



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 34: 27 May 2013

**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

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Iran should recognize that its policies are increasingly unpopular in the Arab world for two reasons. First, the Salafists, who are deeply opposed to Iran, have emerged as a major political force in a number of post-revolutionary Arab states, and in Egypt the Salafists are highlighting the Muslim Brotherhood's outreach to Iran in their campaign against the Brotherhood. Second, Iran's actions have intensified the Sunni-Shiite split and thus contributed to the violence that is now spreading from Syria into Iraq.

4. **David P Goldman** Syria's madness and ours
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"Syria's Descent into Madness" is the cover story of the May 27 Time magazine, recounting the act of ritual cannibalism by a Syrian rebel commander that transfixed the West last week. The sort of atrocities viewable on YouTube – the slaughter by government troops of entire families including infants in Tartus province this month, mass rape of women in rebel-held zones, or the rebel leader Abu Sakkar eating a piece of the lung of a dead government soldier - are becoming Syria's new normal.

5. Adam Habib & Loyiso Nongxa
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Managing global conflict and

The global conflict playing out in the corridors of Wits university pits the advocates of the Palestinian struggle calling for the academic and cultural isolation of Israel, and the Zionist lobby opposing any such attempt to isolate Israel.

6. Itamar Rabinovich **Israeli thinking on the future of the Assad regime**
Institute for National Security Studies, 19 May 2013

The Syrian crisis, which began as a series of demonstrations and developed into a brutal civil war and a sectarian conflict, transformed Israel's view of Assad and his regime. The Syrian civil war soon became a focal point of regional and international conflict.

7. Denis MacEoin **Jews and non-Jews in Israel**
Aish.com, 11 May 2013

Like anyone, I feel free to criticize Israel when its government policies stray from the straight and narrow. Like any country, Israel makes mistakes. But when critics level accusations that are simply divorced from reality – that Israel practices apartheid or that it is a 'Nazi state', for example - then I cannot let such remarks pass by.

8. Alexander Yakobson **What does Israel's Arab minority really think?**
Fathom, 26 April 2013

The Israel Democracy Institute's 'Israeli Democracy Index 2012' provides some fascinating data about attitudes among Arab-Israelis regarding Israeli democracy and the state itself. The findings certainly reflect a critical attitude towards the Israeli reality and government policies. But they also reflect something else: a huge gap between the responses of Arab-Israelis and the typical discourse of the Arab elite in the country; between opinion at the base and rhetoric amongst the political leadership of this community.

If peace never comes, this will be the reason
Deborah Danan, The Tower, June 2013

<http://www.thetower.org/article/if-peace-never-comes-this-will-be-the-reason/>

A future together will require not only painful concessions, but a willingness of each side to validate the other's story. But when ordinary Palestinians and Israelis meet, that's not what happens.

The sit-in was held at a pub in the Hadar neighborhood of Haifa, a common meeting place for Arabs and Jews. The issue at the top of the agenda was how to convey to the world at large that dialogue on the Israeli-Arab conflict still exists and both sides are equally frustrated with the status quo. The vibe in the room was positive, with attendees from both sides encouraged that what the rest of the world calls enemies could sit and drink and talk.

Then, without warning, a stranger intruded. An Arab man had apparently overheard the conversation. He approached the group shouting, "But first you have to let the refugees come home!" An Israeli organizer explained that the meeting wasn't about solving the refugee crisis—it was about opposing inaction and stasis. But the man wouldn't have it. Becoming increasingly agitated, he demanded that the issue be addressed. One of the Arab organizers, Mudar, tried to calm him down, telling him in Arabic, "We know it's not right. We know that the only way is for the refugees to come home, but we aren't talking about that now."

The implication, of course, was that one day we will talk about it. In Mudar's mind, not only will we talk about it, we will make it happen. Like so many of his peers, Mudar—a moderate involved in many coexistence initiatives—is a subscriber to the maximal position on the Palestinian right of return; a position that, if achieved, will effectively put an end to the Jewish state. But the maximal position is a symptom of a far deeper concern, one that is the driving force behind the current impasse in Arab-Israeli relations.

On a cognitive level, Mudar is capable of accepting the fact that it is impossible for Israel to agree to his maximal position. He knows that the return of Palestinian refugees will mean the end of the Jewish state. But Mudar almost certainly does not subscribe to the maximal position out of a desire to harm Israel's Jewish character. In fact, it probably has little to do with Israel at all. Instead, Mudar is trapped in a psychological construct essential to his identity as a Palestinian—a collectivist identity that dominates the Palestinian mainstream.

One of the more tragic aspects of a collectivist identity is that it stifles those aspects of human behavior associated with the individual. These include critical thinking, accountability for one's actions and the actions of other members of the collective, the ability to make personal choices, and empathy toward "the other"—particularly an adversarial other. As a result, Palestinian collectivist identity may be one of the most difficult obstacles on the path to peace.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Palestinian people is the development of their national identity. The need to unite the multiplicity of identities existing under the Ottoman Empire, and to deal with the non-starter of pan-Arab identity required no small amount of intellectual energy, cultural development, and carefully constructed theory in order to create the "collectivistic-oriented culture" examined by today's identity theorists.

In both practical and psychological terms, the role played by Israel and Zionism is of paramount importance to Palestinian collectivism. In 1977, Zuheir Mohsen, leader of the pro-Syrian faction of the PLO, was explicit about this when he said:

For political reasons we carefully underwrite our Palestinian identity. Because it is of national interest for the Arabs to advocate the existence of Palestinians to balance Zionism. Yes, the existence of a separate Palestinian identity exists only for tactical reasons. The establishment of a Palestinian state is a new tool to continue the fight against Israel and for Arab unity.

In the decades preceding Israel's independence, Palestinian national identity was mostly concerned with factional politics based on tribalism and parochialism (internally, this is still largely the case). The rise of a unified national consciousness began in reaction to specific political events, such as the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations' acceptance of Jewish claims to the holy land. With Israel's 1948's Declaration of Independence—what the Palestinians call the *naqba*, or "catastrophe"—two paths were forged and two national identities crystallized.

One of the most important ingredients of a collective identity is the desire for unity, something expressed in article 12 of the PLO's 1964 national covenant:

The Palestinian Arab people believe in Arab unity. In order to contribute their share toward the attainment of that objective, however, they must, at the present stage of their struggle, safeguard their Palestinian identity and develop their consciousness of that identity, oppose any plan that may dissolve or impair it.

After the Six Day War, however, when Israel gained control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Palestinian identity became much stronger, with the “long period of Israeli occupation... sharpening the national element in Palestinian collectivism... and push[ing] the temporary Palestinian society toward a collectivist-oriented culture,” as one scholarly paper puts it.

That paper, authored by Palestinian psychologist Elia Awwad and three Israeli scholars from Ben-Gurion University, shows how successful this process has been. The paper, “Individualism and Collectivism in Two Conflicted Societies,” examined the constructs of collectivism and individualism through a 1997 study of over 3,000 Israeli and Palestinian high school students. They explored three issues: values, historical interests, and attitudes toward conflict resolution.

In relation to values, students were asked to rate the importance of such concepts as family, friends, democracy, peace at any cost, etc. The study concluded, “The strong collective consciousness of a new nationalism was clearly reflected in the answers of the Palestinian group...Whereas the Palestinian group expressed a coherent collectivist value system, including nationalism and other in-group elements, in the Israeli group, the values map is more mixed and ambiguous.”

While Palestinian identity concretized into the group, Israeli identity, in contrast, moved in the opposite direction. Over the past three decades, Israel has undergone a process of rapid individualization. This process has fragmented what was once a unified national culture into various social groups defined by indifference, opposition, and support for a collective national identity. This new, individualized society was able to encompass a host of new, modern identities, such as entrepreneur, capitalist, and technological pioneer. There was also room for negative phenomena to emerge, such as nihilism, defeatism, and, in some cases, an apathy verging on hedonism. This phenomenon appears in microcosm during coexistence initiatives like the one in Haifa, which are attended by Israelis from across the political and social spectrum.

As a result of this process of individualization, Israel has had some success in changing the concept of the “Arab enemy” and accommodating the Palestinian individual—the “other” beloved of the media and academy—and his personal suffering. The Israeli mainstream empathizes with this suffering and is eager to relieve it; partly because out of guilt and partly because of the desire to move on with their (individual) lives.

An extreme example of the individualized Israeli is Ayelet, a self-described radical leftist who regularly participates in various resistance projects, including the Sheikh Jarrah protests in Jerusalem. Though Israeli sympathizers with the Palestinians are not uncommon, Ayelet’s attitude toward the Arabs is unusual. “I hate everything about Arab culture,” she says, because she sees it as misogynistic and homophobic. For Ayelet, however, this does not conflict with her belief that “Israel is an aggressor state that denies Palestinians basic human rights.”

On the other end of the political spectrum is Reuben, a settler from the Gush Etzion settlement bloc of the West Bank who, through a coexistence initiative, was able to express remorse and even accountability for the challenges Palestinians face on a daily basis. Reuben wrote in an email that Israelis and Palestinians

need joint projects to lower the fears on both sides, the end of political violence of any kind, the end of incitement and the recognition that we are all human beings who deserve dignity, freedom and economic prosperity. All of these elements have been kept hostage to a political agreement which is unlikely to happen in the near future because the maximum each side can offer is less than the minimum they can accept. It's time to move ahead on the mutual humanization front.

On the Palestinian side, however, this is not the case. Unable to entirely divest themselves of their “in-group” identity, Palestinians often cannot distinguish between Israeli suffering and their own. As a

result, rather than empathizing with the Israeli side of the situation to think why Israelis take the positions they do and why certain Palestinian positions are unfeasible to them, the Palestinians approach the situation with quid-pro-quo sentiments. Thus, the notion of reconciliation effective in Palestinian society is not based on humanizing the other in order to make deep and painful concessions but on a concept known as *sulha*, or an agreement in which an offended party receives compensation for the wrong he perceived was done.

