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## COPYING THE MASTER?

### PATTERNS OF ISRAELI ARAB PROTEST, 1950-1990

The evolution of protest among Israel's Arab citizens is laden with paradox. On the one hand, their protest has been directed against various social, economic, and political policies of the Israeli government. Moreover, the most recent significant extra-parliamentary developments have moved the Israeli Arab community away from its previous 'soft' identification with the state of Israel and towards greater psychological (if not actual) association with the Palestinian national movement and/or Islam as a sociopolitical force. On the other hand, despite some specifically Arab background factors, the evolution of Israeli Arab protest through the years has been largely a copy (albeit with some time lag) of Jewish Israeli extra-parliamentary activity, despite the relatively insignificant level of Jewish-Arab coordination and cooperation regarding protest as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Lest this point be misunderstood it should be noted at the outset that such 'duplication' is not a matter of Arab *mimicry*, but rather in large part of *parallel development* in the protest patterns of these two major groups in the Israeli population.

In order to understand why and how this has happened, this paper first briefly and schematically surveys Israeli protest in the majority Jewish sector, focusing on those aspects relevant to the Arab sector's protest discussed later on.

1 Less than three percent of all protests in Israel had joint organization or participation of Jews and Arabs. For an in-depth historical overview of Israeli protest from the establishment of the state until the mid-1980s, see S. Lehman-Wilzig, *Stiff-Necked People, Bottle-Necked System: The Evolution and Roots of Israeli Public Protest, 1949-1986*, Bloomington 1990, ch. 3. Chapters 3 and 4 have detailed figures and percentages related to various aspects of protest in Israel.

The most important datum of Israeli extra-parliamentary activity is that as of the early 1980s the country led the Western world in protest participation per capita, with 21.5 percent of all adult Jewish residents having personally participated in a protest event at least once (half of those were repeaters). This compares 'favorably' with other Western nations as surveyed in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup> In short, Israelis are masterful demonstrators, and the protest environment in the country is one which could easily serve as a model for non-Jewish minorities within the state.

Israeli protest — as measured by the number of annual events — can be divided into four distinct historical periods. The first, encompassing the years 1949–1954, was marked by a not insignificant level of demonstrations (especially in light of the relatively small population), grounded mainly in the country's socioeconomic problems in the wake of massive immigration. Of great interest, and later importance, were the protests and riots which occurred in reaction to the authorities' overzealous 'modernization' efforts, e.g., undercutting the new immigrants' religious ethos and forced suburban settlement.

Once the immigration ceased and the economy began to revive, the second period commenced, extending from 1955 until 1970, with a very low annual number of extra-parliamentary protests. This was a period of national consolidation and relative social/political peace, although the latter already showed cracks as a result of the territorial conquests of the Six Day War.

The protest floodgates opened wide in 1971, with the Black Panther riots in Jerusalem serving as the spark which led the way to extra-parliamentary activity by many other groups. The Black Panther phenomenon did not actually *cause* others to demonstrate, but rather constituted a catalyzing factor which was copied by others in large part due to the tremendous media coverage which it engendered. Israeli Jews, and not only Arabs, imitated other Jewish protesters over the years.

Of particular importance is the fact that this was 'second generation' Jewish protest: resentment felt by the children of the earlier immigrants, particularly acute as a result of feelings of relative deprivation. In other words, these young adults living in the slums of the Musrara neighborhood in Jerusalem felt deep resentment with their socioeconomic lot precisely because they had been successfully 'modernized.' They had indeed learned what the modern industrial

world could offer, and so were all the more angry for not being able to partake of such fruits. With their previous traditionalist social and political culture eviscerated, they understood their right (and had a better understanding of how) to demand improvement of their condition. This created a new baseline for the frequency of protest in Israel, which averaged well over 100 cases a year through 1978.

The fourth and final period (1979–1990) witnessed the 'normalization' of Israeli protest: an annual average of more than 200 demonstrations, etc., throughout the period. It is at this stage that the protest 'super-groups' reached maturity: Gush Emunin, Peace Now, Yesh Gvul, Movement for a Constitution and others were all institutionalized *national* extra-parliamentary movements with great staying power.

One key point worth noting is that overall Israeli extra-parliamentarism tended throughout to be mostly non-violent (with the exception of protests involving religious issues) — only one-sixth of all protests had a modicum of violence. In a larger sense, this is a reflection of the relatively low level of physical violence found in Israeli society. Israeli social culture, one could almost say, encourages yelling and bluster, but is not supportive of attack against the person.

Finally, a new form of extra-parliamentary activity began to make itself felt during the late 1970s and increasingly throughout the 1980s. In the wake of the relative *lack* of success of protest, Israelis began to take matters into their own hands through the establishment of alternative 'service systems' such as non-authorized settlements, black medicine, the black market, gray education, pirate cable television and networks.<sup>3</sup> This was self-help with a vengeance, proving to be not only widely popular, but also quite successful in forcing the political establishment into significant institutional reform.

#### *Israeli Arab Protest: The (Ac)Quiescent First Period, 1950–1975*

In contradistinction to the four periods mentioned above, Israeli Arab protest is divisible into only two: 1950–1975, and 1976–present. However, this is not much of a difference as the former period roughly parallels the long second period in the Jewish sector, while the latter period of far higher Israeli Arab protest mirrors the peaks of periods three and four.

