sup> Such a system generally reproduces the dominance of the charter group for generations to come.

The establishment of 'pure' settler societies highlights the political and economic importance of extra-territorial ethnic links that are crucial for the success of most colonial projects. The links typically connect the settler society to a co-ethnic metropolitan state or to supportive ethnic diasporas. As elaborated below, extra-territorial ethnic links are a defining characteristic of ethnocracies. These regimes rely heavily on support and immigration from external ethnic sources as a key mechanism in maintaining their dominance over minority groups.

### *Ethno-nationalism*

Ethno-nationalism, as a set of ideas and practices, constitutes one of the most powerful forces to have shaped the world's political geography in general, and that of Israel/Palestine in particular. Ethno-nationalism is a political movement which struggles to achieve or preserve ethnic statehood. It fuses two principles of political order: the post-Westphalian division of the world into sovereign states, and the principle of ethnic self-determination.<sup>10</sup> The combined application of these two political principles created the nation-state as the main pillar of today's world political order. Although the nation-state concept is rarely matched by political reality (as nations and states rarely overlap), it has become a dominant global model due to a dual moral bases: popular sovereignty (after centuries of despotic and/or religious regimes) and ethnic self-determination.

The principle of self-determination is central for our purposes here. In its simplest form, as enshrined in the 1945 United Nations Charter, it states that 'every people has the right for self-determination'. This principle has formed the political and moral foundation for the establishment of popular sovereignty and democratic government. Yet most international declarations, including the United Nations Charter, leave vague the definition of a 'people' and the meaning of 'self-determination', although in contemporary political culture it is commonly accepted as independence in the group's 'own' homeland state. Once such a state is created, the principle is reified, and issues such as territory and national survival become inseparable from ethno-national history and culture. This possesses powerful implications for other facets of social life, most notably male dominance, militarism and the strategic role of ethnic-religions, although a full discussion of these important topics must await another paper.

The dominance of the ethno-national concept generates forms of ethnic territoriality which view control over state territory and its defence as central to the survival of the group in question, often based on selective and highly strategic historical, cultural, or religious interpretations. As I argue below, the application of this principle has been a major bone of contention in the struggle between Jews and Palestinians and in the formation of the Israeli ethnocracy, which attempted to Judaize the land in the name of Jewish self-determination.

The global dominance of ethno-nationalism and the nation-state order has prompted Billig to consider national identities as 'banal'.<sup>11</sup> But despite its dominance, the political geography of nation-states is far from stable, as a pervasive nation-

building discourse and material reality continuously remolds the collective identity of homeland ethnic minorities. Such minorities often develop a national consciousness of their own that destabilizes political structures with campaigns for autonomy, regionalism, or sovereignty.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Ethnic Logic of Capital*

A third structural force to shape the political geography of Israel/Palestine and the nature of its regime has been associated with the onset of capitalism, and its ethnic and social consequences. Here the settings of a settler society and ethno-nationalism combine to create a specific logic of capital flow, development and class formation on two main levels. First, labour markets and development are ethnically segmented, thereby creating an ethno-class structure that tends to accord with the charter-immigrant-indigenous hierarchy noted above. Typically, the founding charter group occupies privileged niches within the labour market, while migrants are marginalized, at least initially, from the centres of economic power, and thus occupy the working and petit bourgeois classes. Indigenous people are typically excluded from access to capital or mobility within the labour market, and thus virtually 'trapped' as an underclass.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the accelerating globalization of markets and capital has weakened the state's economic power. This went accompanied by the adoption of neo-liberal policies and the subsequent deregulation of economic activities and privatization of many state functions. Generally, these forces have widened the socioeconomic gaps between the charter, immigrant, and indigenous ethno-classes. Yet, in the setting of militant ethno-nationalism, as prevalent in Israel/Palestine, the globalization of capital, and the associated establishment of supra-national trade organizations, may also subdue ethno-nationalism and expansionism, previously fuelled by territorial ethnic rivalries. Particularly significant in this process is the globalization of the leading classes among the dominant ethno-nation, which increasingly search for opportunities and mobility within a more open and accessible regional and global economy. A conspicuous tension between the global and the local thus surfaces, with a potential to intensify intra-national tensions, but at the same time also to ease inter-national conflicts, as has recently been illustrated in South Africa, Spain, and Northern Ireland.<sup>14</sup>

### **Ethnocracy**

The fusion of the three forces—settler society, ethno-nationalism, and the ethnic logic of capital—creates a regime-type I have called 'ethnocracy'.<sup>15</sup> An ethnocracy is a non-democratic regime that attempts to extend or preserve disproportional ethnic control over a contested multi-ethnic territory. Ethnocracy develops chiefly when control over territory is challenged and when a dominant group is powerful enough to determine unilaterally the nature of the state. Ethnocracy is thus an unstable regime, with opposite forces of expansionism and resistance in constant conflict.<sup>16</sup> An ethnocratic regime is characterized by several key principles:

- (a) Despite several democratic features, ethnicity (and not territorial citizenship) determines the allocation of rights and privileges; a constant democratic-ethnocratic tension characterizes politics.
- (b) State borders and political boundaries are fuzzy: there is no identifiable *demos*, mainly due to the role of ethnic diasporas inside the polity and the inferior position of ethnic minorities.
- (c) A dominant 'charter' ethnic group appropriates the state apparatus, determines most public policies, and segregates itself from other groups.
- (d) Political, residential, and economic segregation and stratification occur on two main levels: ethno-nations and ethno-classes.
- (e) The constitutive logic of ethno-national segregation is diffused, enhancing a process of political ethnicization among sub-groups within each ethno-nation.
- (f) Significant—though partial—civil and political rights are extended to members of the minority ethno-nation, distinguishing ethnocracies from *Herrenvolk* democracies or authoritarian regimes.

Ethnocratic regimes are usually supported by a cultural and ideological apparatus that legitimizes and reinforces the uneven reality. This is achieved by constructing a historical narrative that proclaims the dominant ethno-nation as the rightful owner of the territory in question. Such a narrative degrades all other contenders as historically not entitled, or culturally unworthy, to control the land or achieve political equality.

A further legitimizing apparatus is the maintenance of *selective openness*. Internally, the introduction of democratic institutions is common, especially in settling societies, as it adds legitimacy to the entire settling project, to the leadership of the charter ethno-class, and to the incorporation of groups of later immigrants. But these democratic institutions commonly exclude indigenous or rival minorities. This is achieved either formally, as was the case in Australia until 1967, or more subtly, by leaving such groups outside decision-making circles, as is the case in Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup> Externally, selective openness is established as a principle of foreign relations and membership in international organizations. This has become particularly important with the increasing opening of the world economy and the establishment of supranational organizations, such as the EU and NAFTA. Membership in such organizations often requires at least the appearance of open regimes, and most ethnocracies comply with this requirement.

Given these powerful legitimizing forces, ethnocratic projects usually enjoy a hegemonic status that originates among the charter group and is successfully diffused among the populace. The hegemonic moment, as convincingly formulated by Gramsci, is marked by a distorted but widely accepted fusion of a given set of principles and practices. It is an order in which a certain social structure is dominant, with its own concept of reality determining most tastes, morality, customs, and political principles. Given the economic, political, and cultural power of the elites, a hegemonic order is likely to be reproduced unless severe contradictions with 'stubborn realities' generate counter-hegemonic mobilizations.<sup>18</sup>

## **Ethnocracy in the Making: The Judaization of Israel/Palestine**

The analysis of the Israeli regime in this paper covers the entire territory and population under Israeli rule. Prior to 1967, then, it is limited to the area within the Green Line (the 1949 armistice lines), but after that date it covers all of Israel/Palestine, or what Kimmerling has called the 'Israeli control system' (Figure 1).<sup>19</sup> While the Occupied Territories are often treated in studies of Israel as an external and temporary aberration, they are considered here as an integral part of the Israeli regime, simply because Israel governs these areas. This appears to be the situation even following the 1993 Oslo agreement, because the areas under limited Palestinian self-rule are still under overall Jewish control.<sup>20</sup> The appropriate political-geographical framework for the analysis of Israel/Palestine since 1967 is thus: *one ethnocracy, two ethno-nations, and several Jewish and Palestinian ethno-classes*.