In a *Haaretz* article, for example, a Palestinian PhD student from the University of Pennsylvania is quoted as saying that the issue of Jewish refugees from Muslim countries might be the key to reconciliation.

Full reconciliation is reflected in the sulha ceremony where the payment is made. Now I understand that those Jews already paid for the sulha, when they lost all their property and were forced to disperse, just like us Palestinians. The conditions of the sulha have already been fulfilled. If the Israeli government publicizes that, the two nations will be able to progress to a process of true peace. We won't feel that we are the only underdog, because the Jews from the Arab countries were victims. You also experienced a catastrophe, and the time has come to engage in a sulha and to stop killing one another."

In this case, the Palestinian student (educated and moderate by any measure) was able to find reconciliation not with Israel or Israelis, but with her own understanding of the situation. For her the refugee "debt" had been paid and the books balanced. But, crucially, the maximal position of permitting Palestinian refugees to return to all of Israel remains in place for her. As an integral part of her identity as a Palestinian, it could be no other way.

The pioneering social psychologist Kurt Lewin's celebrated theory of group identity may go a long way toward explaining Palestinian collectivism. "It is not similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group," Lewin observed, "but interdependence of fate." In other words, because the individual's fate depends on that of the group as a whole, collective unity precludes individual desires, while simultaneously enhancing the individual's self-esteem and sense of meaning. Paradoxically, an individual living in a collectivist culture can be extremely proud of his identity and almost obliterated by it.

This is apparent on almost every level of Palestinian national society. More often than not, national and cultural events in the Palestinian territories are entirely concentrated on collective goals. Whereas an American national event, like a State of the Union address, is just as likely to focus on individuals' ability to pursue their dreams as on issues like secure borders, in the Palestinian territories even the most personal sphere—the spiritual—is routinely transformed into a collective political issue.

Following her performance on stage, for example, the singer at last year's Christmas show in Bethlehem delivered a heartfelt thank-you in Arabic and English. The Arabic speech ended with the words, "By next Christmas, the state of Palestine will be ours." This statement was notably absent from the English translation.

The same phenomenon was apparent in the PA press office's YouTube Christmas message. Called "From Palestine on Christmas," the first shot shows a teenager with a *kaffiyeh* lighting candles, presumably in a church, before cutting to images of Christmas lights and Santa Claus. Then the music changes and the footage turns grey as the same boy is shown cycling along the security fence. Images of IDF watch towers and barbed wire are accompanied by a haunting melody before the video cuts back to the bustle of pre-Christmas Bethlehem.

It is well documented by social psychologists that trauma enhances collectivist identities. Connecting identity to an event in which a particular people has been victimized is often essential to nation building. Thus, the trauma and suffering Palestinians feel at the hands of Israel serves as a unifying factor and reinforces their collective identity. Much the same was the case with Israeli identity and the Holocaust.

Reconciliation in Palestinian society is not based on humanizing the other in order to make painful concessions, but on a concept known as *sulha*, in which an offended party receives compensation for the wrong he perceived was done.

As a result, Palestinian identity is inextricably connected to the *naqba*. Israeli independence and the resulting war is the seminal event of the Palestinian narrative, turning a group of local tribes, clans, and houses into a nation of refugees. "Palestinian identity is strongly influenced by a sense of victimization, which is evident by displacement and manifested as a collective nationalistic identity," says University of Nebraska anthropologist Michaela Clemens. Whereas other cultures might see refugee concerns as a temporary issue, the Palestinians' self-image as refugees *creates and molds* their identity and, by extension, the conflict itself. Consequently, the right of return has come to be seen as an inalienable right akin to the right to exist.

The extent to which this influences the conflict is pointed out by Phillip Hammack, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Hammack examines identity and politics by studying adolescent participants in Palestinian-Israeli coexistence initiatives like Seeds of Peace and Hands of Peace. According to Hammack, the young people who struggled to integrate the experience of coexistence into their life stories experienced an identity crisis. "Palestinian youth," he observed, "identify with [an] ideology of struggle and victimhood, providing a sense of solidarity and meaning." This identity is inextricably connected to their political extremism. "Nearly all of my Palestinian interviewees," Hammack says, "endorsed the practice of suicide bombing as a legitimate form of resistance against the Israeli occupation, identifying bombers as 'freedom fighters.'"

Paraphrasing Herbert Kelman, a professor of social ethics at Harvard's department of psychology, Hammack concluded that "large-scale shifts in collective identity may be necessary prior to any serious curtailment of the conflict, as the conflict relies on the reproduction of negatively interdependent collective narratives."

In theory, coexistence initiatives enable participants to forego ideological differences by allowing individuals to humanize each other and interact with mutual understanding. My experience at these encounters, however, has been that, while mutual humanization has varying degrees of success, mutual understanding is mostly one-sided. Without surrendering their national identity, individual Israeli participants are able to momentarily cast aside "zero-sum identities" and their own sense of victimization. As a result, Israelis are able to ask questions without feeling that their own identities were threatened. These questions, asked out of politeness, guilt, and curiosity, often with apologetic overtones, are necessary in order to give a voice to the other. The individualized Israeli can listen to a Palestinian without negating his or her sense of self.

At the closing session of a history and heritage tour which took Palestinians and Israelis to Bethlehem, one Israeli participant named Ben remarked that he was sorry he had served as a soldier in Bethlehem a decade earlier. Though heartfelt, Ben's "apology" was completely misconstrued by the Palestinian participants, who saw it as an endorsement of insubordination. They fit Ben's apology into their own narrative, in which the IDF and its actions are wholly illegitimate. In their eyes, Ben was simply coming to terms with this fact.

But this was not at all the case. Encountering Palestinian individuals, Ben was able to internalize the impact his actions had on Palestinians' lives, but still felt that these actions were justified. Seeing how his Palestinian counterparts interpreted his statement, Ben felt obliged to clarify himself in a series of Facebook posts. Although he was sorry that *the situation* had forced him to serve in the West Bank, he wrote, he was not sorry for protecting the citizens of Israel from potential violence. Ben was able to express remorse over the negative implications of his army service without surrendering his belief in Israel's right to self-defense.

I don't feel one needs to apologize for defending one's family. We are stationed at checkpoints for a reason. The moment I or my friends who serve in reserve units decide not stand at checkpoints is the moment a suicide bomber turns up at Sbarro's Pizza in Jerusalem or at a nightclub in Tel Aviv. [I offered this apology because] there is a risk that Palestinians will come to believe only refuseniks or insubordinates want peace. But I seek peace no less than the insubordinates.

The revised apology, with its inherent ambiguity, was less palatable to the Palestinians, and led to a heated discussion about the occupation. The point that Ben was trying to make, while not outright rejected, was simply ignored.

Khalid, a self-described “freedom fighter,” was 14 when he was arrested for seriously injuring an IDF soldier with a Molotov cocktail. He received a 15-year sentence, of which he served nine. Like many security prisoners, Khalid renounced terror in favor of dialogue, and is able to attribute this transformation to a specific moment. Khalid was in a roomful of high-profile prisoners when the guards gave them a movie to watch. It was *Schindler's List*. By the end, Khalid says, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. He laughs as he recalls the sight of tears welling up in the eyes of hardened terrorists. It was difficult, he says, for them to face the guards when he returned. Khalid, like the vast majority of Palestinians, had no idea of the scale of the Holocaust. It marked a turning point for him. Suddenly, Khalid saw the “other” in a new light and, most importantly, he learned how to empathize with his enemy. He subsequently learned Hebrew and read voraciously about Jewish history.

Khalid is now a regular figure on the peace circuit. He remains optimistic and is convinced that the change he sees happening on a grassroots level will eventually bring about larger political change. But even he is unable to separate the act of terror he committed from the Palestinian collective narrative, and cannot accept responsibility for it. Apologizing would be an admission of guilt and, in the Palestinian collective, there is no room for such sentiments. Perhaps as a result, Khalid organizes an annual event in which Israelis and Palestinians gather to commemorate victims on both sides of the conflict and honor their families—including the families of suicide bombers.

Khalid is not alone in his sentiments. An Israeli once asked Ahmed Tibi, Israel's most prominent Arab member of the Knesset, why the Holocaust is not taught in Palestinian schools. “Teaching Jewish history,” Tibi replied, “would erase the Palestinian people.” Tibi's claim sounds harsh, even absurd, but given the realities of Palestinian identity, it is largely accurate.

Theorists often conclude that collectivist identity is overwhelmed by concepts of “us” and “them.” In the case of the Palestinians, the victimized “us” depends on maintaining a stable notion of “them” as a powerful and illegitimate oppressor. The idea that “they,” i.e., Israel, might have their own history (or reality) of victimhood, struggle, impotence, and legitimacy is incompatible with the Palestinian collective narrative. As Clemens noted in his study of refugee status and identity, “This nationalistic collective and individual identity of Palestinians may prove to be the strongest barrier to peace. The conflict is viewed in zero-sum terms.... Either we are a nation or they are. They can acquire national identity and rights only at the expense of our identity and rights.”

But even those Palestinians, like Khalid, who have accepted the existence and significance of the Holocaust—the most severe example of Jewish victimization—cannot separate it from the Palestinian collective narrative. An example of this occurred on a coexistence trip to Yad Vashem in September 2012, during which Palestinians from the West Bank were given a guided tour in Arabic. After recovering from the initial shock that such a thing as the Holocaust had occurred, the standard response was, “If they did it to you, how could you do it to us?” Even for them, the Holocaust was merely the precursor to the *naqba*. The *naqba*, was, in effect, the result of the Holocaust.

To Westerners, whose identity is so defined by individualism, such sentiments probably seem completely illogical. But, as Hammack found in his study, one of the major outcomes of collectivist identity is that pragmatic, realistic goals and perspectives are sacrificed in order to maintain the group's ideology.

This holds true even on the tactical level. As mentioned above, suicide bombings, while not encouraged and often condemned by participants of peace movements, are nevertheless seen as a

legitimate form of resistance to the Israeli occupation. In a collectivist society built on the idea of victimhood, struggle—rather than peace—is the ultimate motivating factor. Peace, moreover, may actually threaten collective identity: If struggle is a prerequisite for peace, then any action that serves the struggle, even terror and incitement, is likely to be perceived as legitimate. Peace is sacrificed to the collective.