3 For a full treatment of the entire phenomenon, see S. Lehman-Wilzig, *Wildfire: Grassroots Revolts in Israel in the Post-Socialist Era*, Albany 1992.

The only difference is to be found in the lack of immigration-connected protest. In actuality, the situation was one of a reverse image insofar as the Arabs were concerned. The massive *emigration* (regardless of the reasons and causes behind it) of Arab Palestinians during and after the War of 1948 — a drop from 650,000 to 160,000 — came as a profound shock to the community, removing as it did much of its natural (and national) leadership which, had it stayed, might have enabled Israel's Arabs to organize some form of protest. In the event, the loss of so many kinsmen left the community in psychological shock, unable to muster the necessary political organization for any sort of political activity — much less extra-parliamentary.<sup>4</sup> During the first 20–25 years, the annual number of Arab protests could be counted on one hand, about the same low level found in the Jewish second period relative to the latter's much greater population.

To be sure, there were two other central factors behind this low level of extra-parliamentary activity in the Arab sector. First, despite — or perhaps *because* of — the leadership flight during the war, those *hamula* leaders who remained continued to operate in traditional fashion with increased local power. This even benefited the Israeli authorities who could deal with a few leaders instead of the potentially more unruly masses. As a result, insofar as the common Arab citizen was concerned government services were dispensed by their own local Arab leaders, which was hardly a prescription for public protest in a time when intra-Arab solidarity was most needed. For their part, the *hamula* leaders were hardly interested in rocking the political boat, as this might have been to their disadvantage. Overall, then, the patron-client system which emerged on two levels (citizen/local leader and local leader/Israeli authorities), coupled with the Arabs' traditional political culture, strongly tended to dampen any overt expression of political discontent. Second, even if the will to express such discontent were there, the conditions of Israeli military government did not enable any such public protest to emerge: one could hardly expect to find significant extra-parliamentary activity in those areas where the authorities had circumscribed even the right to travel. The abolition of the military government in 1966, too, was far from sufficient for the emergence of Israeli Arab protest. Several changes had first to take place within the Arab community itself: in

political culture, advanced human resources and improved internal organization. These began to change in the mid-1960s but it took a decade for the process to come to fruition in the eruptions of 1976.

In short, during most of these early years, Israeli Arab protest was as quiet as that in the Jewish sector, although for somewhat different (and even opposite) reasons. Yet this was not merely a coincidence. It is only natural that a dominated minority take its lead from the actions of the dominant majority. As long as the latter stayed off the streets, the former had few role models. This, then, is the final explanation for the low level of protest found among Israel's Arabs in the state's first two decades, but it is also one of the central factors underlying the changes from the mid-1970s.

#### *Toward the Rise of Israeli Arab Protest: Influences and Models*

Given that a 'natural' time lag exists between developments in the Jewish sector and those in the Arab sector,<sup>5</sup> it should not be surprising to find a gap of five years between 1971 — the Jewish Black Panthers — and 1976 — Arab Land Day. Once again, however, the matter entails far more than mimicry, for in digging deeper one finds that many of the same socioeconomic and psychopolitical factors which lay behind the explosion of protest in the Jewish community could also be found among the Israeli Arabs.

First, and perhaps foremost, modernization within the Israeli Arab community led to several important developments. The socioeconomic indicators of such change are clear. To begin with, there was a huge rise in the level of education. For example, whereas in 1948–49 a mere 300 Arab school teachers were working in all of Israel, by 1975 the number had reached 6,000, and by 1987 had almost doubled once again.<sup>6</sup> Second, the Israeli Arab community underwent a widespread process of urbanization as the Israeli economy attracted many workers away from their traditional agricultural livelihood (which in many cases could not compete with the increasingly efficient Jewish agricultural sector). This process had important cultural consequences: migration from farm/village to town/city (with the consequent breakdown of *hamula* kinship ties), as well as internalization of modern values (e.g., personal freedom, social equality, political democracy) in place of

4 Much the same situation held true on the parliamentary plane. Most of the Arab Knesset members in the early years were elected on slates allied to the Zionist parties, and were far from being independent in ideology or political action. See Raanan Cohen, *Bisvakh Ha'ne'emanuyyot: hevra u-politika bamigzar ha-'Aravi*, Tel Aviv 1989, pp. 114–15 (Heb).

5 Much the same time lag existed between the 'advanced' American society and the 'laggard' Israeli society, with the latter awakening in 1971 some five to eight years after the former.

6 For the 1975 figures, see Eli Rekhess, 'Arviyei Yisrael Vehagada Ha-ma'aravit,' in Alouph Hareven (ed.), *Bain Milhama Le-hesderim: Hasikhsukh Ha'aravi-Yisraeli Le'akhar 1973*, p. 114; for those of 1987, see Cohen, p. 88.

traditional/patriarchal norms that stressed docility, hierarchy and elitism.<sup>7</sup> Highly salient in this regard was the growing number of university-educated Israeli Arabs. Especially impressive — and significant in the context of 1976 as a protest watershed — in the five years between 1970 and 1975, the number of Arabs with higher education increased by almost 150 percent.<sup>8</sup> Taken together, all these trends put increasing numbers of Israeli Arabs in direct contact with mainstream Israeli society, engendering rising economic (as well as social, political, and general cultural) expectations, and ultimately, deep feelings of relative deprivation when many of those expectations were not met.<sup>9</sup> Israel's Arab community and the country's underprivileged Jewish slum-dwellers were being driven by much the same forces in their struggle for the distant fruits of the modern industrial state.