Jews make up about 80 per cent of Israel's 5.9 million citizens and Palestinian-Arabs about 17 per cent (the rest being neither Jewish nor Arab). An additional 2.7 million Palestinians reside in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hence, the population of the entire contested 'Land of Israel' (Palestine) is roughly 55 per cent Jewish and 43 per cent Palestinian-Arab.<sup>21</sup>

Ethnic and religious division is also marked within each national community. About 41 per cent of Jews are Ashkenazi and about 43 per cent Mizrahi. The rest are mainly recent Russian-speaking immigrants, mostly of European origin, who form a distinct ethno-cultural group, at least in the short-term. Of the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, 77 per cent are Muslims (a fifth of whom are Bedouin), 13 per cent are Christian, and 10 per cent Druze. In the Occupied Territories, 95 per cent are Muslim and 4 per cent Christian. In both the Jewish and Muslim communities, a major cultural division has also developed between orthodox and secular groups. About 20 per cent of Jews are orthodox, as are about 30 per cent of Muslims on both sides of the Green Line.<sup>22</sup>

Zionism has been a settler movement, and Israel a settler state, whose territory was previously inhabited by Palestinian-Arabs. Despite notable differences with other colonial movements, the actual process of European settlement classifies Zionism (both before and after 1948) as a 'pure' colonial settler movement.<sup>23</sup> After Israel's independence in 1948 and following the mass entry of Jewish refugees and migrants, conspicuous social stratification emerged. In broad terms, the Ashkenazim have constituted the charter group and have occupied the upper echelons of society in most spheres, including politics, the military, the labour market, and culture. The Mizrahim have been the main group of later immigrants, recently accompanied by a group of Russian-speakers and a small group of Ethiopian Jews. These groups are placed in a middle position, lagging behind the Ashkenazim, but above the indigenous Palestinian-Arabs. Strikingly, and despite an official ideology of integration and equality towards the Mizrahim, a persistent socioeconomic gap has remained between them and the Ashkenazi group.<sup>24</sup>

As is typical in settler societies, Israel's indigenous Arab minority has occupied from the outset the lowest strata in most spheres of Israeli life, and has been virtually excluded from the political, cultural and economic centres of society. Following the

conquest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, their Palestinian residents became partially incorporated into Israeli economy, mainly as day-labourers, but were denied political and civil rights.<sup>25</sup>

## **A Jewish State**

With its Declaration of Independence, in 1948, Israel announced itself as a 'Jewish state'. In some ways, the declaration of Independence was quite liberal, promising non-Jews 'full and equal citizenship' and banning discrimination on grounds of religion, ethnic origin, gender or creed. The central political institutions of the new state were established as democratic, including a representative parliament (the Knesset), periodic elections, an independent judiciary, and relatively free media.

During the following years, however, a series of incremental laws enshrined the ethnic and partially religious Jewish character of the state (rather than its *Israeli* character, as accepted international standards of self-determination would have required). Chief among these have been the state's immigration statutes (Laws of Return and Citizenship), which made every Jew in the world a potential citizen, while denying this possibility to many Palestinians born in the country. Other laws further anchored the Jewish character of the state not only in the symbolic realm, but also as a concrete and *deepening* reality, covering areas such as citizenship, education, communication and land ownership. As the Israeli High Court declared in 1964—in what became known as the Yerdor case—'the Jewishness of Israel is a constitutional given,'<sup>26</sup> In 1985, revisions made to the Basic Law on the Knesset added that no party would be allowed to run if it rejected Israel's definition as a state of the Jewish people.<sup>27</sup> The combination of these laws created a structure nearly immune against democratic attempts to change its Zionist character.

During the early 1990s two Knesset basic laws defined the state as 'Jewish and democratic', thereby further enshrining the state's Jewish character, but also coupling it with a democratic commitment. As argued below, this coupling is problematic not as an abstract principle, but against the on-going reality of Judaization, which has unilaterally restructured the nature of the state through immigration and land policies. This transformation was supported by the uni-ethnic arms of the state, including army, police, courts, economic institutions, development agencies, and most decision-making forums.

Hence, a main obstacle to Israeli democracy does not necessarily lie in the declaration of Israel as 'Jewish', which may be akin to the legal status of Finland as a 'Lutheran state' or England as 'Anglican'. The main problem lies in the mirror processes of *Judaization* and *de-Arabization* (that is, the dispossession of Palestinian-Arabs) facilitated and legitimized by the declaration of Israel as 'Jewish', and by the ethnocratic legal and political structures resulting from this declaration.<sup>28</sup> Let us now explore in some detail the dynamic political geography behind the establishment of the Israeli ethnocracy.

## **Judaizing the Homeland**

Following independence, Israel entered a radical stage of territorial restructuring. Some policies and initiatives were an extension of earlier Jewish approaches, but the tactics, strategies, and ethnocentric cultural construction of the *Yishuv*—the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine—were significantly intensified. This was enabled with the aid of the newly acquired state apparatus, armed forces, and the international legitimacy attached to national sovereignty.

The territorial restructuring of the land has centered on a combined and expansionist *Judaization* and *de-Arabization* programme adopted by the nascent Israeli state. This began with the expulsion and flight of approximately 750,000 Palestinians during the 1948 war. Israel prevented the return of the refugees to their villages, which it rapidly demolished.<sup>29</sup> The authorities were quick to fill the ‘gaps’ created by this forced exodus with settlements inhabited by Jewish migrants and refugees who entered the country *en masse* during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The Judaization programme was premised on a hegemonic myth cultivated since the rise of Zionism, namely that ‘the land’ (*ha-aretz*) belongs to the Jewish people, and only to the Jewish people. An exclusive form of settling ethno-nationalism developed in order quickly to ‘indigenize’ immigrant Jews, and to conceal, trivialize, or marginalize the Palestinian past.

The ‘frontier’ became a central icon, and its settlement was considered one of the highest achievements of any Zionist. The frontier *kibbutzim* (collective rural settlements) provided a model, and the reviving Hebrew language was filled with positive images such as *aliya lakarka* (literally ‘ascent to the land’, i.e.. settlement), *ge’ulat karka* (land redemption), *hityashvut*, *hitnahalut* (positive biblical terms for Jewish settlement), *kibbush hashmama* (conquest of the desert), and *hagshama* (literally ‘fulfillment’, but denoting the settling of the frontier). The glorification of the frontier thus assisted both in the construction of national-Jewish identity, and in capturing physical space on which this identity could be territorially constructed.

Such sentiments were translated into a pervasive programme of Jewish-Zionist territorial socialization, expressed in school curricula, literature, political speech, popular music, and other spheres of public discourse. Settlement thus continued to be a cornerstone of Zionist nation-building, even after the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state. To be sure, the ‘return’ of Jews to their ancestors’ mythical land and the perception of this land as a safe haven after generations of persecution had a powerful liberating meaning. Yet, the darker sides of this project were nearly totally absent from the construction of an unproblematic ‘return’ of Jews to their biblical promised land. Very few dissenting voices were heard against these Judaizing discourses, policies or practices. If such dissent did emerge, the national-Jewish elites found effective ways to marginalize, co-opt, or gag most challengers.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, 1948 should be regarded as a major political turning point, not only due to the establishment of a state pronouncing a democratic regime, but also as the beginning of a state-orchestrated, and essentially non-democratic Judaization project. Two parallel processes have thus developed on the same land: the visible establishment of democratic institutions and procedures, and a more concealed, yet systematic and coercive, seizure of the territory by the dominant ethnic group. The contradiction between the two processes casts doubt on the pervasive classification of Israel in the academic literature as a democracy, a point to which we return later.