Individualization, then, is essential to peace. Economic development, education, and democracy will hopefully contribute to a general change in Palestinian collective identity. But ultimately it is the task of the individual Palestinian to break free from the in-group, achieve psychological autonomy, and become an independent agent and master of his own fate. This is the most important step on the way to reconciliation.

The greatest living Hebrew writer is an Arab
Debra Kamim, The Tower, June 2013

<http://www.thetower.org/article/the-greatest-living-hebrew-writer-is-an-arab/>

The Hebrew renaissance produced writers, fighters, painters, and prostitutes. Now it has its own non-Jewish literary hero. Sayed Kashua holds up a mirror to Israel, and spares no criticism for his Arab community as well.

In the story “Shem and Japheth on the Train” by the great Hebrew-Yiddish writer S.Y. Abramowitz, a pack of downtrodden Jews are crammed into a third-class train car as it hurtles through Bismarck-era Germany. Squeezed in among the poor and abject folk is our author, who refers to himself by his pen name, Mendele Mocher Seforim—Mendele the Book Peddler.

Across from Mendele sits a destitute family. “Their dress, their appearance, their wan expression, testified to extreme poverty and roused my pity,” Abramowitz writes. Suddenly Japheth, a cheerful Polish gentile, emerges from his hiding place. “His face was chalk-white,” Abramowitz tells us, “his cheeks sunken, and his mustache formed thin fringes whose ends dropped like lizards’ tails from the sides of his mouth.” What is he doing on a train packed with Jews?

Japheth proceeds to tell the fascinated Mendele that this family, and in particular its patriarch Reb Moshe the Tailor—referred to as “Shem”—have become his mentors. Japheth once enjoyed security and wealth. This luxury led him to arrogance and its sinister European cousin, anti-Semitism. Though he and Shem were once friends, after Japheth fell into the cult of hatred, he even participated in a pogrom. But when tyrants reign and societies unravel, no one is immune to the bitter consequences. History’s dark shadow soon swallowed up the Poles in addition to the Jews, and Japheth found himself as down-and-out as his Jewish neighbors. Faced, like the Jews, with banishment, Japheth asks Shem to teach him his ways. In essence, he asks not to become Jewish, but to learn to live like a Jew.

“Stay a Christian as you have always been, and keep your religion in your own way,” Shem tells Japheth, “but there is one thing you must learn to do. You must come to master the Jewish art of living, and cleave to that, if you are to preserve yourself and carry the yoke of exile.” And so Japheth learns to follow his Jewish brother, wandering the earth and bearing his lot like a Jew.

More than a century later, the Jews have fostered another Japheth, and this time, he is marked not by scarcity but by snark. Arab-Israeli writer and satirist Sayed Kashua has a weekly column in Haaretz, a wildly popular prime-time comedy on Israeli television, and three critically-acclaimed novels under his belt. And everything he has done, he has done in Hebrew. He is Japheth to today’s Israeli Shems, a gentile living among the chosen people, the outsider who has burrowed his way into the fold.

Sayed Kashua, says Dana Olmert, a literary theorist, editor, and daughter of former prime minister Ehud Olmert, “is really writing within this tradition of being an uprooted writer torn between tradition and identity. He’s no longer a part of the traditional Arab culture because he was raised and educated in Hebrew and in Jewish school. He’s Israeli more than anything else.”

The 37-year-old Kashua is a hard-drinking chain smoker, his baby face marked by bags under his eyes, and his speech often trails off into indecipherable muttering. In his weekly Haaretz column, Kashua exposes his persistent malaise, his deep-seated insecurity, and his fumbling struggles with fatherhood, married life, and professional ambition. Having learned to live among the Jews and adopt their ways, one wonders why Kashua isn’t as jolly as Abramowitz’s Japheth. Perhaps it’s because today’s writers must project a fuller, less allegorical picture than in the past; and Kashua is nothing if not a complex storyteller.

He grew up in Tira, located in a region of Israel known as the Triangle that straddles the Green Line separating Israel proper from the Palestinian territories. The vast majority of Israel’s Arabs—who comprise 20 percent of the population and define themselves as Palestinian—live there and in the Galilee.

In 1990, at the age of 15, Kashua was accepted into the Israel Arts and Science Academy (IASA), a Jerusalem boarding school for gifted teens. He quickly realized that his very presence aroused suspicion. “I hated the city as soon as I entered it,” Kashua writes of moving to Jerusalem. “On my first bus ride, a soldier got on and immediately pegged me as an Arab: a boy leaving his village for the first time, with an Arab’s clothes, an Arab’s thin moustache, and most tellingly, the frightened look of an Arab. That was the first time I was taken off the bus and searched. It took me a while to blur my external identity.”

This plunge into the heart of Jewish-Israeli society created the existential paradox that confounds Kashua to this day. At IASA, he says, he learned how to look and act Israeli. He was immersed in the Hebrew language and all the cultural ramifications that come with it. Since then, he has undeniably become the most prominent Arab writer in Israel, and has done so by writing only in Hebrew.

Kashua, much like Abramowitz before him, inserts himself into everything he writes, but does so in a more subtle fashion. His self-referential humor is sly. Rather than name his protagonists “Sayed,” he opts not to name them at all; but it doesn’t take much analysis to understand that they are depictions of himself.

“I like to deal with the characters that I know best,” Kashua told me in a recent interview. Without even pausing for a beat, he adds, “I’m totally in love with myself.” Sitting in a smoky office at the studio that produces his hit television show *Avoda Aravit* (“Arab labor”), Kashua is aloof, friendly but guarded, and always a bit detached. He offers a great deal of humor and sarcasm but precious few straight answers. His work, he seems to be saying, should speak for itself. And on many levels it does.

The protagonist of each of Kashua’s three novels is a hapless, anti-heroic Arab-Israeli without a name. His debut, *Dancing Arabs*, is the most obviously autobiographical. It tells the tale of a Palestinian boy from Tira who gets accepted to a prestigious Jerusalem boarding school and ends up marooned between two disparate identities. Rather than define himself as one or the other, he drifts anonymously into adulthood, carrying the weight of his family’s deflated nationalism and dragged down by the tedium of everyday life.

“[Kashua’s] hero does not have a God. He does not threaten with violence, nor does he ask for pity,” wrote Professor Miriam Shlesinger, who translated works by such acclaimed Hebrew writers as Etgar Keret, A.B. Yehoshua, and Shai Agnon. “His life is a masquerade ball, and though he betrays himself, disguises himself, and pours himself from one character to another, he is always honest. And no reader, foreign or local, can remain indifferent to his truth.”

But truth, like culture, is relative. Yosef Haim Brenner, one of the founders of modern Hebrew literature, once said, “A single particle of truth is more valuable to me than all possible poetry.” If

Kashua feels the same way, he would never admit it. He is Arab. He is Muslim. But in his day-to-day existence and, more crucially, in his writing, he is as Jewish as Japheth on the train.

The great Hebrew and Yiddish writers of Jewish history, such as Brenner, Micha Berdichevsky, Sholom Aleichem, and Ahad Ha'am, culled the quintessential Jewish experience of living as an outsider and elevated it to literary greatness. Kashua's second novel, *Let It Be Morning*, takes the literary ramifications of this "otherness" and pushes it to new heights.

The anonymous narrator of *Let It Be Morning* is—like Kashua himself—an Arab journalist working for an Israeli newspaper. But unlike Kashua, who a few years ago moved from the East Jerusalem Arab enclave of Beit Safafa to Jewish West Jerusalem, the protagonist decides to drag his wife and baby daughter back to his childhood home in an Arab-Israeli town near the West Bank.

The novel takes place in the wake of the al-Aqsa intifada in late 2000. Kashua's main character is spurred to action, he tells the reader, by a two-day series of riots. As a journalist, *Let It Be Morning's* protagonist is assigned to attend funerals and interview families in mourning. In the midst of it, something inside him breaks.

"Those two days had changed my life," Kashua, in his trademark first-person narration, writes. "Suddenly, my life as an outsider, which had had its advantages, began to get in the way. My being an outsider was what had qualified me for my job and my position, and had given me the language in which I was expert enough to work as a journalist. My being an outsider was beginning to put my life in danger."

So he moves back home, forgetting to consider that, while his childhood village has not changed, he has. As politics bubble and churn outside the village's borders, the narrator's decision ends up having permanent ramifications, dooming him never to belong anywhere at all.

Perhaps Kashua's closest collaborator is Shai Capon, a prominent Israeli director who helms *Avoda Aravit*. Now in post-production on its fourth season, *Avoda Aravit* is one of the top five Israeli comedies of all time and an indisputable trailblazer for Arab-Israeli actors.

Except for reality shows, *Avoda Aravit* is the only show on Israeli TV featuring major Arab characters, and certainly the only one with a large part of its dialogue in Arabic. The Israeli media group Keshet admitted they were taking a major gamble when they green-lighted the show in 2007, and initially, they braced for a backlash. And there was a backlash—from Israel's Arab media. Kashua was accused of indecency, stereotyping, and even treason. But Israeli Jews, who Keshet feared would be in an uproar, for the most part just tuned in and laughed.

"Sayed wouldn't accept my saying it, but I think that the series made a great change in Israel society," Capon tells me. "It's the first time that you see an Arab as a vulnerable human being on Israeli television. Not as a terrorist and not as a victim. Not as anything else, just a simple human being like all of us."

Constrained by the boundaries of television, Kashua did give his sitcom's protagonist a name. He is called Amjad, and he is (once again) a journalist working for a Hebrew newspaper. Like Kashua himself, Amjad is married to an Arab-Israeli social worker; and also like his creator, he sends his children to Hebrew-language schools. Amjad embodies an exaggerated version of Kashua's own troubled identity. In Israel, a nation plagued by xenophobia and casual racism, Kashua is the quintessential good Arab, the Arab who passes, who does not dare to offend.