As hinted above, such socioeconomic change had profound implications also for the authority structure within the Arab community. The large number of workers now earning their livelihood outside of the village or town meant that the *hamula* leader had far less of an economic (and thus political) hold on the population. Conversely, the increasing numbers of high school and university-educated Arabs generated a new source of political leadership which was not tied to the Israeli establishment, and had far less to lose in any direct political confrontation with the authorities. On the contrary, protest in the Arab street was a double-edged sword: it not only expressed discontent with the Israeli authorities, but indirectly also suggested lack of support for the traditional *hamula* leadership, thereby weakening the latter in the eyes of the former.<sup>10</sup>

7 Elie Rekhess, 'Arabs in a Jewish State: Images and Realities,' *Middle East Insight* 7/1 (Jan./Feb. 1990): pp. 4–5.

8 Rekhess, 'Arviyei Yisrael,' p. 114.

9 One should note another important element: the introduction of television in 1968. Television teaches others how to demonstrate and also displays to the poorer segments of society the material wealth of the better off (causing feelings of relative deprivation). In the case of the Israeli Arab community, widespread purchase of television sets lagged somewhat behind that of the Jews, constituting another factor in the time lag of the Arabs' overall protest.

10 This is not to suggest that the *hamula* leadership no longer existed. On the local level, vestiges did remain. Interestingly enough, even among the more advanced and radical elements of the new cadre one still found familial ties to the formerly dominant *hamula* elite — but this new generation of leaders was loathe to carry their *hamula* surname. Thus, a study conducted at Bir Zeit University found that among 400 members of the PLO National Council, approximately half came from such aristocratic families. In short, even if some measure of *hamula* familial-political continuity existed, it was more nominal than a reflection of a traditional political approach by the sons and grandsons of the original leaders. See Danny Rubinstein, 'Tehiya zmanit la'aristokratiya,' *Ha'aretz*, 2 November 1990, p. B3 (Heb.).

The anti-establishment duality can be seen in the results of the various Knesset elections. Whereas the percentage of Arab votes for Jewish-Zionist and 'Arab-sister' parties in the 1950s ranged from the mid- to high eighties, it dropped to 63 in 1973 and to 50 in 1977 — precisely the period when Israeli Arab protest increased dramatically. Virtually all the defecting votes during this period moved to the Israeli Communist Party (ICP) as a sign of increasing electoral protest against the 'mainstream' Zionist and/or allied Arab parties. From a low of 11 percent in 1959 and 28 percent in 1969, ICP support jumped dramatically in the 1973 and 1977 elections to 37 and 50 percent, respectively, of the Arab vote. Indeed, the greater the frustration in the Arab community, the more militant and popular the ICP became, further strengthening the radicalization of the Israeli Arabs in the street. This relationship culminated in the 1976 Land Day protests, which were organized primarily by the ICP. Overall, then, Israeli Arab extra-parliamentary activity complemented what was occurring on the parliamentary plane from the mid-1970s onward. It is worth noting that similar anti-establishment electoral behavior was gathering force in the Jewish sector (also in large part due to changing demographic trends and socioeconomic dissatisfaction) — culminating in the 1977 elections in which Labor was ousted from the government.

The increased educational and economic attainments of many Israeli Arabs led them to create an additional necessary condition for significant protest: national organization. Here, too, developments were following a path similar to that in the Jewish sector. In the early 1970s one could discern for the first time among the Jewish population several institutionalized protest movements of national scope: the 'Young Couples,' Shinui, and Gush Emunim. While not initially established for protest purposes, one finds several similar organizations in the Arab community by the mid-1970s: The National Committee of Arab High School Students (1974), the National Student Union of Arab University Graduates (1975); and most important of all, the National Committee of Heads of Arab Local Authorities (1974). These formed a matrix of national social and political activity heretofore unknown (indeed, quite impossible under the military government until 1966) among Israel's Arabs, which made concerted extra-parliamentary action possible. It need hardly be stated that the first two organizations, especially, also undercut the traditional Arab leadership, while broadening the common Arab's political outlook well beyond the narrow confines of the local/municipal polity.

It was the third body, however, which proved to be the most decisive. The



elected Arab establishment for the first time stood up against the country's predominant Jewish power structure with two consequences: it provided legitimacy for protest (and role models) for the relatively docile Arab citizens, and rendered exceedingly difficult (and ultimately impossible) any control or cooptation on the part of Israel's rulers. By setting up an umbrella non-party-oriented organization in charge of advancing the cause of Israeli Arabs on all fronts — education, water, health, housing, industry — the Arab community managed to successfully create its own national quasi-parliament.<sup>11</sup> Here, indeed, was a *sui generis* development, notwithstanding the general societal elements in Israel necessary for its occurrence.

All of the above factors — socioeconomic modernization, political decay and change, increasing national organization — can be viewed as processes endogenous to the Arab community itself, despite parallels with the larger Jewish sector. Just as Israeli Jewish protest was not in full 'control' of itself, but rather emanated from profound socioeconomic and political processes within that dominant sector, so too, similar processes in the Israeli-Arab community paved the way for mature Arab protest. No less significant, however, were several exogenous developments which further pushed Israel's Arabs into an advanced protest mode.