The perception of the land as only Jewish was premised on a distorted national discourse of a 'forced exile' and subsequent 'return'.<sup>31</sup> A parallel discourse developed in reaction to the Arab-Jewish conflict (and Arab rejectionism), elevating the exigencies of national security onto a level of unquestioned gospel. These discourses have blinded most Jews to a range of discriminatory policies imposed against the state's Palestinian citizens, including the imposition of military rule, lack of economic or social development, political surveillance and under-representation, and—most important for this essay—large-scale confiscation of Palestinian land.<sup>32</sup>

Prior to 1948, only about 7-8 per cent of the country was in Jewish hands, and about 10 per cent was vested with the representative of the British Mandate. The Israeli state, however, quickly expanded its land holdings and it currently owns or controls 93 per cent of the area within the Green Line. The lion's share of this land transfer consisted in expropriating Palestinian refugee property, but about two-thirds of the land belonging to Palestinians who remained and became Israeli citizens were also expropriated. At present, Palestinian-Arabs, who constitute around 17 per cent of Israel's population, own only around three per cent of its land, while their local government areas cover 2.5 per cent of the country (Figure 1).

A central aspect of land transfer was its legal *unidirectionality*. Israel created an institutional and legal land system under which confiscated land could not be sold. Further, such land did not merely become state land, but a joint possession of the state and the entire Jewish people. This was achieved by granting extraterritorial organizations, such as the Jewish National Fund, the Jewish Agency, and the Zionist Federation, a share of the state's sovereign powers and significant authority in the areas of land, development and settlement. The transfer of land to the hands of unaccountable bodies representing the 'Jewish people' can be likened to a 'black hole', into which Arab land enters but can never be retrieved. This structure ensures the unidirectional character of all land transfers: from Palestinians to Jewish hands, and never vice versa. A stark expression of this legal and institutional setting is that Israel's Arab citizens are currently prevented from purchasing, leasing or using land in around 80 per cent of the country.<sup>33</sup> It can be reasonably assumed that the constitutions of most democratic countries would make such a blatant breach of equal civil rights illegal. But Israel's character as a Judaizing state has so far prevented the enactment of a constitution which would guarantee such rights.

During the 1950s and 1960s, and following the transfer of land to the state, over 600 Jewish settlements were constructed in all parts of the land. This created the infrastructure for the housing of Jewish refugees and immigrants who continued to pour into the country. The upshot was the penetration of Jews into most Arab areas, the encirclement of most Arab villages by exclusively Jewish settlements—where non-Jews are not permitted to purchase housing—and the virtual *ghettoization* of the Arab minority (Figure 1).

[Figure 1 around here]

### **Settlement and Intra-Jewish Segregation**

Let us turn now to the issue of ethno-classes. Beyond the obvious consequences of the Jewish settlement project on the ethno-national level, it also caused processes of segregation and stratification between Jewish ethno-classes. This aspect is central for the understanding of relations between the various Jewish ethno-classes, and especially Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. Notably, it is not argued that relations between Jewish ethnic groups are non-democratic, but rather that the ethnocentric-settling nature of Jewish-Palestinian relations has adversely affected intra-Jewish relations. To illustrate the geography of these processes, let us outline in more detail the social and ethnic nature of the Jewish settlement project, which advanced in three main waves.

During the first wave, between 1949 and 1952, some 240 communal villages (kibbutzim and moshavim) were built, mainly along the Green Line. During the second wave, from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, 27 'development towns' and a further 56 villages were built. These were mainly populated— usually through coercion—by Jewish immigrants and refugees from North Africa. During the same period large groups of Mizrahim were also housed in 'frontier' urban neighbourhoods, which were either previously Palestinian or adjacent to Palestinian areas. Given the low socioeconomic resources of most Mizrahim, their mainly Arab culture—now affiliated with 'the enemy'—and lack of ties to Israeli elites, the development towns and 'the neighbourhoods' quickly became—and have remained to date—distinct concentrations of segregated, poor, and deprived Mizrahi populations.<sup>34</sup> This geography of dependence, achieved in the name of Judaizing the country, has underlain the evolution of Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations to the present day.

The third wave, during the last two decades, saw the establishment of over 150 small non-urban settlements known as 'community' or 'private' settlements (*yeshuvim kehilatiyim*). These are small suburban-like neighbourhoods, located in the heart of areas on both sides of the Green Line (Figure 1). Their establishment was presented to the public as a renewed effort to Judaize Israel's hostile frontiers, using the typical rhetoric of national security, the Arab threat to state lands, or the possible emergence of Arab secessionism. In the Occupied Territories, additional rationales for Jewish settlement referred to the return of Jews to ancient biblical sites, and to the creation of 'strategic depth'. But, despite the continuation of a similar Zionist discourse, a major difference characterized these settlements—they ruptured, for the first time, Israel's internationally recognized borders, a point to which I return below.

From a social perspective, the people migrating into most of these high quality residential localities were mainly middle-class Ashkenazi suburbanites, seeking to improve their housing and social status. In recent years, urban Jewish settlement in the West Bank accompanied the on-going construction and expansion of small *kehillati* settlements. These towns have increasingly accommodated religious-national and ultra-orthodox Jews.<sup>35</sup>

Notably, the different waves of settlement were marked by social and institutional *segregation* sanctioned and augmented by state policies. A whole range of mechanisms was devised and implemented not only to maintain nearly impregnable patterns of segregation between Arabs and Jews, but also to erect fairly rigid lines of separation between various Jewish ethno-classes. Segregation mechanisms included the demarcation of local government and education district

boundaries, the provision of separate and unequal government services (especially education and housing), the development of largely separate economies, the organization of different types of localities in different state-wide 'settlement movements', and the uneven allocation of land on a sectoral basis.<sup>36</sup>

As a result, 'layered' and differentiated Jewish spaces were created, with low levels of contact between the various ethno-classes. This has worked to reproduce inequalities and competing collective identities. Movement across boundaries has been restricted as most new Jewish settlements (built on state land!) are allowed to screen their residents through tests of 'resident suitability'. This practice has predictably produced communities dominated by middle-class Ashkenazim. At least part of the ethno-class fragmentation and hostility currently evident in Israeli society can thus be traced to the Judaizing settlement system and its institutionalized segregation. In this process we can also note the working of the ethnic logic of capital I singled out earlier as a major force shaping social relations in ethnocracies. Development closely followed the ethno-class pattern prevalent in Israeli society. This created spatial circumstances for the *reproduction* of the 'ethnic gap' between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, through location-based mechanisms such as education, land control, housing, social networks, local stigmas, and accessibility to facilities and opportunities.

### **Democracy or Ethnocracy?**

As we have seen, the politico-geographic analysis of Jewish land and settlement policies highlights three key factors, often neglected in other interpretations of Israeli society: (a) The Israeli regime has facilitated a constant process of expanding Jewish control over the territory of Israel/Palestine. (b) Israel is a state and polity without clear borders. (c) The country's organization of social space is based on pervasive and uneven ethnic segregation. An elaboration of these assertions leads me to question the taken-for-granted notion that Israel is a democracy.<sup>37</sup> Instead, I would argue that the polity is governed by an ethnocratic regime, as defined earlier. It is a rule for and by an expanding ethnic group, within the state and beyond its boundaries, which is neither democratic nor authoritarian.<sup>38</sup>

Democracy, on the other hand, is a regime which follows several main principles, including equal and substantial civil rights, inclusive citizenship, periodic and free elections, universal suffrage, separation between arms of government, protection of individuals and minorities against the majority, and an appropriate level of government openness and public ethics.<sup>39</sup> A factor often taken for granted by regime analysts—but far from obvious in the Israeli case—is the existence of clear boundaries to state territory and its political community. The establishment of a state as a territorial-legal entity is premised on the existence of such boundaries, without which the law of the land and the activity of democratic institutions cannot be imposed universally, thus undermining the operation of inclusive and equal democratic procedures.

This brings us back to the question of Israeli boundaries and borders. As shown above, the Jewish system of land ownership and development, as well as the geography of frontier settlement, have undermined the territorial-legal nature of the

state. Organizations based in the Jewish Diaspora possess statutory powers within Israel/Palestine. World Jewry is also involved in Israeli politics in other significant ways, including major donations to Jewish parties and politicians, open and public influence over policy-making and agenda-setting, as well as lobbying on behalf of Israeli politicians in international fora, especially in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Hence, extraterritorial (non-citizen) Jewish groups have amassed political power in Israel to an extent unmatched by any democratic state. This is an undemocratic structural factor consistent with the properties of ethnocratic regimes.