But there is no sector of Israeli society that *Avoda Aravit* doesn't skewer. From the secular to the Orthodox to his fellow Arabs, Kashua uses his deft comedic skills and piercing dialogue to expose the vast hypocrisy of Israel, with its racist conservatives, apologetic liberals, and the helplessness of everyone in between. He can do so because no matter where he stands, Kashua is on the outside looking in.

“Jewish comedians and writers a hundred years ago, like Sholom Aleichem, they were the outsider, the one living in a foreign environment and just wanting to be accepted,” Capon says. “There is a lot of similarity here. The great Jewish humorists were dealing with the same issues. That’s why it’s so close to everybody. It makes it so you can see it from the other side.”

Kashua and Capon are close friends and drinking buddies, spending many post-production nights unwinding together. Their creative process is so intertwined that they share an office, facing each other at parallel desks so they can pass ideas, insults, and spare cigarettes back and forth.

I asked Capon about the similarities between Amjad’s life and that of Kashua. “You cannot write a character that is so far away from who you are,” Capon says. “So yes, I think Amjad is very close to Sayed. He plays on a certain color of his personality. Of course Sayed is more complicated. His personality has a lot of colors in it. This one, however, is a dominant color, and that’s what we see in the series.”

Kashua’s response to the same question was more direct: “Ask Shai,” he told me. “Shai shares an office with Amjad.”

Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Kashua’s own existential quandaries are given new life in Amjad. During the third season Amjad goes on Israeli Big Brother and pretends (perhaps too convincingly) to be an Israeli Jew; he pretends to have a liberal, free-thinking sister to prove his feminist sympathies; and, noting that there are no Arab vegetarians, he decides to forgo meat so he can become “civilized.”

The season’s finale, however, takes a more serious turn. An air raid siren sounds in the middle of the night and sends all the occupants of Amjad’s Jerusalem apartment building scrambling to the bomb shelter. The elderly Yoske and Yocheved, Arab-Jewish newlyweds Amal and Meir, Amjad, his wife Bushra, and their children are all trapped together behind a steel door. With no cell-phone reception and no clue as to what horrors may be unfolding outside, the neighbors make their true feelings known.

“We really should have let them have it,” one of the neighbors says to another, while Amjad watches from the other side of the shelter. Amjad, aching from being left out, says to the group, “Besides the fact that there’s a war outside, there’s something about this togetherness, right?” They stare at him in silence. Finally, Natan, who outside the bomb shelter is a good friend of Amjad, snaps, “Say, Amjad, why are you attacking Jerusalem?”

Tension continues to build until a full-on political debate has broken out. Someone finds a bottle of vodka and suggests a diverting game of truth-or-dare. But the Jews in the room keep returning to the issue of loyalty: You live here, but whose side are you really on? Maybe it was the Iranians this time, Amjad says, reminding the group that the Iranians are not, in fact, Arab. “Maybe this time,” he says with a twinge of optimism, “we’re in it together.”

But soon the bottle lands on Amjad, and it is his turn to tell the truth. Yoske asks him where he would choose to live if he had the choice between Israel and any Arab country. The camera frames Amjad head-on, and at last, after three long seasons, he is not trying to be something other than himself. Suddenly, the “safe room” takes on a new meaning. If it meant avoiding a lifetime on society’s fringe, Amjad tells Yoske, then yes, he would choose to have been born elsewhere. Even if “elsewhere” means living under the tyranny of Egypt or Syria.

Kashua hesitates when I ask if he sympathizes with his alter ego. “It would be very difficult,” he says, “because I know another reality. I have freedom of speech.” But if it meant knowing his place in society and fitting into a community, then yes, he says, “Sometimes I do think like Amjad.”

In *Let It Be Morning*, on the other hand, the nameless anti-hero's dreams of finding a home come from weakness, not national pride.

I tried to survive. I'd always been a survivor. I knew how to adapt to my surroundings, working and doing what I wanted.... But I decided I'd had enough. Somehow I came to the conclusion that it would be much safer to live in an Arab village. Somehow it seemed to me that if I lived in a place where everyone was like me, things would be easier.

Of course, Kashua knows better than to let such fantasies come to fruition. The narrator's return to his childhood home is marked by all sorts of failures, some of them small and some spectacular. And the novel's stunning denouement tells us that, for an Arab in Israel, success in life can only come from using one's outsider status for good. Kashua "is at his core Israeli, but a secondary type of Israeli, and he knows it," Olmert says. "All the time, he is forcing his readers to deal with the hypocrisy and this gap between what we think about ourselves and how we actually behave."

This is the genius of Kashua's writing. In every book, every column, and every episode, he mocks the world around him, but also makes sure to mock himself. No one can say he isn't even-handed.

"There is this concept in nationalistic thought that there's an affinity between the language you speak and the territory you live in," Olmert explains. "When an Arab writes in Hebrew, he's confusing those affinities because suddenly he's showing that you can speak and write in Hebrew without being Zionist.... He's writing for a Jewish audience, and when we read him it's very confusing. On the one hand you identify with his experiences and on the other hand it's a very hard mirror to look into."

Because he is both a part of and apart from Israeli culture, Olmert believes that Kashua is in the ideal position to offer such a reflection. "He shows Israeli culture as racist, full of prejudice about Arabs, lacking self-criticism," she says. "So his protagonists are always anti-protagonists, anti-heroes."

In his third and most recent novel, *Second Person Singular*, Kashua offers not one but two of these anti-heroes. While one of them, referred to only as "the lawyer," remains nameless, the second is called Amir. Allowing one of his protagonists the luxury of a first name is not as much of a departure as it may seem, however. Amir is a common first name among both Arabs and Jews, something Kashua makes sure to point out to his readers as the book delves deeper and deeper into identity politics and the lure of "passing."

It isn't long before Amir not only sheds his name, but his entire Arab identity. He adopts the personal history of a tragic young Israeli named Yonatan, who is in a persistent vegetative state as a result of a failed suicide attempt. In separate but intertwining narratives, Amir/Yonatan and the nameless lawyer embark on a trouble-ridden quest for acceptance and inclusion in modern-day Jerusalem.

"The plot here is merely the vehicle through which Kashua keenly dissects issues of identity and class," Scott Martelle wrote in a *Los Angeles Times* review. And in doing so, Kashua touches the most primal nerve of Israeli life, writing fiction that speaks the truth about race relations and religious tension in this most complicated of countries.

"There is something very sophisticated in his writing," Olmert says.

It's all about a very strong passion to become a Jew, to pass. So you know some left-wing Israelis call him by the term aravi machmad (literally, "pet Arab") like the one who is trying to be cute, to be loved by Ashkenazim, the elite. He is willing to go too far for it, so they accuse him of not really representing the Palestinian cause. He's always the victim of some criticism. No one really knows how deal with him, and I think that's part of his charm.

Second Person Singular has been hailed as Kashua's strongest work yet, the book that will finally cement his place at the pinnacle of Hebrew literature. One review at the popular Israeli website Walla! gushed, "*Second Person Singular*, Sayed Kashua's new book, proves once and for all that he is the best Hebrew writer working today."

What emerges is that Kashua, as an outsider working in Hebrew, has internalized two different Jewish languages: both the modern Hebrew idiom of the new Jew and the millennial, existential struggle of the classical Jew in exile. He knows he is not one of us, yet he is the living embodiment of our own traumatic history. "I'm not trying to tell any truth," he says. "I'm using materials from my own private experience, if I'm lucky, and I'm trying to deal with a problematic identity and nationality problems. I use humor to take it to different levels."

"Sayed takes what Israelis think, and he says it out loud," says Capon. "That's why Israelis, the Jewish Israelis, accept him." And he says it in their own language. Kashua pretty much stopped writing in Arabic as soon he enrolled in the Israel Arts and Sciences Academy. While he still speaks it fluently and is perfectly capable of writing Arabic-language dialogue for *Avoda Aravit*, his grasp of literary Arabic is weak at best. In season three of the program, Kashua mocks his own limitations by showing Amjad, trying for once to write for a Palestinian newspaper, struggle to type a few simple Arabic words on his computer.

"My Hebrew is much better than my Arabic because I haven't really practiced Arabic since I was 15," Kashua says. "But I wouldn't be honest if I didn't also say that I always wanted to be part of the strong people in Israel. So it was the only way."

Kashua's accomplishments are certainly impressive, but the weight of them, Capon says, is also crushing. "In a way, Sayed has the weight of the entire Palestinian nation on his shoulders," he tells me. "I think the pressure on him is greater than on anyone else. It's easy to create satire when you're comfortable in your chair. But it's harder to do satire when you are in the bloody Middle East, and you are an Arab."

Olmert explains it differently. Kashua, she says, is not straddling two worlds. He is locked out of two worlds. "Arabs consider him to be too Jewish and Jews consider him to be too Arab. He's stuck in the middle, exactly like Berdichevsky and Feireberg and Brenner and all those great Jewish writers from the turn of the 20th century that had this notion of not belonging anywhere."

Even after three successful Hebrew novels, Kashua admits that he still dreams of writing a book in Arabic. It might, he says, bring him that elusive sense of belonging. "Language is just a tool," he tells me. "Recently, I do think about trying to practice Arabic, reading more Arabic, and maybe one day even writing a novel in Arabic. I have a very strange feeling that my fourth novel will start in Hebrew, and then it will turn into a mix of Hebrew and Arabic, and it will end with Arabic."

I asked Kashua if such a transition from one language to another would be symbolic. He laughed and changed the subject. The question, he seemed to be telling me, was far too simplistic. Later on, I asked him if he has a message he is trying to deliver to the Israeli people. After all, he has spent his entire adult life working in Hebrew and living among Jews, an Arab Japheth on the chaotic train that is the Jewish state.

"No, no, I don't have a point," he says. "I just want everyone to love me."

The Muslim Brotherhood's views on Iran

Eric Trager, The Washington Institute for Near East Studies, 20 May 2013

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhoods-views-on-iran>

In the face of new developments in the Arab world, what should a new Iranian administration take notice of vis-a-vis Arab-Iranian relations?