First, with the era of massive immigration having ended a couple of decades earlier,<sup>12</sup> Israeli society in the 1970s had begun a serious public discussion about the 'demographic problem.' With the birth rate among Israel's Arabs far higher than that found among Israel's Jews (both were dropping, but the gap remained very wide), the latter began to extrapolate into the twenty-first century, with much talk of when the two communities might reach demographic parity. To be sure, objectively this was no short-term problem for the Jewish state, but it did serve to boost the morale of the Arab sector and provide it with the promise of turning the clock back to before 1948 insofar as population numbers were concerned. Psychologically, then, such talk served to embolden Israel's Arab minority vis-à-vis the Jewish majority.

11 Eli Rekhess, 'Arviyei Yisrael — hitpatkhut ba'mishor ha-peilut ha-politit,' in Alouph Hareven (ed.) *Ehad mi'kol shisha Yisraelim*, Jerusalem 1981, p. 146 (Heb.).

12 There was a relatively large increase in Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, but still far from the huge dimensions (in absolute terms, and certainly in proportional terms) found immediately after the founding of the state. No-one at the time foresaw the collapse of the USSR, and the influx of Russian Jews to Israel that followed.

This was especially true if the West Bank and Gaza Palestinian community was to be taken into account. Here, too, the situation was somewhat paradoxical, for it these territories were to be annexed, then the demographic problem would be even more acute and much more short-term. This possibility could have hardly been missed by Israel's Arabs as it was constantly raised by Israel's Left as an argument against any form of annexation. Israel's Arabs, of course, were completely against any type of annexation or continued conquest, but as long as the Israeli government maintained such a policy it would only make Israel's Arabs feel numerically stronger. In that sense, then, continued administration of the occupied territories doubly reinforced their penchant for protesting: politically against the policy itself, and psychologically with the feeling of greater Palestinian/Arab solidarity and potential power on both sides of the Green Line.

Adding to this sense of greater self-confidence was the increasingly obvious fact that from the late 1960s onwards the Jewish majority was itself split on the issue of the occupied territories. While most of the Israeli Arab protests were not over the issue of the territories (at least until the outbreak of the Intifada in the late 1980s),<sup>13</sup> the shattering of the heretofore monolithic national security front within Israel proper could not but further embolden Israel's Arabs to more forcefully express their own needs and desires. This in a sense was somewhat similar to the obvious cracks in the ruling Mapai party's predominance as evidenced in the Lavon Affair (1960), Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's resignation (1963), and the emergence of Rafi (1965) as a competing party — political phenomena which psychologically paved the way for the eruption of protest in the Jewish sector commencing in 1971 as described above. Israeli demoralization in the wake of the October War of 1973 (coupled with the PLO's rising status in the post-1973 world) only added to Israeli Arab pride and self-confidence.<sup>14</sup>

The exogenous factors influencing Israeli Arab protest did not stop at the border. While brief mention has already been made of the Israeli government's policy vis-à-vis the occupied territories as a stimulant of such protest, these territories constituted an even more influential factor as a role model. The

13 To be sure, there were occasional protests related to the Palestinian issue during the early 1980s. For a brief survey, see Eli Rekhess, 'Ha'kfar ha'Aravi be-Yisrael — Moked politit-le'umi mithadesh,' *Skiror*, Tel Aviv 1985, p. 16 (Heb.).

14 Rekhess, 'Arviyei Yisrael,' p. 143.

outbreak of sociopolitical turmoil and collective violence in the West Bank and Gaza in late 1975 and early 1976 was undoubtedly a powerful catalyst pushing Israel's Arabs into the Land Day protest on 30 March 1976. This is not to suggest that the specific subject was the same, for the former came in the wake of a UN debate on the future of the occupied territories, while the latter emerged out of the Israeli policy of land expropriation. The salient aspect here, however, was the model which the Palestinians constituted for the Israeli Arabs.

Once again, this form of imitation is an altogether natural process, with an obvious parallel of sorts in the Jewish sector. As noted earlier, it was hardly coincidental that the name selected by the 'boys' from Musrara was 'Black Panthers,' a direct link with events a few years earlier in the USA. It would probably be no exaggeration to suggest that the post-1973 war protest demonstrations in Israel also derived cognitive sustenance from the American anti-war movements in the previous decade. Israel's Arab community, for obvious reasons, focused its attention not on the West but on the Middle East, and here — extremely close to home — their brethren were showing the way just a few kilometers over the increasingly blurred border.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the role models were not all distant. With the increase in the number of Palestinians working in Israel proper, the social interaction between Israel's Arabs and their Palestinian counterparts took on a real-life, day-to-day character. Conversely, the virtual elimination of restrictions for Israeli Arabs on travel within the occupied territories meant that they were able to see their compatriots' situation firsthand, as well as view them in extra-parliamentary action. The ensuing pressure to act similarly — even if only self-imposed — was considerable: how could the Israeli Arabs not indulge in legal and culturally acceptable modes of direct political action, when their suffering brethren were doing so without legal sanction?

The type of protest, the issues protested against, the level of intensity, and other internal characteristics, were in most cases carefully chosen by the participants themselves for maximum effect (or minimal self-damage). In short, Israeli Arab protest was by no means 'original,' but it equally was not a slave to the directives of others.