As mentioned, Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories has also ruptured the Green Line (Israel's pre-1967 internationally recognized borders) as a meaningful border. At the time of writing, some 340,000 Israeli Jews resided in the territories (including al-Quds, or East Jerusalem), and Israeli law has been unilaterally extended to each of these settlements.<sup>41</sup> The Green Line has been transformed into a geographical mechanism of separating (citizen from non-citizen) Palestinians, but not Jews.<sup>42</sup>

The combination of the two factors means that 'Israel', as a definable democratic-political entity, simply *does not exist*. The legal and political power of extraterritorial (Jewish) bodies and the breaching of state borders empty the notion of Israel from the broadly accepted meaning of a state as a territorial-legal institution. Hence, the unproblematic acceptance of 'Israel proper' in most social science writings (including some of my own previous work) and in the public media has been based on a misnomer.<sup>43</sup>

Given this reality, Israel simply does not comply with a basic requirement of democracy—the existence of a *demos*. As defined in ancient Greece, *demos* denotes an inclusive body of citizens within given borders. It is a competing organizing principle to the *ethnos*, which denotes common origin. The term 'democracy' therefore means the rule of the *demos*, and its modern application points to an overlap between permanent residency in the polity and equal political rights as a *necessary democratic condition*.

As we have seen, Israel's political structure and settlement activity have ruled out the relevance of such boundaries, and in effect undermined the existence of universal suffrage (as Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories can vote to the parliament that governs them, but their Palestinian neighbours cannot). The significance of this observation is clear from Israel's 1996 elections: counting only the results within 'Israel proper', Shimon Peres would have beaten Benjamin Netanyahu by a margin of over five per cent. Netanyahu's victory was thus based on the votes of Jews in the Occupied Territories (that is, outside 'Israel proper'), as were the previous successes of the Likud camp in 1981, 1984 and 1988. The involvement of the settlers in Israeli politics is of course far deeper than simply electoral. They are represented (1998) by 18 Knesset members (out of 120), four government ministers, and hold a host of key positions in politics, the armed forces, and academia.

Hence, a basic requirement for the democratization of the Israeli polity is not only to turn it into a state of all its citizens (as most non-Zionist groups demand), but to *a state of all its resident-citizens, and only them*. This is the only way to ensure that extra-territorial and politically unaccountable bodies, such as the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund, and Jewish settlers in Occupied Territories, do not unduly

affect the state's sovereign territory. And it is only this principle that can lay the appropriate foundations for democratic rule, for and by the state's political *demos*.

Beyond the critical issue of borders, several other major impediments to the establishment of sound democratic regime have existed throughout Israel's political history. These have included a very high level of regime centrality, relative lack of political accountability, weakness of judiciary, pervasive militarism, male dominance and associated discrimination against women in most walks of life and the inseparability of religion and state. Lack of space prevents discussion on all but the last of these issues, to which we now turn.

### **Ethnocracy or Theocracy?**

Some scholars claim that a growing influence of orthodox Jewish groups on Israeli politics is leading Israel towards theocratic—and not ethnocratic—rule.<sup>44</sup> Yet the orthodox agenda appears compatible with the Jewish ethnocratic project, as orthodox groups take the rule of the Jewish *ethnos* as a given point of departure, and chiefly aim to deepen its religiosity. As such, their campaign is geared to change the nature of the Israeli ethnocracy without challenging its very existence or the ethnic boundaries of its membership.

Still, the orthodox agenda in Israeli politics is significant in another way, as it, too, challenges the prevalent perception of Israel as 'Jewish and democratic'. Despite important differences, all orthodox parties support the increasing imposition of religious rule in Israel (*Halacha*), as stated by the late leader of the National Religious Party, Z. Hammer, who was considered a moderate: 'I genuinely wish that Israel would be shaped according to the spirit of Tora and Halacha ... the democratic system is not sacred for me...'<sup>45</sup> Likewise, one of the leaders of Shas, often considered a relatively moderate orthodox party, declared not so long ago: 'We work for creating a *Halacha* state ... such as state would guarantee religious freedom, but the courts will enforce Jewish law ... we have the sacred Tora which has a moral set of laws, why should anyone be worried?'<sup>46</sup> Although the initiatives these bodies have taken in recent times attempt to mainly influence the character of public (and not private) spheres, there exists a fundamental contradiction between the orthodox agenda and several basic features of democracy, such as the rule of law, individual liberty and autonomy, civil equality, and popular sovereignty.<sup>47</sup>

This challenge is somewhat obscured by the duality in the interpretation of Judaism as ethnic and/or religious. The secular interpretation treats Judaism as mainly ethnic or cultural, while orthodox and ultra-orthodox groups interpret it as an inseparable whole (that is, *both* ethnicity and religion). This unresolved duality is at the heart of the tension between the secular and orthodox Jewish camps: if the meaning of 'Jewish' is unresolved, how can the nature of the 'Jewish state' be determined?

The challenge to democracy from the orthodox agenda has become more acute because the orthodox political camp has grown stronger in Israeli politics over the last decade. In the 1996-99 period it held 28 of the Knesset's 120 seats (with orthodox parties holding 23 and the rest being orthodox members of other parties).

The orthodox camp has held the parliamentary balance of power for most of Israel's history.

Notably for this paper, the rising power of orthodox sectors in Israel is closely linked to the state's political-geography, and to the Zionist project of Judaizing the country. There are four main grounds for this. First, all religious movements in Israel, and most conspicuously Gush Emunim ('Loyalty Bloc', the main Jewish religious organization to settle the West Bank), fully support the settling of Jews in occupied Palestinian territories and the violent military occupation of these areas. This is often asserted as part of a divine imperative, based on the eternal Jewish right and duty to settle all parts of the 'promised land'. Such settlement is to be achieved while ignoring the aspirations of Palestinians in these territories for self-determination or equal civil rights. Needless to say, this agenda undermines even the possibility of democratic rule in Israel, and has already caused several waves of intra-Jewish religious-secular violence, including the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995.

Second, repeated surveys show that the religious public in Israel is the most intransigent in its opposition to granting civil equality to Israel's Arab citizens. This does not mean that the entire orthodox public opposes democratic rule, or that it is homogenous in its political views. But nearly all opinion studies, as well as the platforms of main religious political organizations, rank democratic values lower than the Jewish-ness of the state or Jewish control over the entire territory that is Palestine.<sup>48</sup>

Third, there is a discernible link between the rising power of orthodox bodies and the rupturing of Israel's borders. Political analyses and surveys show that as the Judaization of the Occupied Territories deepened, so have the Jewish elements in the collective identity of Israeli-Jews at the expense of Israeli components.<sup>49</sup> This trend stems from the confusion in the meaning of 'Israeli', when both state borders and boundaries of the Israeli polity are blurred. In other words, the breaching of Israeli borders with settlement activity and the involvement of world Jewry in internal politics have eroded the territorial and civil meaning of the term 'Israeli', and simultaneously strengthened the (non-territorial and ethno-religious) Jewish collective identity. This process has grave implications for democracy, principally because it bypasses the institution of territorial citizenship, on which a democratic state must be founded. In the Israeli context it legitimizes the stratification between Jews (with full rights) and Arabs (second-class citizens), thus denying Arabs much of the status attached to their 'Israeli' affiliation. Only the demarcation of clear Israeli borders, and the subsequent creation of a territorial political community, can halt the undemocratic ascendancy of Judaism over Israeli-ness.

Finally, the Judaization project is perceived by many in the orthodox camp not only as ethnic-territorial, but also as deepening the religiosity of Israeli Jews. This is based on interpretation of a central percept: 'all Jews are guarantors for one another'. Here 'guarantee' entails 'returning' all 'straying' non-believers to God's way. This mission legitimizes the repeated—if often unsuccessful—attempts to strengthen the religious character of laws and public spaces. The state's religious character is already anchored in a variety of areas: the Jewish Sabbath is the official Israeli day of rest; public institutions only serve Kosher food; no import of pork is allowed; all

personal laws are governed with the national rabbinate (which prohibits civil marriage); and most archaeological digs need approval from religious authorities.