Iran should recognize that its policies are increasingly unpopular in the Arab world for two reasons. First, the Salafists, who are deeply opposed to Iran, have emerged as a major political force in a number of post-revolutionary Arab states, and in Egypt the Salafists are highlighting the Muslim Brotherhood's outreach to Iran in their campaign against the Brotherhood. Second, Iran's actions have intensified the Sunni-Shiite split and thus contributed to the violence that is now spreading from

Syria into Iraq. Iran would thus be well advised to cease its support for Maliki's divisive policies in Iraq and its support for the Assad regime in Syria, because a continuation of these policies will likely strengthen the backlash against it, as well as fuel further violence across the region.

What key differences do you see between the Islamic ideology espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood and that of Shiite Iran? How does the Muslim Brotherhood view Iran's anti-Western policies and the country's potential for regional influence?

Unlike Iran's concept of *vilayat-e faqih*, the Muslim Brotherhood has no jurisprudential approach for interpreting the sharia to derive *fiqh*, and it ultimately uses "Islam" as a slogan to justify its power consolidation while tarring its enemies as non-Islamic. The Brotherhood's view of the sharia is thus very vague, which is why its leaders still do not know what "implementing the sharia" means for policy and refer back to the sharia very superficially, and only to justify whatever policies they pursue.

As with Iran, anti-Westernism is a foundational principle for the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood views the establishment of an Islamic state in Egypt, and ultimately a "global Islamic state," as necessary means for resisting Western cultural and political influence. Its anti-Westernism is currently less apparent than Iran's, however, because -- according to deputy Supreme Guide Khairat al-Shater -- building an Islamic state (i.e., consolidating power) precedes establishing a "global Islamic state," and the Brotherhood understands that it needs relatively stable international relations to consolidate power at home. It is, therefore, willing to have relations with the West in the short run while it is pursuing this goal, but will likely become hostile once it pivots towards pursuing its foreign policy goals.

Would the Muslim Brotherhood be able to carve out a position for itself in a post-conflict Syria? What kind of bilateral relations with Iran does the Muslim Brotherhood envision in a post-Assad, post-conflict Syria?

It seems likely that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood will be an important player in post-Assad Syria, but it is not clear whether its organizational strength will make it a leading force, given Syria's fractiousness. And whereas the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has engaged Iran and sought to coordinate a solution to the Syrian civil war with it, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood reportedly resents Tehran's longtime backing of the Assad regime. So it remains to be seen how this relationship might develop in a post-Assad Syria.

From what perspectives does Iran's presidential election carry significance for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt?

Iran's presidential election does not carry a great deal of significance for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, because the Brotherhood will likely seek to continue its engagement with Tehran with whoever is elected. The Brotherhood does not have any specific vision for what it wants from its relationship with Iran; it simply wants to use this outreach to signal a shift from the relatively pro-Western foreign policy of the Mubarak era. So, for the Brotherhood, the winner of the forthcoming Iranian presidential elections is irrelevant.

Do you see in AKP -- Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling party in Turkey -- ideological affinities with the Muslim Brotherhood? Is Turkey in the same line with Qatar and Saudi Arabia when it comes to building an anti-Iranian bloc in the region?

The AKP shares the Brotherhood's Islamist outlook, but like the Brotherhood its defining feature is its autocratic behavior. So just as more journalists have been prosecuted in Egypt for "insulting the president" during Mohamed Morsi's first year in office as during Hosni Mubarak's 30 years, Erdogan's Turkey has the most imprisoned journalists in the world. But unlike Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, the AKP's leadership has coincided with strong economic growth, and it has also worked to consolidate its power more gradually and thus faced far less resistance. The Brotherhood initially looked to the AKP as a model given the AKP's political success, but once the Brotherhood faced resistance, it abandoned the AKP's type of gradualism and is now attempting to consolidate power as quickly as possible, which has only intensified the resistance against it and weakened the very state that the Brotherhood is trying to control.

As for regional alignments, much depends on the outcome in Syria and whether or not the U.S. ultimately gets involved. A more engaged American approach would ensure the fall of the Assad regime and thereby contribute to Iran's isolation, presumably with the backing of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. But so long as the U.S. remains on the sidelines, Iran will remain a major player in Syria and possibly force its way into negotiations with Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia regarding that country's future. This would prevent the consolidation of an anti-Iranian bloc.

Syria's madness and ours

David P Goldman, *Asia Times*, 20 May 2013

<http://www.meforum.org/3511/syria-madness>

"Syria's Descent into Madness" is the cover story of the May 27 Time magazine, recounting the act of ritual cannibalism by a Syrian rebel commander that transfixed the West last week. The sort of atrocities viewable on YouTube - the slaughter by government troops of entire families including infants in Tartus province this month, mass rape of women in rebel-held zones, or the rebel leader Abu Sakkar eating a piece of the lung of a dead government soldier - are becoming Syria's new normal.

Westerners cannot deal with this kind of warfare. The United States does not have and cannot train soldiers capable of intervening in the Syrian civil war. Short of raising a foreign legion on the French colonial model, America should keep its military personnel at a distance from a war fought with the instruments of horror.

There is nothing new about the use of atrocities to persuade one's own forces to fight to the death because defeat would entail a dreadful retribution. The Nazis "deliberately insinuated knowledge of the Final Solution, devilishly making Germans complicit in the crime and binding them, with guilt and dread, to their leaders," as the Atlantic Monthly's Benjamin Schwarz reviewed the latest research. [1] Both sides in Syria perpetrate crimes against humanity for the same reason. The Assad government encourages its irregulars to rape as many women as possible in towns controlled by the opposition. [2] Abu Sakkar's videotaped cannibalism was allegedly retaliation for such rapes.

Something more sinister is at work in the killing fields of the Middle East, however. The danger that Islam would conquer the West attenuated after the Ottomans' failed Siege of Vienna in 1683. Muslim birth rates are falling faster than those recorded for any people at any time in history, and two of the prospective Muslim powers, Iran and Turkey, will become geriatric shells within a generation. But Muslim societies in their death throes offer a different and deadly threat to the West. It was in response to this threat that I began writing these essays. A month after the 2001 attack on the World Trade center, I warned:

The grand vulnerability of the Western mind is horror. The Nazis understood this and pursued a policy "*des Schreckens*" (to cause horror) and "*Entsetzens*" (terror, literally: dislodgement).

Horror was not merely an instrument of war in the traditional sense, but a form of Wagnerian theater, or psychological warfare on the grand scale. Hitler's tactical advantage lay in his capacity to be more horrible than his opponents could imagine. The most horrible thing of all is that he well might have succeeded if not for his own megalomaniac propensity to overreach.

America, as Osama bin Laden taunted this week, lost in Vietnam. But it was not military setbacks, but the horrific images of Vietnamese civilians burned by napalm, that lost the war. America's experience in the war is enshrined in popular culture in the film *Apocalypse Now*, modeled after Joseph Conrad's story, *The Heart of Darkness*. The Belgian trading company official, Paul Kurtz, sinks into bestiality and dies with these words: "The horror! The horror!" It was a dreadful film, but a clever reference. At the close of World War I, T S Eliot subtitled his epitaph for Western civilization, *The Hollow Men*, with a quote from the Conrad story: "Mr Kurtz, he dead." [3]

Pre-modern societies competed as a matter of course to commit acts of cruelty horrific enough to paralyze the will of their enemies. The Mongol conqueror Tamerlane - the Boston bomber's namesake

- killed almost all the city's residents and piled their heads into a pyramid. The Romans lined the Appian Way with 6,000 crucified slave rebels after crushing Spartacus' revolt in 71 BCE. During the Siege of Jerusalem in CE 70 they crucified 500 victims a day. Among all the ancient peoples only the ancient Hebrews prohibited the public display of executed corpses (Deuteronomy. 21:23), because an atrocity inflicted on the living image of God is an offense to God.

That is what holds the West together. The Christian West summoned the pagans out of pre-history on the authority of a God whose love extends to every individual, so that as individuals they might abandon the collective identity of tribe and instead embrace an individual identity as Christian converts. The bright line that separates pre-modern collective identity from the covenantal identity of the Western individual is nowhere clearer than in the matter of atrocity. Pagan tribes feel no compunction about torturing and desecrating the cadavers of members of another collectivity; Western societies cannot abide such acts without going mad. We cannot even observe them from afar without feeling a touch of madness.

We in the West already are more than a little mad. A gauge of our madness is our preoccupation with horror in popular entertainment. The horror genre supplied one in eight feature films released in the United States in 2009. When Universal Studios made its classic supernatural thrillers during the 1930s, the ratio was 1:200, and in 2000 it still was 1:25. Since 9/11, the volume of horror films has expanded from a trickle to a flood.

Horror films are not merely repellent, but stupid and repetitive. There aren't enough possible variations on subject matter like vampires, werewolves and zombies to permit much originality, except, perhaps, in the realism of their depiction of mayhem. American audiences watch horror obsessively, the same way they watch pornography.

It is probably not a coincidence that that first big jump in the proportion of horror films (from the 2% to the 4% range) came towards the end of the Vietnam War (with *Night of the Living Dead* and *Rosemary's Baby*), and the second big jump (from the 4% range to 12%) came after the attacks on the Twin Towers. Americans are horrified because something has horrified them.

That was not always the case. In an essay on the horror genre for First Things magazine in October 2009, I noted that the old classic horror films were viewed as an exotic import:

Hollywood gave us a small run of exotic-origin horror films in the 1930s, all drawn from European fiction: *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. After the Second World War, however, these nightmares of tormented Europeans were mostly naturalized as sight gags for American adolescents. And that was how it was supposed to be. The monsters had a different meaning in their Old World provenance. As Heinrich Heine once observed, the witches and *kobolds* and *poltergeister* of German folktales are remnants of the old Teutonic nature-religion that went underground with the advent of Christianity. The pagan sees nature as arbitrary and cruel, and the monsters that breed in the pagan imagination personify this cruelty. Removed from their pagan roots and transplanted to America, they became comic rather than uncanny. America was the land of new beginnings and happy endings. The monsters didn't belong. [4]

Horror became an American genre with local themes after Vietnam. The monsters have taken out citizenship papers and are no longer subject to deportation. The pre-modern roots of horror remain evident-every haunted house seems to be built over a Native American burial ground-but they now stem from our own past rather than the remote legends of European tribalism.