15 Without meaning to push this point too far, one could also note that the food riots in Egypt occurred less than two years before the Israeli Arab/Palestinian protests in 1976. Extra-parliamentary activity among the Arab masses was certainly in the air during the mid-1970s.

### Characteristics of Israeli-Arab Protest

What are the specific characteristics of Israeli Arab protest, i.e., the degree of participation and the internal aspects of the events themselves? Here, too, one finds a few significant differences from protest in the Jewish sector, but not so dissimilar as to render it intrinsically distinct from its Israeli Jewish counterpart.

The most basic question of level of participation is a difficult one methodologically. In a 1981 poll among the Jewish sector, protest participation was found to be 21.5 percent — a world record.<sup>16</sup> A 1988 poll of Israeli Arabs asked two questions: about participation in the Land Day events (39.6 percent), and in any demonstrations over the previous two years over the treatment of Arabs in Israel (11.6 percent).<sup>17</sup> The former is far too high, the latter somewhat low. An educated guess would place the Arabs' actual rate of participation quite close to the Jewish one — between 20–25 percent.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the internal aspects of Arab protest, the picture is complex. Taken as a whole over the entire period,<sup>19</sup> the most notable difference between protest in these two communities involves the element of intensity. Whereas 14 percent of all Jewish cases of protest involved some measure of violence (against property, and/or persons), Israeli Arab protests were violent 26 percent of the time. Indeed, the latter's tendency toward violent protest has increased over time, encompassing 30 percent of all such events during the late 1970s and 1980s.

Nor was this merely a matter of intensity. A more inclusive 'magnitude' index comprising duration, number of participants, as well as intensity, gave an average score of 6.39 to Israeli Arab protest events as compared to 5.60 for the Israeli Jewish events (on a scale of 1 to 13). Such a difference of magnitude

16 Lehman-Wilzig, *Stiff-Necked People*, p. 59.

17 See Sammy Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, Vol. 1: *Conflicting and Shared Attitudes in a Divided Society*, Boulder 1989, p. 128, table 13.4.

18 Ibid. The 39.6 percent did not take into account 'Arabs for whom participation was irrelevant, i.e., unemployed, retired, housewives, the sick, etc.' The first three categories alone probably made up over half the Arab adult population, so that their inclusion (as in the Jewish poll) would have brought the response rate down to about 20 percent. On the other hand, the 11.6 percent included only those protesting on the issue of mistreatment. Several other issues were the focus of Israeli Arab protest as well, so that here the figure easily approached the 20 percent mark once again.

19 The following data cover the pre-Intifada period 1949–1986. For a full explanation of the methodology and definitions regarding the categories and scoring, see Lehman-Wilzig, *Stiff-Necked People*, chs 2 and 4.

became more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s, with a gap of a full point (6.49 compared to 5.51) in the latter decade. Even more noteworthy was the 'size' component. Despite their far smaller population base, 21 percent and 7 percent of all Israeli Arab protests were 'large' (1,000–10,000 participants) and 'huge' (10,000 + respectively) compared to 12 and 3 percent respectively, in the Jewish protests of similar size.<sup>20</sup>

How can this magnitude and size be explained? To begin with, there is little doubt that the pain felt by the Arabs regarding many of the objects of protest was greater than that of the Jews. The problems of land expropriation (or even development zoning), as well as severe lack of adequate social services were two areas where the Israeli Arab community suffered from far greater governmental action (in the former) or lack of it (in the latter) than the Jewish community.<sup>21</sup> In addition, one must also note the circular problem inherent in the authorities' handling of Arab protest: given the mutual distrust as well as Jewish fear that the Arabs might try to undermine social peace, the police or Border Guard (after 1966 the army was very rarely involved in dealing with Israeli Arab protest) tended to react in more forceful fashion to Arab extra-parliamentary activity than it did to similar action among Jews. Such proportionately more 'forceful' responses in turn occasionally engendered more intense protest in reaction to this force (beyond the intensity of the protested issue itself).

Second, being both geographically and ethnically on the periphery of Israeli society, Arab protest must resort to a higher level of intensity (or size, and/or duration) in order to catch the attention of the political authorities through the Hebrew mass media (themselves controlled exclusively by Jews).<sup>22</sup> One of the ways in which Israel's Arabs widened extra-parliamentary participation without the threat of forceful police reprisal was to increase the use of the political strike as a protest weapon. Here, too, in the category of 'type' of

20 In almost all cases, the protests which were 'mixed,' i.e., organized and attended by Arabs and Jews together, showed scores or percentiles midway between the two other categories, thereby reinforcing the trustworthiness of the results.

21 For instance, the Israel government's allotment to Jewish cities as compared to the Arab municipalities in the first three decades was five to fifty times greater. On this point, see Majid Al-Haj and Henry Rosenfeld, *Arab Local Government in Israel*, Boulder 1990, pp. 126–154.

22 Among the major Hebrew-language newspapers, only *Ha'aretz* tended to consistently present Israeli Arab grievances in a neutral and even sympathetic light, and the Arab affairs adviser to the prime minister was most often someone who was sympathetic to their complaints. Overall, though, Israel's Arabs were still on the political and journalistic periphery.

protest, one can discern some interesting differences. Whereas Israeli Jewish protests tended to be overwhelmingly 'outdoor demonstrations' (71 percent) and only marginally 'political strikes' (11 percent), the Israeli Arabs use of the latter is significantly higher (25 percent) and of the former somewhat lower (58 percent).<sup>23</sup> Given the fact that many industrial and service sectors of the Israeli economy are dependent on those workers, general Israeli Arab strikes had a larger impact on Israeli society than demonstrations in outlying areas. What such strikes lost in 'intensity', they more than made up in the number of participants and overall effect.