Orthodox parties justify the imposition of these regulations on the secular public by asserting that they ensure the state's ethnic-cultural character for future generations. As such, this would prevent the incorporation of non-Jews and create a state which 'deserves to be called Israeli... and Jewish'.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, the theocracy sought by religious parties already presupposes a Jewish ethnic state (ethnocracy). Their agenda is simply to transform it into a *religious ethnocracy*.<sup>51</sup> In this light, we should note not only the conflict between orthodox and secular Jews, but also their long-standing *cooperation* in the project of establishing a Jewish ethnocracy.

Hence, the religious challenge to the democratization of Israel and the relations between orthodox and secular elements in Israeli society cannot be separated from the political geography of a *Jewish* and *Judaizing* state. The leading Israeli discourse in politics, academia, and the general public tends to treat separately Arab-Jewish and religious-secular issues. But, as shown above, the conflicts and agreements between secular and orthodox Jews cannot be isolated from the concerns, struggles and rights of Palestinian-Arabs. This is mainly because at the very heart of the tension between orthodox and secular Jews lie the drive of Israel's Palestinian citizens to see the state transformed from ethnocracy to democracy, and to halt and even reverse the ethnocratic Judaization project.

### **A Segregative Settling Ethnocracy**

As we have seen, the project of Judaizing the state, spearheaded by Jewish immigration and settlement, and buttressed by a set of constitutional laws and a broad consensus among the Jewish public, has been a major (indeed constitutive) feature of the Israeli regime. Israel thus fits well the model of an ethnocratic regime presented earlier in the paper. More specifically, and given the importance of settlement, it should be called a *settling ethnocracy*.

But beyond regime definitions, and beyond the fundamental chasm between Palestinians and Jews, the fusion of ethnocentric principles and the dynamics of immigration, settlement, and class formation created uneven and segregated patterns among Jews. This was exacerbated by the geographic nature of the Jewish settlement project, which was based on the principal unit of the locality (*Yeshuv*). The Jewish settlement project advanced by building localities which were usually ethnically homogeneous, and thus created from the outset a segregated pattern of development. As noted, this geography still stands behind much of the remaining tension between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim in Israel.<sup>52</sup> The political, legal, and cultural mechanisms introduced for the purpose of segregating Jews from Arabs were thus also used to segregate Jewish elites from other ethno-classes, thereby reinforcing the process of 'ethnicization' typical of ethnocratic regimes.

To be sure, these mechanisms were used differently, and more subtly, among Jews, but the persistent gap between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim cannot be understood without accounting for the geography of intra-Jewish relations. In the main, Mizrahim were spatially marginalized by the Israeli settlement project, whether

in the isolated periphery or in poor and stigmatized neighbourhoods of Israel's major cities. This has limited their potential economic, social, and cultural participation.

There is a clear nexus connecting the de-Arabization of the country with the marginalization of the Mizrahim, who—culturally and geographically—have been positioned between Arab and Jew, between Israel and its hostile neighbours, between a 'backward' Eastern past and a 'progressive' Western future. But, we should remember, the depth and extent of discrimination against Palestinians and Mizrahim has been quite different, with the latter included in Jewish-Israeli nation-building project as active participants in the oppression of the former.

A similar segregationist logic was also used to legitimize the creation of segregated neighbourhoods and localities for ultra-orthodox and orthodox Jews, the more recent Russian immigrants, and Palestinian-Arabs. In other words, the uneven segregationist logic of the ethnocentric regime has been infused into spatial and cultural practices, which have worked to further ethnicize Israeli society.

Of course, not all ethnic separation is negative, and voluntary separation between groups can at times function to reduce ethnic conflict. But in a society which has declared the 'gathering and integration of the exiles' (*mizug galuyot*) a major national goal, levels of segregation and stratification between Jewish ethno-classes have remained remarkably high. Referring back to our theoretical framework, we can note the fusion of settler-society mechanisms (conquest, immigration, and settlement) with the power of ethno-nationalism (segregating Jews from Arabs) and the logic of ethnic capital (distancing upper and lower ethno-classes) in the creation of Israel's conflict-riddled contemporary human geography.

This process, however, is not unidimensional, and must be weighed against counter-trends, such as growing levels of assimilation between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, and increasing formal equality in social rights among all groups. In addition, solidarity among Jews in the face of a common enemy has often eased internal tensions and segregation, especially between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, as both have merged into a broadening Israel middle class. Here we can also note that the original Ashkenazi charter group has broadened to incorporate the Mizrahim, especially among the assimilated middle and upper classes.<sup>53</sup> Yet, the ethnicization trend has also been powerful, as illustrated by the growing tendency of political entrepreneurs to exploit 'ethnic capital' and draw on ethno-class-religious affiliations as a source of political support. In the 1996 elections such sectoral parties increased their power by 40 per cent, and for the first time in Israel's history overshadowed the largest two parties, Labour and Likud, which have traditionally been the most ethnically heterogeneous.

Moreover, the situation has not been static. The strategy of Judaization and population dispersal has recently slowed, responding to the new neo-liberal agendas of many Israeli elites.<sup>54</sup> It has also encountered growing Palestinian-Arab resistance and Mizrahi grievances, which in turn have reshaped some of the strategies, mechanisms, and manifestations of Israel's territorial, planning, and development policies. Both Arabs and Mizrahim have seen a rise in their absolute (if not relative) socioeconomic standards, partially due to Israel's development policies. Likewise, Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and oppression, culminating in the first Intifada that broke out in the Occupied Territories in December 1987, worked to slow



Jewish expansion in several regions, brought about the 1993 Oslo agreement, and achieved a measure of limited Palestinian self-rule.<sup>55</sup> But these changes, important as they were, still occurred within the firm boundaries of the dominant, ethnocratic Zionist discourse, where Jewish settlement and control and the territorial containment of the Arab population, are undisputed Jewish national goals both within the Green Line and in large parts of the Occupied Territories, as the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000 has made so abundantly clear.<sup>56</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Enigma of Distorted Structures**

In the foregoing I have attempted to probe the nature of the Israeli regime from a political-geographic perspective. I have showed that three main forces have shaped the Israeli polity—the establishment of a settler society, the mobilizing force of ethno-nationalism, and the ethnic logic of capital. The fusion of these forces has created a regime I have termed ethnocracy, which privileges *ethnos* over *demos* in a contested territory seized by a dominant group. Ethnic relations in Israel are thus comparable to other ethnocracies, such as Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Serbia, or Estonia, but not to western liberal democracies, as commonly suggested in scholarly literature or popular discourse.<sup>57</sup>

More specifically to Israel, I have shown that the Israeli regime has been significantly shaped by the ethnocratic project of *Judaizing* the Land of Israel/Palestine. This has been legitimized by the need to ‘indigenize’ ‘de-territorialized’ Jews in order to fulfil a claim for territorial self-determination. The momentum of the Judaization project has subsequently led to the rupture of the state’s borders, the continuing incorporation of extra-territorial Jewish organizations into the Israeli government system, the persistent and violent military rule over the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and the subsequent undermining of equal citizenship. As shown above, the Judaization project provides a ‘genetic core’ for understanding the Israeli polity because it did not only shape the Jewish-Palestinian conflict, but also the relations between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim as well as between secular and orthodox Jews.<sup>58</sup>

A key factor in understanding the Israeli regime thus lies in uncovering the sophisticated institutional setting that presents itself as democratic, but at the same time facilitates the continuing immigration of Jews—and only Jews—to Israel, and the uni-directional transfer of land from Arab to Jewish hands. Here we can observe that the legal and political foundations of the Jewish state have created a distorted structure that ensured a continuing uni-ethnic seizure of a bi-ethnic state. Once in place, this structure has become self-referential, reifying and reinforcing its own logic.

But the dominant view unequivocally treats Israel as a democracy.<sup>59</sup> This view is augmented by the durable operation of many important democratic *features*—as distinct from *structures*—especially competitive politics, generous civil rights, an autonomous judiciary, and free media. In particular, Israel’s democratic image has also been promoted in the Israeli academy by nearly all scholars in the social sciences and humanities.