Why did Americans display a psychic immunity to the horrors of the European wars, but show such susceptibility to the Black Breath wafting from the World Trade Center? There are many reasons, but chief among them, I believe, is that we have forgotten what makes us different. President George W Bush told us that Islam is a religion of peace, and President Barack Obama told the world in 2009 at Cairo that America and Islam "overlap, and share common principles - principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings". Our clergy inform us that all adherents of the "three Abrahamic religions" are brothers under the skin sharing the same principles, and our political

theorists assure us that democratic institutions eventually will make Muslim countries more or less like America.

We were told, and most of us believed, that the so-called Arab Spring of early 2011 portended a great democratic transformation of the Muslim Middle East. As the images of tech-savvy Facebook friends in Tahrir Square gave way to video clips of ravaged bodies, our faces turned gray.

It will get much, much worse. There is a reason that Syria has labored under brutal minority regimes for half a century, since the Ba'ath Party coup of 1963 led by the Christian Michel Aflaq, followed by the Alawite Assad dynasty's assumption of power in 1971. The colonial cartographers who drew the modern map of the Middle East after World War I understood something that America's political mainstream does not: states composed of the tribal remnants of pre-modern society can be stable only if the ethnic and sectarian melange is ruled by a minority. Syria's Alawites ruled over a Sunni majority with Christian support, while Iraq's Sunnis ruled over a Shi'ite majority, also with Christian support.

Tyrannical as a minority regime might be, it is constrained by the fact that it is a minority. The minority cannot exterminate the majority, so it must find some sort of compromise arrangement. A majority government, though, can (and frequently will) exterminate an ethnic or religious minority. That is why the Sunni majority in Syria long tolerated the Alawite minority regime while the Iraqi Shi'ite majority tolerated a minority Sunni regime.

Syria's Alawites will fight to the death because a Sunni victory would mean the end of their sect, and Iran will provide unlimited numbers of weapons and fighters. Iraq's Sunnis, divided from their Syrian cousins by the thin pencils of colonial cartographers, will not stand by and allow Syria to turn into an Iranian protectorate, while Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar support the Sunni rebels with weapons and personnel. What we have seen so far are the preliminary skirmishes. The real horrors of war are yet to come.

It will not help to stick our fingers in our ears and shout, "I can't hear you!," as Ron Paul and the new isolationists propose. America cannot abandon a region in which it retains vital strategic interests without disastrous consequences. But it must act in pursuit of these interests, rather than attempt to export democracy.

What America most requires is a renewed understanding of its own uniqueness, and the grim recognition that it cannot prevent civilizations that are determined to destroy themselves from doing so.

Managing global conflict and democratic space at Wits
Adam Habib & Loyiso Nongxa, Business Day, 20 May 2013

http://www.ornico.co.za/editorialstream/OwnMediaAttachments/2013_05_20_945195.pdf

There is a global conflict playing out in the corridors of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). On the one hand, there are the advocates of the Palestinian struggle calling for the academic and cultural isolation of Israel. On the other, members of the Zionist lobby oppose any such attempt to isolate Israel. In between there are multiple shades of opinion, most of which are crowded out in the acrimonious public discourse over the issue. The contest at Wits over these controversies has raised managerial challenges, some of which have been covered in the media. This, and the fact that Wits is a public institution, prompts us to explain the managerial dilemmas of this struggle, and how we are managing them.

We are not surprised Wits has become one of the primary platforms for this conflict. It is one of Africa's great academic institutions and one of South Africa's most vibrant universities. Winning a significant political platform for one's position at Wits provides one with access to a highly influential constituency. We believe this is why both sides have targeted Wits so aggressively.

Another reason could be the remarkable transformation that has taken place at Wits in the past two decades — through the diversity of its people, programmes and ideas that bring to the fore divergent views on complex issues. Wits has sizeable communities that belong to the major religions of the world — perhaps one of the most complex social microcosms in South Africa. This concentration of multiple views and ideas in one intellectual space makes Wits a compelling platform on which contentious issues are raised and debated.

For the first time in its history, Wits appointed a vice-chancellor of African ancestry in 2003 and then a Muslim to its top post this year. Given that Adam Habib has a Muslim and political background, religious and political activists on both sides have clearly been galvanised by his appointment, either fearing or hoping for a change in Wits's position on Israel. Yet both sides have made a mistake by treating Wits and its vice-chancellor as synonymous. Wits is greater than its vice-chancellor or any other members of its executive team.

Moreover, when the vice-chancellor and the executive act, they do so in a capacity beyond their individual ideological or religious predisposition. They act to advance the mandate of the university, a key element of which is to retain the institution as a free space for competing ideas.

This is why we welcome a thorough debate on issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and others, in an open and tolerant environment. We expect and allow for freedom of expression and protests on key issues. This is part of the learning experience of our students, where they can become active citizens of South Africa and the world. We also demand that, while debate and protests happen, they do so within the parameters and boundaries established by our collective university community and within the laws of our country.

In recent days, when students protested against the concert of the German-domiciled Israeli pianist, we had no problem with the act of protest. But when 11 members of the Wits community allegedly violated university rules, impinged on the rights of others, broke up the concert and in effect violated academic freedom, we acted and subjected them to disciplinary hearings. To ensure that the processes were fair and independent, we appointed outside legal expertise to preside over the hearings.

The Wits Students' Representative Council (SRC) has demanded we drop the charges. They suggest our refusal to do so emanates from the pressure from donors who support Israel. There have indeed been some individuals who have threatened to withdraw their donations. Our responses have been categorical. We will not be threatened or cajoled by "cheque-book diplomacy".

We will act, but we do so on principle, not because of the threat or promise of donations. The vast majority of our donors are driven to give not by the ideological predisposition or religious affiliations of a vice-chancellor, but rather by their commitment to the principle of human solidarity and the public-good purposes of the university. They give because they want to empower us to deliver more to present and future generations. We applaud this gesture of human solidarity and we are convinced most of our donors will continue to be driven by gestures of human goodwill and social commitment.

On the other hand, some political and civic leaders have also demanded that we drop the charges and that Wits should boycott Israel. Zwelinzima Vavi of the Congress of South African Trade Unions has called on the university's rich tradition of progressive political struggle, and the memory of academics such as David Webster, to motivate the case for Wits's adoption of an academic boycott against Israel. However, Wits is neither a political party nor a civic movement. Rather, it is a university and as such is meant to be an intellectual space for diverse views to be heard, even if those are not shared by the vice-chancellor. If we were to act against those views, or to prevent them from existing within the institution, then we violate our essential mandate: to build and retain an intellectual space for the pursuit of diverse ideas.

Does this mean Wits as an institution is always and will always be neutral? No. We are a university that shares the values enshrined in the constitution. Those values enable the building of a world-class, cosmopolitan university with an African orientation. Those principles also allow for a plurality of interpretation of how they translate into specific political situations. These interpretations we leave to

our academics, students, alumni and their organisational expressions. Rarely do we as a collective translate these values into specific political situations. And in the rare cases that we do, as we did under apartheid, the decision is made through a laborious process of consultation and decision-making by every single stakeholder associated with the institution, and every single structure within it, including its SRC, academics, support staff, convocation, alumni, senate, council, clubs and societies.

Wits has not taken a position to boycott Israel, and in keeping with the principles of the constitution, leaves its interpretation open in this specific case to its various stakeholders. Our academics, staff, students and alumni are given relative autonomy to make decisions in this regard in line with their own conscience. Our responsibility as vice-chancellors and institutional executives is to protect this measured autonomy in making these decisions because it enshrines the principle of academic freedom within the institutional architecture of Wits.

Indeed, even if Wits had taken a collective institutional position in this regard, we would still protect the academic freedom of dissidents in our midst and the intellectual space for them to articulate their views. This philosophy governs our decisions pertaining to the Palestinian-Israeli issue and other similarly contested, controversial matters.

We believe that not only is it in line with our celebrated constitution, but it also speaks directly to our mandate as vice-chancellors to build a world-class African university in the 21st century.

Israeli thinking on the future of the Assad regime

Itamar Rabinovich, Institute for National Security Studies, 19 May 2013

<http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=11464>

On May 17, 2013, *The Times* of London quoted "Israeli intelligence sources" who argued that "an intact, but weakened, Assad regime would be preferable for the country and for the whole troubled region." The paper went on to quote "a senior Israeli intelligence officer" in the north of the country: "Better the devil we know than the demons we can only imagine if Syria falls into chaos and the extremists from across the Arab world gain a foothold there." We do not know who the Israeli sources were, but the *Times* story provides a window into the deliberations and disagreements within Israel's national security establishment as to the country's priorities with regard to Syria.

The expression "the devil we know" was famously used by former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2005 when he explained to President George W. Bush why he opposed the US President's desire to topple Bashar al-Assad. President Bush became hostile to the Syrian President who supported the rebellion in Iraq against the US occupation and opened his borders to jihadi infiltrators and military equipment in support of the rebellion. While not enamored of the Syrian President, Sharon thought that from Israel's perspective it was preferable to have a familiar regime in Damascus rather than face an uncertain future and the prospect of the Muslim Brotherhood, the only organized opposition in Syria, taking over the country. Assad was Iran's ally and provided it with a land bridge to Hizbollah in Lebanon and supported Hamas and Islamic Jihad. But he did maintain a quiet border in the Golan Heights and inherited his father's reputation as a familiar, and on the whole, predictable enemy. Throughout his political career and his five years as prime minister, Sharon opposed the idea of a settlement with Syria and withdrawal from the Golan that was part and parcel of such a settlement.