Third, and perhaps most significant of all, was the gradual evolution from 1976 onwards of the annual Land Day events from localized riotous paroxysms of anger to less violent but even more widespread organized mass demonstrations of ethnonational pride coupled with frustration. As noted above, the initial Land Day explosion in 1976, in which six Arab Israelis were killed and 70 injured, resulted from a specific grievance — land expropriation — but Israeli Arabs began to exploit the annual event for a wider purpose, turning it into their singular 'national remembrance day' with a general ambience.<sup>24</sup> In other words, by the mid-1980s virtually the entire Israeli Arab community was celebrating the day,<sup>25</sup> with the act of remembrance itself a sign both of increasing psychological independence and growing dissatisfaction with the Israeli authorities' discriminatory socioeconomic policies. The 'nationalization' and 'standardization' of Land Day was perhaps the clearest evidence that not all Israeli Arab protest was derivative; internal will, in this case, patently won over the Israeli authorities' wish to prevent this protest expression from becoming a regular affair.

23 The Jewish sector used 'indoor protest assemblies' 4 percent of the time and 'other' forms 14 percent altogether, while the Arabs' figures were 7 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

24 Attallah Mansour, 'Yom ha-adama' ke-hag le'umi, *Ha'aretz*, 30 March 1986, p. 11 (Heb.). See also his article 'Yom ha-adama be-pa'am ha-shminit,' *Ha'aretz*, 30 March 1984, p. 17 (Heb.), where for the first time the National Council of Heads of the Arab Municipalities wholeheartedly accepted the declaration of nationwide Land Day events. Indeed, as Mansour notes, by 1984 even the Israeli government had resigned itself to the fact that Land Day had become a regular event for Israel's Arabs.

25 But not always united as one camp. For instance, in 1982 the Progressive List party called for a general strike while the larger Communist Party wished to continue the tradition of local processions. On this, see Elie Rekhess, 'Asor le-yom ha-adama': mabat le-ahor, *Ha'aretz*, 26 March 1986, p. 7 (Heb.).



The last important difference of note between these two sectors is the question of 'protest issue,' i.e., what sort of problems do Israel's Jews and Arabs demonstrate about? Interestingly enough, of the four central issues surveyed, their order of frequency turned out to be the same, but the percentage differences within each were rather large. The issue of most frequent protest was 'social' (discrimination, education, services, land), accounting for 32 percent of all extra-parliamentary events among Israel's Jews, compared to 47 percent among the Arabs. Second in rank came political issues (war and peace, parties, personalities), and once again the Jewish figures were far lower than the Arab (29 percent to 44 percent). In third place for both were economic issues (taxation, inflation, unemployment), but the percentages were reversed — 27 percent to only 9 percent, respectively. Finally, in last place were religious issues; here, too, the Jewish sector led the Arab one by a wide margin of 16 percent to less than 1 percent.

The rank order of social-issue protest ahead of political-issue protest may come as a surprise. However, it should first be understood that such a categorization is neither dependent on who stands behind each protest (whether political party or ad hoc group), nor what its protest intent may be (political or utilitarian). This rubric relates only to the problem which the protest wishes to call to public attention. Second, the ranking of these two issues held constant even for the 1970s–80s, albeit with an increasing closing of the gap between them. Overall, then, land expropriation and inadequate government service for the Arab community within Israel proper continued to be as salient as the issues of a Palestinian homeland and peace negotiations outside of the country's official borders, if not slightly more.

This conclusion sheds some additional light on the question of Israelization vs. Palestinization, which is addressed by other papers in this issue. The data, precisely because they lend themselves to quantification and what the Israeli Arabs themselves were doing, clearly show that the process of Palestinization had *not* yet become the dominant trend in the Israeli Arab community.

Which brings up the attitudinal question. Up to now we have focused on the similarities and differences in Jewish and Arab protest in practice. But what was their attitude regarding protest as a political weapon? Here, too, the similarities are striking. In the 1981 poll, 76 percent of Jews found protest (without reference to any specific group) to be legitimate.<sup>26</sup> The 1988 poll of Israeli Arabs

found 75.5 percent to be in favor of 'licensed demonstrations to improve the situation of the Arabs in Israel.'<sup>27</sup>

Even more critical from the perspective of national loyalty and potential civil war was the fact that a mere 7 percent and 7.5 percent of the Arabs polled (vs. 2 percent and 1.4 percent among the Jewish respondents) approved of 'unlicensed demonstrations,' 'resistance with force' as means to improve the Israeli Arabs' lot.<sup>28</sup> The 7 percent Arab figure legitimating resistance by force was actually a steep *decline* from the 18 percent registered in a 1976 poll.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, not only was there little evidence of increasing radicalization of the Arabs' instrumental protest, but if anything, the attitudinal divide between the two sectors regarding extra-parliamentarism has almost closed all the way — and this despite (perhaps because of?) growing Arab political self-confidence. No better evidence is needed for the argument that Israel's Arabs and Jews have come to a meeting of minds regarding the accepted *modus operandi* for change in their shared democratic state.