Israeli scholars use a range of definitions for the Israeli regime, including liberal democracy,<sup>60</sup> constitutional democracy,<sup>61</sup> consociational democracy,<sup>62</sup> and ethnic democracy.<sup>63</sup> The enactment of two new basic laws during the 1990s has prompted a wave of writing hailing the 'constitutional revolution' as a major move towards legal liberalism.<sup>64</sup> Even critical writers such as Azmi Bishara, Shlomo Swirsky, Uri Ram, Yoav Peled, Yonattan Shapiro and Uri Ben-Eliezer still treat 'Israel Proper' (the imaginary unit within the Green Line) as a democratic—albeit seriously flawed—regime.<sup>65</sup> Most Palestinian writers have refrained from analyzing the specific nature of the Israeli regime, although here a number of significant challenges to the common democratic definition of Israel began to appear, most notably by Elia Zureik,<sup>66</sup> Asad Ghanem and Nadim Rouhana, with the latter two defining Israel as a non-democratic 'ethnic state'.<sup>67</sup>

Yet, none of these works has incorporated seriously the two principal political-geographical processes shaping the Israeli polity: the on-going Judaization of the country, and the vagueness of its political borders. Even critical writers tend to ignore the incongruity between the definition of Israel within the Green Line, and the residence of people considered as full Israelis in occupied territories beyond the state's boundaries. This is not a minor aberration, but rather a structural condition that undermines the claim for a democratic regime. 'Israel Proper' is a political and territorial entity which has long ceased to exist, and hence cannot provide an appropriate spatial unit for analyzing the nature of the polity.

In many ways, the situation resembles the hegemonic moment observed by Gramsci, when a dominant truth is diffused by powerful elites to all corners of society, preventing the raising of alternative voices and reproducing prevailing social and power relations. From the above it appears that this hegemony has reached even the most enlightened and putatively democratic realms of Israeli-Jewish society.

How can this enigma be explained? How can enlightened circles that declare themselves to be democratic square the 'Jewish and democratic' account with the continuing process of Judaization? I suggest here a metaphor in which Israeli-Jewish discourse is analogous to a tilted tower, such as the Tower of Pisa. Once one enters the tower, it appears straight, since its internal structural grid is perfectly perpendicular and parallel. Similarly, the introverted discourse about the Jewish and democratic state: once inside this discourse, most Jews accept the Jewish character of the state as an unproblematic point of departure, much like the floor of the tilted tower. From that perspective, Judaization appears natural and justified—or perhaps does not appear at all.<sup>68</sup>

On the basis of this tilted foundation, Israel has added laws and policies over the years that can be likened to the tower's walls. Given the tilted foundation, these walls could only be built on an angle, yet they appear straight to those observing from the inside. One needs to step outside and away from the tilted building and measure its coordinates against truly vertical buildings in order to discern the distortion. In the Israeli case, then, scholars are urged to step outside the internal Jewish-Israeli discourse and analyze the Israeli regime systematically against the 'straight' principles of a democratic state.<sup>69</sup>

In this vein, let us explore briefly the principle of self-determination, which forms the basis of popular sovereignty and thus of democracy itself. Because the

modern state is a legal-territorial entity, and because the fullest expression of self-determination is the governance of a state, it must be exercised on a territorial basis. But Israel maintains a placeless entity (the Jewish people) as the source of its self-determination, and thus defines the state as 'the state of the Jewish people'. This non-territorial definition presents two serious problems for democratic rule: (a) it prevents the full political inclusion of non-Jews by degrading the status of (territorial) state citizenship,<sup>70</sup> and (b) it reinforces Judaization through the role of world Jewry in immigration and land transfer.

Returning to the case of Finland may help illustrate the problem: while that state is declared to be Lutheran, it is also defined as a (territorial) *Finnish* political community. As such, it allows non-Lutheran minorities to fully identify as Finnish. But because the state of Israel is defined (non-territorially) as Jewish, and Arabs can never become Jewish, their right to equal citizenship is structurally denied. Hence, a democratic state requires a *territorial* form of self-determination that enables the equal inclusion of minorities into the state's civil society.<sup>71</sup> This recognition casts doubt over the validity of one of the most significant statements made by the Israeli High Court, which declared in 1988, that 'Israel's definition as the state of the Jewish people does not negate its democratic character, in the same way that the Frenchness of France does not negate its democratic character'.<sup>72</sup> This statement harbours a conceptual distortion: if France is French, Israel should be *Israeli* (and not Jewish). Hence, stepping outside the internal Israeli-Jewish discourse reveals that the maintenance of a non-territorial (Jewish) form of self-determination structurally breaches central tenets of democracy. It constitutes, instead, the foundation of the Israeli-Jewish ethnocracy.

### **Epilogue: Ethnocracy and Negev Lands**

To conclude, let us return once again to the 'coal face' of land control issues in Israel. Since September 1997, the Israeli government has announced on several occasions the introduction of new strategies to block the 'Arab invasion' into state lands within the Green Line, and to curtail 'illegal' Bedouin dwellings, construction and grazing. In most cases, 'illegal dwellings' and 'Arab invasion' are code terms for Bedouin residence on traditional tribal land and resistance to involuntary concentration in a small number of towns designated by the state in the Negev and Galilee.<sup>73</sup> The recently announced strategy would combine the development of small Jewish settlements (mainly in the Negev's north-eastern hills), the establishment of single-family Jewish farms, the sale of Negev land to the Jewish Agency and diaspora Jews, and the application of greater pressure on Bedouins to migrate to the state-planned towns. The initiator of the policy was the (then) director of the Prime Minister's office, Avigdor Lieberman, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union and a resident of a Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories..

A closer look at this latest land control strategy raises several hard questions about its basic assumptions: if the Bedouin-Arabs were Israeli citizens—which they are—why would their use of state land be considered an 'invasion'? How do other sectors of Israeli society, such as *moshavim* and *kibbutzim*, which regularly build without planning permission, escape treatment as 'invaders'? Given that the initiator

of the policy is a West Bank settler (illegal according to international law), who is actually the invader here? How can a recent immigrant to the country campaign to evacuate residents who have been on the land for several generations, since well before the state was established? How can the state lease large tracts of land to non-citizen (Jewish) organizations and continue to block its own (Arab) citizens from using it for residential purposes?<sup>74</sup>

At the end of its first Jubilee, then, Israel's *ethnocratic* features keep surfacing: the on-going Judaization project, the stratification of ethnic rights, the fuzziness of geographical and political boundaries, and the legal and material involvement of extra-territorial Jewish organizations. Against this reality, scholars, students, and activists are called upon to help dislodge the hegemonic Jewish discourse of a 'Jewish and democratic state', and participate in the task of transforming Israel from ethnocracy to democracy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written during 1998, and most of it appeared as Yiftachel, O.

“‘Ethnocracy’”: the Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine’, Constellations: International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory, Vol. 6: 3: 364-390 (1998).

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<sup>2</sup> IHC 6698/95, *Ka’adan v. Israel Land Authority et al.*

<sup>3</sup> Here my work joins previous critiques of the Israeli regime; see, for example, U. Ben-Eliezer, *The Emergence of Israeli Militarism* (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Me’uhad 1995) (Hebrew); B. Kimmerling, ‘Religion, Nationalism and Democracy in Israel’, *Zemanim* 56 (1995): 116-131 (Hebrew); A. Ghanem, ‘State and Minority in Israel: The Case of Ethnic State and the Predicament of Its Minority,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21/3 (1998): 428-447; J. Shapiro, *Democracy in Israel* (Ramat Gan: Messada 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Ashkenazi Jews (Ashkenazim in plural) are of European origins, while Mizrahi Jews (Mizrahim in plural, also termed Sepharadim or Oriental Jews) hail from the Muslim world.

<sup>5</sup> Following H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell 1991).

<sup>6</sup> See O. Yiftachel and T. Fenster, ‘Introduction: Frontiers, Planning and Indigenous Peoples’, *Progress in Planning* 47/4 (1997): 251-260.

<sup>7</sup> G. M. Fredrickson, ‘Colonialism and Racism: United States and South Africa in Comparative Perspective’, in idem (ed.), *The Arrogance of Racism* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 1988); G. Shafir, *Land, Labour and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 1882-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989).

<sup>8</sup> D. Stasiulis and N. Yuval-Davis, ‘Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies: Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies,’ in D. Stasiulis and N. Yuval-Davis (eds.), *Unsettling Settler Societies* (London: Sage 1995). This broad classification fluctuates

according to the specific circumstances of each settler society.