Israel's perspective changed in 2006 after the Second Lebanon War. For Prime Minister Olmert, who succeeded Sharon, the war demonstrated the severity of the threat posed to Israel by the Iran-Syria-Hizbollah axis. The conclusion he drew, with the support of the defense establishment, was that it was a high priority for Israel to dismantle this axis and to do it primarily by pulling the Syrian brick out of the Iranian dominated wall. To this end, in early 2007 he began a Turkish mediated effort to explore the prospect of an Israeli-Syrian settlement. The negotiation lasted until its collapse in December 2008, although it was temporarily suspended in September 2007 when according to foreign sources Israel destroyed the North Korean-built Syrian nuclear reactor in al-Kibar. It could be argued that there was no point in negotiating a settlement with a Syrian president capable of such radical action, but Olmert calculated that this was all the more reason to defuse the conflict with Syria. He and others

were also impressed by the fact that Assad displayed maturity and self control when he refrained from retaliating after being humiliated by the attack.

Another Syrian-Israeli negotiation was conducted in 2010-2011, during the final two years of Benjamin Netanyahu's previous tenure, through mediators on behalf of the Obama administration. According to these mediators, this was a very serious negotiation, Netanyahu's public rejection of a withdrawal from the Golan Heights notwithstanding. The outbreak of the Syrian crisis in March 2011 put an end to this negotiation as well.

The Syrian crisis, which began as a series of demonstrations and developed into a brutal civil war and a sectarian conflict, transformed Israel's view of Assad and his regime. The Syrian civil war soon became a focal point of regional and international conflict. On the regional level, it became a conflict between Iran and its adversaries. Iran and its proxy, Hizbollah, have invested huge efforts to protect this strategic asset. Iran's rivals such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and Jordan have extended support to the opposition. Internationally, Russia, and to a lesser extent China, are providing the Assad regime with a defensive shield in the Security Council and other forums. Russia also continues to provide Assad's regime with sophisticated weapon systems. For Russia, protecting its investment in Syria and preventing it from falling into the US orbit is a high priority.

As a neighbor with a high stake in Syria's future, Israel must decide on its own preferences. Early on, Israel chose a passive stance. Whatever its preferences, it calculated, correctly, that its ability to affect the outcome of the civil war was limited. It has no influence on Syria's domestic politics and if it were to extend any support to the opposition it would play into the regime's hands. Assad and his spokesmen argued from the outset that this was not a genuine domestic rebellion but a conspiracy hatched from the outside, and the regime would seize the opportunity to embarrass the opposition by pointing to any Israeli link or support. At the same time, Israel made it clear that it had its own red lines vis-à-vis Syria. It announced that it would interrupt the transfer of sophisticated, game changing weapon systems to the hands of terrorist groups, be they Hizbollah or the jihadi groups that have come to play an important role in the Syrian armed opposition. In January 2013, Israel reportedly destroyed a cache of missiles in the Damascus area en route to Lebanon. In order not to embarrass the regime and to minimize the risk of retaliation, Israel took no credit for this action. But in May 2013, Israel acted twice and in a manner that could not be secret. Clearly, Iran, Syria, and Hizbollah were upping the ante. So was Russia, which is about to provide Syria with sophisticated S-300 missiles whose entry into the Syrian-Lebanese arena is unacceptable to Israel. Israel may find itself in a cycle of violence in which it acts again and again against arms transfers via Syria to Hizbollah, eventually triggering a response, whether by Syria or by Hizbollah. It was in this context that an Israel official stated last week to the *New York Times* that should Assad retaliate, Israel will topple his regime, meaning that the destruction of Assad's air force and armor by Israel would lead to the opposition victory. Be that as it may, Israel finds itself deeply involved in the regional and international conflict over Syria's future as well as in the question of the regime's future.

Indeed, there is a debate within the Israeli defense establishment as to the desirable outcome of the Syrian civil war. Some argue, in line of what was said to the *London Times*, that at the end of the day is it better for Israel that Assad remain in power, probably as a weakened ruler over part of the country. Their argument is that given the strength of the jihadi and Islamist elements among the militias fighting against the regime, a jihadi or Islamist takeover or a state of anarchy with jihadi elements free to launch terrorist activities is the most severe threat to Israel's security. Against this backdrop, Assad once again becomes "the devil we know." Others argue that the continuation of Assad's regime in the service of Iran and in close partnership with Hizbollah presents a graver threat to Israel's national security. They further argue that it is of course not desirable that jihadi groups take over Syria or parts of Syria, but that Syria is not the Sinai and Israel would be able to act if confronted with terrorist threats from Syria.

This latter school of thought is the more convincing. Bashar al-Assad demonstrated his ability to take radical dangerous actions when he built a nuclear reactor in league with North Korea. He demonstrated his willingness to brutalize his own population and use missiles and chemical weapons against it. He is now purely a tool in the service of Iran. This, however, does not mean that Israel should come out openly against Assad and the future of his regime. Israel's recent entanglement in the Russian-American conflict over the future of Syria is a negative development. While protecting its

vital security interests, it should seek to return to the policy it pursued during most of the civil war, i.e., refrain to the best of its ability from being drawn into the crisis and into Syrian politics, and protect its vital security interests firmly, but cautiously and discretely.

Jews and non-Jews in Israel

Denis MacEoin, Aish.com, 11 May 2013

<http://www.aish.com/jw/me/Jews--Non-Jews-in-Israel.html>

Subject: Israel's explicit policies
Prof. Malcolm Levitt
Dept. of Chemistry
Southampton University
11th May 2013

Dear Professor Levitt,

I am not a chemist nor, indeed, a scientist of any kind. My academic background exists in a very different field, but one, I hope, that is of particular relevance to the subject of this e-mail. I am a former lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies and a former editor of *The Middle East Quarterly*, an international journal. My PhD was in an adjunct area of Persian Studies. I have a particular interest in the Middle East (where I have lived, first in Iran, later in Morocco) and my several visits to Israel have created in me a particular interest in matters relating to that country, both religious and political.

I was alerted today to a statement you made recently relating to the decision by Professor Stephen Hawking to boycott a conference due to be held in Israel, when you said 'Israel has a totally explicit policy of making life impossible for the non-Jewish population and I find it totally unacceptable.' Assuming I have quoted you correctly, I feel impelled to ask you where on earth you obtained such a manifestly nonsensical view. Like anyone, I feel free to criticize Israel when its government policies stray from the straight and narrow. Like any country, Israel makes mistakes. But when critics level accusations that are simply divorced from reality – that Israel practises apartheid, for example, or that it is 'a Nazi state' – then I cannot let such remarks pass by.

Israel is the one country in the Middle East of which it cannot be said that it 'has a totally explicit policy of making life impossible' for adherents of any but the dominant faith.

Israel is the one country in the Middle East (and often far beyond) of which it plainly and categorically cannot be said that it 'has a totally explicit policy of making life impossible' for adherents of any but the dominant faith. In Iran, for example, members of the indigenous Baha'i religion (about which I have written extensively) are hanged, imprisoned, denied employment in all professions, refused entry to the universities, and are threatened with genocide. Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews there are treated harshly. For many, life is impossible. Jews have been driven out of all the Arab countries. In most Arab countries (notably Egypt), Christians are persecuted, churches are destroyed, and whole communities have been leaving over the past ten years and more. Those are all countries you would do better to condemn.

Israel is the only country in the Middle East whose Christian population has risen steadily since 1948. And Israel's treatment of the Baha'is is exemplary: they have their international centre in Haifa, where they have built gardens, terraces, and white marble buildings facing the Mediterranean, half of a UNESCO World Heritage Site that puts the Iranian regime to shame. The other half of the UNESCO site is situated outside Acre and contains the holiest of the Baha'i shrines. In Iran, every single one of the Baha'i holy places has been bulldozed, never to be rebuilt. Every Baha'i cemetery has met the same fate.

In Israel, then 1967 Protection of Holy Places Law guarantees the safety of all Jewish and non-Jewish sacred sites:

1. The Holy Places shall be protected from desecration and any other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings with regard to those places.
 - A. Whosoever desecrates or otherwise violates a Holy Place shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of seven years.
 - B. Whosoever does anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings with regard to those places shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of five years.
2. This Law shall add to, and not derogate from, any other law.
3. The Minister of Religious Affairs is charged with the implementation of this Law, and he may, after consultation with, or upon the proposal of, representatives of the religions concerned and with the consent of the Minister of Justice make regulations as to any matter relating to such implementation.
4. This Law shall come into force on the date of its adoption by the Knesset.

This Law is rigorously applied to Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Baha'i and other holy places. There is nothing remotely like it in any Islamic country. In Saudi Arabia it is expressly forbidden to build churches, synagogues, temples, and it is illegal for Christians and others even to meet in their own homes to worship.

The Israeli law of citizenship and other related laws confer on all citizens the same rights and responsibilities. This applies to non-Jews as fully as to Jews. Arabs are full citizens of the state, they may vote in all elections, they may form political parties (and there are quite a few of them), they may stand for parliament (and a great many serve in it), they serve as members of the Supreme Court, as judges in other courts, as university teachers and professors, 20% of all students in all universities are Arabs (with Arabs forming 18% of the population), and so on. There is, quite flatly, no law or regulation calling for any form of apartheid. Go to Israel (and it may help you a lot to do so) and watch: no restaurants barred to Arabs, no shops barred to Arabs (Christian or Muslim), no buses for Jews only, no trains, no university campuses, no hotels, no beaches. All Israelis have the same rights.

Not only that, but consider the situation of women in Muslim countries, especially now that Salafi and other radical Muslim groups are taking over across the region. In Israel, women have full rights with men.

I have hinted at religious freedom and its denial in all Muslim states. The Israeli position has been set out thus:

"Every person in Israel enjoys freedom of conscience, of belief, of religion, and of worship. This freedom is guaranteed to every person in every enlightened, democratic regime, and therefore it is guaranteed to every person in Israel. It is one of the fundamental principles upon which the State of Israel is based... This freedom is partly based on Article 83 of the Palestine Order in Council of 1922, and partly it is one of those fundamental rights that 'are not written in the book' but derive directly from the nature of our state as a peace-loving, democratic state'... On the basis of the rules – and in accordance with the Declaration of Independence – every law and every power will be interpreted as recognizing freedom of conscience, of belief, of religion, and of worship."