#### *Alternative Action: The Movement for Grassroots Self-Help*

As indicated in our earlier survey of Israeli Jewish protest, the evolution of extra-parliamentary activity underwent a sea change in the 1980s for reasons which would lead us well beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>30</sup> Suffice it to say that as a result of rising higher education, an ever-growing middle class and the palpable inability of the official system to reform itself, the Israeli public began to take matters into its own hands in the 1980s. With the obvious failure of most protest campaigns to force the establishment into systemic change,<sup>31</sup> a number of similar socioeconomic phenomena began to appear: black economy, gray education, black medicine, pirate cable television. This was the creation by the

27 Smooha, *Arabs and Jews*, p. 126, table 13.2. A much smaller percentage of Jews (44 percent) answered in the affirmative to what for them was a cross-ethnic question, but that was another matter altogether.

28 Ibid., p. 127, table 13.3.

29 Ibid., p. xvi.

30 For a full discussion and analysis of the phenomena mentioned here, see Lehman-Wilzig, *Wildfire*. The factors behind this development are outlined in ch. 2, while the specific 'revolts' are described in chapters 4–10.

31 See Lehman-Wilzig, 'Me-ha'ah tziburit be-Yisrael: Ha'im hi matzliha?' *Medina, memshal, ve-yahasim bein-le'umiyim* 31 (Summer-Autumn 1989), pp. 111–25 (Heb.). However, not everyone agrees with my conclusion. See especially Gadi Wolfsfeld, *The Politics of Provocation: Participation and Protest in Israel*, Albany, 1988, chapter 7.



Israeli public of service systems to provide what the official ones did not render.

In light of all the parallelisms between Jewish and Arab extra-parliamentarism, it should come as no surprise to find that by the mid-1980s the same development could be discerned in the Arab sector as well. The lead came from the political parties and, even more strikingly, was found among precisely the same type of parties in both the Jewish and Arab communities.

In 1984, a new fundamentalist religious and ethnic party, Shas, appeared on the Jewish Israeli national scene with striking electoral success. By 1988, it had become the country's third largest party. Even more remarkable was the fact that approximately half of its support came from non-religious neighborhoods. What accounted specifically for the latter, and its great success in general? A combination of political activity and social activism through its affiliate, *El-Ha'mayyan*, which devoted much effort to social rehabilitation within underprivileged neighborhoods, not necessarily ultra-orthodox. It ran day-care programs and after-school enrichment programs without religious coercion (although certainly with an ultimate religious objective in mind). Shas was thus virtually the only Jewish political party to be active in a concrete, grassroots, and daily basis trying to improve the lives of its constituents and potential followers.

At almost the same time, an identical political party emerged on the Israeli Arab scene, the Islamic Movement, headed by Sheikh Abdallah Darwish.<sup>32</sup> The following description of its work succinctly summed up the parallelism:

Darwish's greatest success was to mobilize Israel's Muslims to carry out Islamic-oriented work in their own neighborhoods. Volunteers built village roads, put up bus stop shelters with separate waiting spaces for men and women, and opened kindergartens, libraries, and clinics. The Islamic Movement provided practical solutions to pressing hardships. Its community work filled a vacuum created by years of government neglect. While secular

32 It is of interest to note the similarity in the factors underlying the emergence of Shas and the Islamic Movement. The former was a breakaway party, standing against two different but related phenomena: the dominance of Agudath Yisrael, an ultra-orthodox party which was led almost exclusively by Jews of Ashkenazi extraction, who were shortchanging the religious institutions of the Jews from the Arab Muslim countries; and the increasing secularization of these Jews who had been almost universally religious. In like manner, the Islamic Movement emerged as a reaction to two forces: first, the dominance of the Israel Communist Party which was too busy with 'national' issues such as peace negotiations to address local deficiencies and second, the westernization and secularization of the Israeli Arab population as already noted. Seen in this light, it was not altogether surprising that both Shas and the Islamic Movement took the socially activist route they did.

activists led campaigns of verbal protest, Darwish showed that people could do things for themselves rather than clamor for the authorities to help...a prescription for political success in the February 1989 municipal elections, when the Islamic Movement made substantial gains.<sup>33</sup>

This is not to suggest that Israeli Arabs abandoned traditional forms of extra-parliamentary protest. On the contrary, just as there was no letup among Jews in the frequency of their vocal street demonstrations, so, too, Arabs nowhere abandoned protest and political strike action. Rather, the new self-help approach was an important complement to the traditional forms of protest. However, despite the advances and striking achievements of the Islamic Movement in the Israeli Arab townships, for the foreseeable future their self-help approach will remain of secondary importance due to the massive needs of the Arab community and the relative paucity of personal economic resources which the Arabs can bring to bear, compared to their Jewish counterparts (personally or organizationally).