<sup>9</sup> Y.N. Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994).

<sup>10</sup> A. Murphy, 'The Sovereign State System as a Political-Territorial Ideal: Historical and Contemporary Considerations,' in T. Biersteker and S. Weber (eds.), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).

<sup>11</sup> M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage 1995).

<sup>12</sup> B. Anderson, 'Introduction,' in G. Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation* (New York: Verso 1996); W. Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994); A.D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Stasilius and Yuval-Davis. 'Beyond Dichotomies.'

<sup>14</sup> For the global process, see D. Held, 'The Decline of the Nation State,' in S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds.), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1990); D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell 1989). For its Israeli manifestations, see U. Ram, 'Citizens, Consumers and Believers: The Israeli Public Sphere between Capitalism and Fundamentalism,' *Israel Studies* 3/1 (1998): 24-44; G. Shafir and Y. Peled, 'Citizenship and Stratification in an Ethnic Democracy,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21/3 (1998): 408-427.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'ethnocracy' has appeared in previous literature; see J. Linz and A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1996), p. 69; J. Linz, 'Totalitarian Vs Authoritarian Regimes,' in F. Greenstein and N. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading: Addison Wesley 1975); A. Mazrui, *The Making of Military Ethnocracy* (London: Sage 1975); D. Little, *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Emnity* (Washington: US Institute of Peace 1994), p. 72. However, as far as I am aware, it was generally used as a derogatory term, and not

developed into a model or concept, as formulated here. For an earlier formulation, see my 'Israeli Society and Jewish-Palestinian Reconciliation: "Ethnocracy" and Its Territorial Contradictions,' *Middle East Journal* 51/4 (1997): 505-519.

<sup>16</sup> As noted, ethnocracies have existed for long periods in countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Northern Ireland (until 1968), and more recently in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, and Serbia.

<sup>17</sup> Here the advent of 'illiberal democracy' (F. Zakaria, 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,' *Foreign Affairs* 76/6 (1997): 22-43) is instrumental, by establishing a regime with formal democratic appearance but with centralizing, coercive, and authoritarian characteristics. See also Y. Yona, 'A State of all Citizens, a Nation-State or a Multicultural State? Israel and the Boundaries of Liberal Democracy,' *Alpayim* 16 (1998): 238-263 (Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers 1971); see also Lustick's illuminating discussion of the notion of hegemony in his *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1993).

<sup>19</sup> B. Kimmerling, 'Boundaries and Frontiers in the Israeli Control System: Analytical Conclusions,' in B. Kimmerling (ed.), *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: SUNY Press 1989).

<sup>20</sup> This is supported by repeated statements of Israeli leaders. For example, Prime Minister Netanyahu claimed that 'only one government has and will have sovereign power west of the Jordan' (*Ma'ariv*, 18 February 1998); similarly, Minister of Justice Y. Hanegbi claimed on 14 September 1998 (Channel One, Israeli TV) that 'sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael will never be divided and will remain Israeli, and Israeli only.'

<sup>21</sup> Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Israel Yearbook* (Jerusalem: Government Printers 1998); figures relate to 31 December 1997.

<sup>22</sup> E. Rekhes, 'The Moslem Movement in Israel,' in E. Rekhes (ed.), *The Arab Minority in Israel: Dilemmas of Political Orientation and Social Change* (Tel Aviv: Dayan Centre,



University of Tel Aviv 1991).

<sup>23</sup> The differences from 'typical' European settler movements include Zionism's nature as an ethno-national and not an economic project, the status of most Jews as refugees, the loose organization of diasporic Jewish communities as opposed to the well-organized metropolitan countries, and the notion of 'return' to Zion enshrined in Jewish traditions.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Y. Cohen and Y. Haberfeld, 'Second Generation Jewish Immigrants in Israel: Have the Ethnic Gap in Schooling and Earnings Declined?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21/3 (1998): 507-528; S.M. Lewi-Epstein and N. Semyonov, 'Ethnic Mobility in the Israeli Labour Market,' *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 342-351.

<sup>25</sup> For the historical evolution of Israel's ethnic political economy and labour relations in Israel, see L. Grinberg, *Split Corporatism in Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press 1991); M. Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992).

<sup>26</sup> P. Lahav, *Judgment in Jerusalem: Chief Justice Simon Agranat and the Zionist Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997).

<sup>27</sup> The 1985 Law also disqualifies parties using a racist platform.

<sup>28</sup> See D. Kretzmer, *The Legal Status of the Arabs in Israel* (Boulder: Westview 1990); Adalah, *Legal Violations of Arab Rights in Israel* (Sehfa'amre: Adalah 1998).

<sup>29</sup> See B. Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993).

<sup>30</sup> According to Peled and Shafir ('The Roots of Pacemaking: The Dynamics of Citizenship in Israel, 1948-93,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 391-413), the intensity of the Judaization project has slowed down recently, in part because of the global orientations of Israeli elites. But despite the decline, the logic of Judaization is still fundamental to Israeli-Jewish politics and should be treated as the historical 'genetic core' of the Israeli regime.

<sup>31</sup> See U. Ram, 'Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur,' *History and Memory* 7/1 (1995): 91-124. Records show that

Jews remained in the land of Israel for centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, and in most cases emigrated voluntarily.

<sup>32</sup> On policies affecting Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, see also G. Falah, 'Israeli Judaisation Policy in Galilee and its Impact on Local Arab Urbanisation,' *Political Geography Quarterly* 8 (1989): 229-253; I. Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control over a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1980); S. Smooha, 'Existing and Alternative Policy Towards the Arabs in Israel,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 5 (1982): 71-98; O. Yiftachel, *Planning a Mixed Region in Israel: the Political Geography of Arab-Jewish Relations in the Galilee* (Aldershot: Avebury 1992); E.T. Zureik, *Palestinians in Israel: A Study of Internal Colonialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1979).

<sup>33</sup> I.e., the area of Israeli regional councils, where world Jewry organizations are part of most land leasing and ownership arrangements.

<sup>34</sup> See S. Hasson, 'Social and Spatial Conflicts: the Settlement Process in Israel During the 1950s,' *L'Espace Geographique* 3 (1981): 169-179; Y. Gradus, 'The Emergence of Regionalism in a Centralised System: The Case of Israel,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2 (1984): 87-100; S. Swirski and B. Shoshani, *Development Towns: Toward a Different Tomorrow* (Tel Aviv: Brerot 1985) (Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> See Falah, 'Israeli Judaisation Policy in Galilee'; Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*; D. Newman, 'The Territorial Politics of Exurbanisation: Reflections on 25 Years of Jewish Settlement in the West Bank,' *Israel Affairs* 3/1 (1996): 61-85; Yiftachel, 'Israeli Society and Jewish-Palestinian Reconciliation.'

<sup>36</sup> See Yiftachel, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> There exists a wide body of literature which debates the characteristics of Israeli democracy, all assuming *a priori* that Israel is governed by such a regime. See A. Arian, *The Second Republic: Politics in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan 1997); B. Neuberger, *Democracy in Israel: Origins and Development* (Tel Aviv: Open University 1998); S.

Smooha, 'Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype,' *Israel Studies* 2/2 (1997): 198-241.

<sup>38</sup> For elaboration of the historical evolution of the Israeli-Jewish 'ethnocracy', see my 'Israeli Society and Jewish-Palestinian Reconciliation'. A similar formulation of Israel as an 'ethnic state' can be found in N. Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities and Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1997); Ghanem, 'State and Minority in Israel.'

<sup>39</sup> See D. Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1988); Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. Needless to say, pure democracy is never implemented fully, although Linz and Stepan list 42 countries which fall over a democratic threshold. We use the democratic model here as an analytical tool with which the Israeli regime can be examined.

<sup>40</sup> A striking example of the involvement of world Jewry was the declaration by ultra-orthodox Australian millionaire, and major donor to religious parties, David Guttnick, that he would work to 'topple the Netanyahu government' in case it decides to withdraw from Occupied Territories (*Ha'aretz* 14 August 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories were established under military rule; the settlements are closed to Palestinian-Arabs.