I find it remiss of you, as someone endowed with considerable intellect, to have been so grossly misled about the reality of life in Israel. Your statement goes beyond the limits of reasonable and fair discourse. I can only consider you to have been misled by unprincipled persons who wish to disseminate falsehoods about Israel for base motives. In the face of the facts I have given and your freedom to board a plane to Israel in order to see all of this for yourself, I have to ask you to apologize to the citizens of a moral, ethical and democratic people, both Jews and Arabs, who have endured almost daily attacks from enemies determined to wipe them from the face of the planet. That Jewish Israelis have had the patience and moral strength to hold out the hand of friendship to so many Arab citizens while experiencing suicide attacks and rocket fire from their brethren across the border should inspire you to think again. As a university teacher you have a responsibility to dissociate yourself from such a totally explicit lie as the one you have uttered. Please reassure me that you understand the points I have tried to make.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Denis MacEoin

What does Israel's Arab minority really think?

Alexander Yakobson, Fathom, 26 April 2013

<http://www.fathomjournal.org/policy-politics/what-does-israels-arab-minority-really-think/>

The Israel Democracy Institute's 'Israeli Democracy Index 2012' – an annual comprehensive survey of the mood of Israeli society, widely considered one of the most authoritative in the field – provides some fascinating data about attitudes among Arab-Israelis regarding Israeli democracy and the state itself. The findings (not significantly different to previous years) certainly reflect a critical attitude towards the Israeli reality and government policies. But they also reflect something else: a huge gap between the responses of Arab-Israelis and the typical discourse of the Arab elite in the country; between opinion at the base and rhetoric amongst the political leadership of this community.

Findings

Before setting out the findings, we must ask how reliable they are. It is sometimes suggested that the relatively positive results of these kinds of surveys reflect the reluctance of Arab participants to express their views with full candor and their desire to appease the establishment or the Jewish majority. But one of the survey's most interesting findings is the negative answer given by the great majority of Arab respondents to the question, 'Do you think that the Knesset Members from Arab parties are more radical than the general Arab public?' Only 24.4 per cent think so; almost half of the rest say the Arab MK's are actually more moderate than the Arab public at large. This is obviously a very disappointing answer from the viewpoint of the Jewish majority. Those who gave it were clearly not afraid of anybody and not trying to please anybody. Precisely for this reason, it can be regarded as strengthening the credibility of the other answers in the survey: after having expressed support for their political leadership, the Arab citizens proceeded to give, on many important points, answers that are hugely different from what the leadership is saying.

There is a huge difference between the responses of ordinary Israeli Arabs and the typical discourse of the Arab elite.

The picture is thus complicated, and the fundamental attitude of the Arab minority towards the State appears to be deeply ambivalent. But given the prolonged national conflict, with no end in sight at this point, this ambivalence should be regarded as good news. The Arab parties express the negative aspect of this ambivalence well enough; but anyone reading the survey will notice that the other aspect exists as well, and it is not at all negligible.

Proud to be Israeli. Some 44.5 per cent of Arab citizens (compared with 89 per cent of Jewish Israelis) answered affirmatively when asked whether they are 'proud to be Israeli' (14.1 per cent 'very proud', 30.4 per cent 'quite proud', 20.4 per cent 'not so proud' and 29.3 per cent 'not at all proud'). This reflects a decline from last year, when 52.8 per cent of Arabs responded positively, but it is still within the normal fluctuations over the last decade (between more than 40 and more than 50 per cent). Some argue that a state that defines itself as Jewish cannot, by definition, inspire feelings of patriotism among its Arab citizens – these findings tell a different story. It should be noted that the expression the survey uses is not 'Israeli citizen' but 'Israeli'. In theory this should be the same thing, but in fact, everyone living in Israel knows that both Jews and Arabs often use the term 'Israeli' as a synonym for an 'Israeli Jew'.

To my knowledge, none of the leaders of the Arab public would adopt the label 'Israeli', and many reject this term explicitly. The Arab leadership also rejects the term 'Israeli Arab' because it sounds too Israeli. The acceptable alternative is not 'Palestinian Israeli' or 'Israeli Palestinian' but 'Arab Palestinian citizen of Israel,' or '(Arab) Palestinian in Israel'. Under these conditions, the willingness of

slightly less and sometimes slightly more than a half of the Arab public to adopt the label 'Israeli' and express pride in it is of great significance. A few years ago I spoke with a group of British journalists who questioned me about the situation of Arab citizens of Israel. After dealing with various specific points, I asked them: do you suppose that 45 per cent of Catholics in Northern Ireland would be prepared to say 'I am proud to be British'? One of them replied, 'I don't believe there are 45 Catholics in Northern Ireland who are willing to say I am proud to be British, never mind 45 per cent.' Of course, he may have been exaggerating.

Israeli democracy. In relation to Israeli democracy, 44 per cent of Arab respondents say Israel's democracy is at the 'appropriate level', 7.8 per cent say Israel is 'too democratic', 37.2 per cent said it is 'not democratic enough' and only 11 per cent that it is 'not democratic enough by far'. The last answer corresponds to what is routinely said by virtually the entire Arab leadership. In fact, the 'vision documents' of the Arab leadership claim that Israel is not a democracy at all. That is not the opinion of the Arab public.

With regard to political institutions, 51.3 per cent of the Arab population have confidence in the Knesset and 51.8 per cent in the president, while only 39.3 per cent have confidence in the government (the cabinet). This signifies, presumably, not political support for the present government, but rather confidence in the government as *an institution*.

Nearly 82 per cent of the Arab respondents 'definitely agree' that under no circumstances should violence be used to achieve political goals. The percentage of Jews that answered that way to the question is 75.5 per cent.

Equality. Asked whether Arab citizens are discriminated against ('disadvantaged', as the survey puts it) compared with the Jewish population, a large majority of respondents answered 'yes'. One should not make light of this finding. But here also there are marked differences between the message from the public and the message of the leadership. Some 46.6 per cent 'strongly agree' with this claim, while 28.3 per cent 'somewhat agree' and 22.5 per cent 'disagree' or 'do not agree so much.'

National security and state institutions. 16.8 per cent of Israeli Arabs say they would increase Israel's defence budget, while 40.8 per cent would leave it unchanged. In 2011, when the question was asked in a different way, 45 per cent responded that it was 'important' or 'very important' to enhance Israel's military capability. Some 42.4 per cent of Arabs say they have confidence in the IDF and a further 18.8 per cent have confidence 'to a small extent'. Only 32.5 per cent have 'no confidence at all'. It seems that even among those who do not have great confidence in the IDF, more than a few are of the opinion that there are other forces in the Middle East that inspire even less confidence.

Some 62.3 per cent of Arab respondents say they have confidence in the police (25.1 per cent 'a lot of confidence' and 37.2 per cent 'some confidence') – a significant increase from the previous survey and slightly more, remarkably, than the percentage of Jews who say so. The editors of the survey comment that this may be due to increased recent police efforts to fight crime in the Arab sector. If indeed one year of relatively good work is enough to garner the police of the Zionist state an expression of confidence by a large majority of the Arab public, this indicates that the real relationship between the state and its Arab citizens is very different, and much more complex, than is commonly thought.

If so, there is an important lesson here for other parts of the Israeli establishment: a concrete action – even if not particularly dramatic – by official institutions, for the benefit of the Arab public, as part of the country's citizenry, can certainly lead to increased confidence by the Arab citizens in these institutions.

Some 78 per cent of Arabs say they have confidence in the Supreme Court (compared with 72 per cent of Jews). Certainly, the Supreme Court is the most liberal branch of the Jewish state, which has done a lot to protect the civil rights of the Arab minority. But it is still unmistakably a branch of the Jewish state. Not many radical critics of the Jewish state, within the country or abroad, are willing to give credit to its Supreme Court.

Israel's future. When asked about their assessment of Israel's outlook for the next fifteen years, a large majority of the Arab respondents estimated that the country will be able to defend itself militarily (62.8 per cent), and that it will not lose its Jewish character (68.1). Some 49.7 per cent think Israel will become much more religious, and 55.5 per cent believe its international isolation will grow. But the assessment that enjoys the highest majority is that Israel will retain its status as a high-tech leader (75.9 per cent). Some 60.2 per cent of Arabs (compared to 75.6 per cent of the Jewish population) say they are 'optimistic about the future of Israel'. Just over half of those are 'very optimistic', the rest 'quite optimistic'.

Conclusions

Of course, one may question the methodology and significance of any poll, but consistent findings in a series of authoritative polls are not something that can be easily dismissed. Anyone who studies the data closely, and factors in the difficult prevailing circumstances, must be impressed by the extent of optimism among Israel's Arab minority. The findings should, I think, inspire some cautious optimism in the reader as well. After all, the data was collected after a period in which the Yisrael Beitenu party and parts of the Likud questioned the loyalty of the Arab minority in Israel in a highly inflammatory manner. The shameful public call by a group of municipal rabbis not to sell or rent apartments to Arab citizens, met only fairly mild disapproval from government leaders, and no official measures were taken against these rabbis, despite the fact that they are public servants paid by the state. Back in 2006, some Arab Knesset members publicly praised the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah whilst his missiles fell on Haifa and (the Arab-Israeli town of) Nazareth; this did not help the relations between Jewish and Arab citizens either. Indeed, anyone listening to the nationalist rhetoric on both sides could easily imagine that the relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel were about to explode.

However, these and similar findings indicate that Jewish-Arab relations in Israel are actually much better – or less bad, if one prefers to put it this way – than the nationalist rhetoric would suggest. Clearly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict casts a large shadow over these relations. But even absent a solution to this conflict (which would of course be highly desirable in many respects), there is much that can and should be done to improve the civic status of Arabs in Israel and the relations between the majority and the minority. The claim that the Arab citizens of Israel are essentially and fundamentally alienated from the state is plain wrong.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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