Moreover, as the post-Intifada events within the Israeli Arab sector have made clear, there remained several critical issues of concern to Israel's Arabs which were not amenable to 'political circumvention' of the self-help variety (notwithstanding the large amounts of food and clothing which Israel's Arabs sent to the Palestinians in the occupied territories).<sup>34</sup> Several 'successful'<sup>35</sup> national strikes, plus other large-scale demonstrations during the years 1988-1990 in support of their Palestinian brethren, brought home to Israeli Arabs and Jews alike that the former have not discarded the protest weapon as a legitimate tool of political expression. On the other hand, the solidarity of Israel's Arab community with the state of Israel in the face of Iraq's Saddam Husayn and his missiles was testimony not only to the self-imposed limits of

33 Rekhess, 'Arabs in a Jewish State,' p. 7.

34 The irony here is that whereas in 1976 the Palestinians 'taught' Israel's Arabs how to launch major protests, in 1987 it was the Palestinians who learned from the Israeli Arabs, i.e., the Islamic Movement, that when all else fails, the self-help route may provide significant relief, if not salvation. This was hardly surprising given the ideological affinity between the Islamic Movement and its fellow, albeit predominantly violent, movement in the territories, Hamas.

35 The word 'success' is here defined as a protest which evinced widespread support by Israel's Arabs, and not by any substantive change in the Israeli government's policy. For a description of the six nationwide general strikes during this period, see As'ad Ganem and Sarah Osatzki-Lazar, 'Kav yarak, kavim adum'im, 'Arviyei Yisrael nokhakh ha-intifada,' Givat Haviva 1990, p. 9 (Heb.).

protest by Israeli Arabs, but also to their continuing (if not absolute) identification with the state.<sup>36</sup>

### *Conclusion: In the Image of the Master*

This paper's central thesis was that in most respects the evolution and character of Israeli Arab protest was markedly similar to that among Israel's Jews regarding chronology, factors underlying increasing protest, level of participation, the rank order of issues protested, attitudes regarding the legitimacy of protest, and the more recent circumvention of the official system through alternative self-help. The terminology, though, is all important: these are 'similar' characteristics and elements, not exact replicas due to any conscious Arab mimicry or Jewish manipulation.

It remains to ask whether all this bodes well for Israeli society in general and its Arab community in particular. The answer is that in the short term probably yes, in the longer term most likely no, but overall 'it depends.'

On the one hand, the protest parallelisms were not due to the superficial copying of the behavior of the dominant majority by a dominated minority. Rather, it was a result of the minority's internalization of the country's underlying political value system. Put simply, growing Israeli Arab protest stemmed from that community's acceptance of, and socialization into, the norms of Israeli democracy. One could easily envision another minority group within a fledgling democracy resorting to far less democratic means in expressing its displeasure or disapproval of governmental policy (e.g., Sri Lanka, India, Philippines, Lebanon). That this did not happen to any significant extent (even during the highly charged Intifada years), was a monument to the successful penetration of Israel's democratic culture into its Arab population. Thus, the worst that can be expected in the short term is

heightened protest on the part of the Arab community, most probably no higher than the proportional level found among Israel's Jewish inhabitants.

On the other hand, the norms of democracy were not merely those of freedom of expression and assembly. No less important were such values as equality before the law in public policy output. The very large disparities between the Jewish and Arab sectors regarding government services and resource transfer was the central cause of protest. Should such a large differential continue to exist, then one can expect Israel's Arabs over the long term to begin turning away from the whole democratic package — free vocal expression and economic justice taken altogether — in favor of more 'normal' underdog political activity — violence, irredentism, revolution — as found abroad.

In the final analysis, then the future course of Israeli Arab protest depends not on these protesters but rather on their 'master.' Having successfully and constructively taught the Arab minority how to act in a responsible political fashion (in the tradition of the 'loyal opposition,') it is up to the Israeli Jewish majority to discharge its duty regarding the other side of the democratic coin: socioeconomic equality. In so doing it would not only be teaching the advanced lesson that the whole democratic value system is worthy of being upheld, but it would also negate the need for much of the Israeli Arab protest currently in evidence. Israeli society has managed to effectively bridge the socioeconomic gap between the country's two major *Jewish* ethnic groups; it would do well to apply its abilities in this regard as much as possible to the Arab minority as well. That is the sort of *extra* parliamentary effort which would constitute the last and best lesson for Israel's Arabs in particular and the nation's evolving democracy in general.<sup>37</sup>

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36 This was evidenced in several ways. First, as announced by David Magen, the minister responsible for Arab affairs, despite the Gulf War there was no increase in Israeli-Arab violence during or after the war; see David Rudge, 'No rise in Israeli Arab violent acts Magen says,' *Jerusalem Post*, 27 March 1991, p. 10. Second, there were also few reported cases of Israeli Arabs cheering the incoming missiles during the war as the Palestinians in the territories had done. Third, the Land Day demonstrations a month after the end of the Gulf War were the least violent and most sparsely attended since 1976, in part due to the Islamic Movement's boycotting them because men were not separated from women. See Attalah Mansour and Yehudit Greenblatt, 'Yom ha-adama avar bli alimut.' 'lo zakhur 30 be-mars kol kach shaket,' *amar nitzav Hefetz*, *Ha'aretz*, 31 March 1991, p. A2.

37 In late August 1991, the Israeli government announced a historic decision, precisely along these lines: within four years the amount of money per capita granted to Arab municipalities would be brought up to the Jewish municipality's standard. Should this indeed be carried out, it would constitute a revolution in terms of equal treatment of the Israeli-Arab community. Significantly, although unsurprisingly, the government's decision was made in the face of a general strike by the head of Arab municipalities. See Yerakh Tal, 'Sarei ha-memshala ishru be-telefon et ha-hesder ha-mashveh bain taktzivai ha-migzar ha'Aravi ve-hayehudi,' *Ha'aretz*, 27 August 1991, p. A5.