<sup>42</sup> For a thorough, ground-breaking analysis of the role of borders in Jewish politics, see A. Kemp, *Talking Boundaries: The Making of Political Territory in Israel 1949-1957*, PhD dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1997 (Hebrew).

<sup>43</sup> Most accounts of the Israeli regime, including critical analyses, have continued to treat Israel concurrently as (a) the land bounded by the Green Line, *and* (b) the body of Israeli citizens (including Jewish settlers of the Occupied Territories). This contradiction was rarely problematized in the literature. For examples of critical accounts which take this approach see Y. Peled, 'Ethnic Democracy and the Legal Construction of Citizenship: Arab Citizens of the Jewish State,' *The American Political Science Review* 86/2 (1992):

432-443; U. Ram, 'Citizens, Consumers and Believers'; Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*; Smootha, 'Ethnic Democracy'. For earlier debates with this approach, see Kimmerling, 'Boundaries and Frontiers in the Israeli Control System'; J. Migdal, 'Society-Formation and the Case of Israel,' in M. Barnett (ed.), *Israel in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press 1996).

<sup>44</sup> See Kimmerling, 'Religion, Nationalism and Democracy in Israel'; Y. Nevo, 'Israel: From Ethnocracy to Theocracy,' paper delivered at conference 'The Conflictual Identities Construction in the Middle East,' Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, November 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Neuberger, *Democracy in Israel*, p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Interview of Rabbi Azran, *Globs*, 28 September 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Kimmerling, 'Religion, Nationalism and Democracy in Israel'; C. Liebman, 'Attitudes Towards Democracy among Israeli Religious Leaders,' in E. Kofman, A. Shukri and R. Rothstein (eds.), *Democracy, Peace and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers 1993).

<sup>48</sup> See Y. Peres and E. Yuchtman-Yaar, *Between Consent and Dissent: Democracy and Peace in the Israeli Mind* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute 1998); S. Smootha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel: Change and Continuity in Mutual Intolerance* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview 1992).

<sup>49</sup> See Migdal, 'Society-Formation and the Case of Israel'; Peres and Yuchtman-Yaar, *Between Consent and Dissent*.

<sup>50</sup> See Stukhammer, 'Israel's Jubilee and Haredi-Secular Relations from a Haredi Perspective,' *Alpayim* 16 (1998): 219 (Heberw); see also a recent interview with the new leader of the Religious National Party, Rabbi Y. Levi, who claimed that the main goal of his party was to ensure the Jewishness of the state for future generations (*Ha'aretz* 12 August 1998).

<sup>51</sup> As observed by E. Don-Yehiya (*The Politics of Accommodation: Settling Conflicts of State and Religion in Israel* (Jerusalem: Floresheimer Institute for Policy Studies 1997), the most striking feature of orthodox-secular relations is their cooperation, and not conflict, as the two groups differ sharply on most values, goals and aspirations. I suggest here that the central project of Judaizing the country has formed the foundation for this cooperation.

<sup>52</sup> See E. Shohat, 'The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernisation: the Case of the Mizrahim,' *Critique* (Spring 1997): 3-18; S. Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed 1989).

<sup>53</sup> T. Bensky, 'Testing Melting Pot Theories in the Jewish Israeli Context,' *Sociological Papers* (Sociological Institute for Community Studies, Bar Ilan University) 2/2 (1993): 34-62.

<sup>54</sup> Peled and Shaifr, 'The Roots of Peacemaking.'

<sup>55</sup> On protest and resistance in the Israeli peripheries, see my 'Israeli Society and Jewish-Palestinian Reconciliation.'

<sup>56</sup> For the events that led to the second Intifada and its short-term consequences, see: Yiftachel, O. (2004). "Contradictions and Dialectics: Reshaping Political Space in Israel/Palestine." *Antipode* **36**: 607-613; and

Yiftachel, O. (2001) 'From 'Peace' to Creeping Apartheid: the Emerging Political Geography of Israel/Palestine', *Arena*, Vol. 16: 3: 13-24.

It can also be argued that the Oslo process has accelerated the process of Judaizing large parts of the Occupied Territories, by legitimizing the construction of further Jewish housing and pervasive land confiscation for 'by-pass roads'. In this vein, the long closures of the territories, and the subsequent importation of hundreds of thousands of foreign workers to replace Palestinian labour, are also part of the post-Oslo process of Judaization.

<sup>57</sup> For recent attempts to compare Israel to western democracies, see A. Dowty, *The Jewish State: One Hundred Years Later* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998); G. Shefer, 'Has Israel Really Been a Garrison Democracy? Sources of Change in Israel's Democracy,' *Israel Affairs* 3/1 (1996): 13-38.

<sup>58</sup> I do not claim, of course, that the Judaization process can explain every facet of ethnic relations in Israel/Palestine; rather, it is a factor which helped shape these relations while remaining largely overlooked in scholarly literature. But the Judazation process has also affected greatly power relations between groups not covered in this paper, including military-civil society, gender relations and local-central tensions; see K. Ferguson, *Kibbutz Journal: Reflections on Gender, Race and Nation in Israel* (California, Trilogy Book 1993).

<sup>59</sup> This includes some my own previous writings, such as *Planning a Mixed Region in Israel* (1992), where I classified Israel as a bi-ethnic democracy.

<sup>60</sup> Neurberger, *Democracy in Israel*; Shefer, 'Has Israel Really Been a Garrison Democracy?'

<sup>61</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Transformation of Israeli Society* (London: Weinfield and Nicholson 1985).

<sup>62</sup> Don-Yihya, *The Politics of Accommodation*; Liebman, 'Attitudes Towards Democracy among Israeli Religious Leaders'; D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press 1990).

<sup>63</sup> Smooha, 'Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype'; Shaifr and Peled, 'The Roots of Peacemaking.'

<sup>64</sup> See Arian, *The Second Republic*; A. Barak, 'Fifty Years of Israeli Law,' *Alpayim* 16 (1998): 36-45 (Hebrew).

<sup>65</sup> See A. Bishara, 'On the Question of the Palestinian Minority in Israel,' *Teorya Uvikkoret* (Theory and Critique) 3 (1993): 7-20 (Hebrew); U. Ben-Eliezer, 'Is Military Coup Possible

in Israel?' *Theory and Society* 27 (1998): 314-349; Peled, 'Ethnic Democracy and the Legal Construction of Citizenship'; Shapiro, *Democracy in Israel*; Swirsky, *Israel: The Oriental Majority*; Ram, 'Citizens, Consumers and Believers.'

<sup>66</sup> E. Zureik, 'Prospects of Palestinians in Israel (I),' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12/2 (1993): 90-109.

<sup>67</sup> See Ghanem, 'State and Minority in Israel'; Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*.

<sup>68</sup> Here we can note that the political disagreement between the Jewish left and right in Israel, which is often portrayed as a bitter rivalry, is not on the broadly accepted 'need' to Judaize Israel, but only on the desired extent of this project.

<sup>69</sup> A step in this direction has already been taken; cf. Ghanem, 'State and Minority in Israel'; Rouhana, *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*; Yiftachel, 'Questioning "Ethnic Democracy",' *Israeli Studies* 3/2 (1998): 253-67.

<sup>70</sup> This affects adversely the political rights of Israeli-Jews too, as it undermines the extent of their own sovereignty.

<sup>71</sup> Political theorists discuss in recent debates the possibility of cultural or linguistic forms of self-determination, which may be non-territorial (see W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* [Oxford: Clarendon Press 1995]).

However, these forms also allow the possibility of civil entrance into the collectivity. This is different in Judaism, which is neither territorial, cultural or linguistic, and thus prevents the possibility of civil inclusion.

<sup>72</sup> *Neiman v. Central Elections Committee*, Judgment of the then High Court President, Justice M. Shamgar.

<sup>73</sup> On this issue, see detailed analysis by T. Fenster, 'Settlement Planning and Participation Under Principles of Pluralism,' *Progress in Planning* 39/3 (1993): 169-242.

<sup>74</sup> The government's new strong-arm approach became evidently clear in early April, 1998, when three homes built by Beduoin on private Arab land in the Galilee were demolished. The event was followed by demonstrations and strikes, and community efforts to rebuild the homes.