Contents

Editorial 2

Theme

Israel and its war in Lebanon 4
includes

Pax Hebraica 4
Emmanuel Farjoun

The Lebanese communities and their little wars 13
Magida Salman

Letter from the West Bank 21
'Adil Samara

Review of two books on the war 25

★ Class divisions in Israeli society 29
Emmanuel Farjoun

★ The Oriental support for Begin – a critique of Farjoun 40
Avishai Ehrlich

Observations in Gaza 47
S. Ur

The rise of Islam: What did happen to women? 49
Azar Tabari

Discussion forum

State capitalism in Egypt – a critique of Patrick Clawson 73
Clive Bradley

Reply to Israel Shahak 100
Roberto Sussman

Book reviews 115
Editorial

The present issue of Khamsin goes to the press almost exactly one year after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon. The events of the war – the invasion, the siege of Beirut, the massacre of Sabra and Chatila – have received wide coverage in the press and in a number of books. The central theme of the present issue is not a description of these events themselves, but their broader context.

In his article Pax Hebraica, E. Farjoun shows that the Israeli intervention in Lebanon was but a first step towards implementing a far-reaching plan. This plan – openly discussed in Israel, where it is referred to as the ‘Big Thing’ – aims to re-draw the map of the Arab East and place it under the hegemony of a new imperial Israel. Part of this plan, associated particularly with the name of Ariel Sharon, is to ‘solve’ the Palestinian problem by establishing a puppet state on the East Bank of Jordan, and compelling hundreds of thousands of Palestinians presently living in Lebanon and the West Bank to move into that state. Only against this larger background can Israel’s genocidal conduct of the war be properly understood. Farjoun’s article, written just before the Sabra-Chatila massacre, also helps to explain how that massacre fits in with broader Israeli designs. This analysis lends added credence to the growing body of evidence that when Sharon and his generals invited the Phalange into Sabra and Chatila, they were fully aware of the probable consequences. (The Kahan Commission dismissed this possibility, without giving it proper consideration.)

Recent events in Lebanon did not happen in a vacuum; the Lebanese body politic was in an advanced state of disintegration long before the Israeli invasion. As the civil war dragged on, any initial political distinction between right and left tended to get drowned in the blood of sectarian killings. Magida Salman’s article describes the political psychology of the warring sects, their continuing feuds and their new illusions.

In this section we also print a letter from a reader in the West Bank, ‘Adil Samara, who comments from an independent leftist viewpoint on the war and the dilemma which its consequences has posed to the PLO.

Future developments in the Middle East will depend crucially on the internal political evolution of Israel. In this connection it is important to understand the nature of the support which the Begin government has won among Israel’s Oriental Jewish working class. E. Farjoun’s article Class divisions in Israeli society as well as A. Ehrlich’s critique of
that article constitute a debate on this important topic. Although the
two writers differ on several points, they are at one in rejecting the wide-
spread view that the mass support for Begin is motivated purely, or even
predominantly, by ideology. Rather, this support has important
material causes, which must be sought in the specific socio-economic
structure of Israeli society.

The first section of the present issue ends with an eye-witness report
on the everyday realities in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip.

Apart from articles on Israel and its war in Lebanon, this issue contains
an article by Azar Tabari, in which she subjects to critical examination
the widespread view that the rise of Islam improved the lot of women
compared to their situation in pre-Islamic Arabia.

The Discussion Forum in this issue contains two contributions by our
readers. Clive Bradley’s contribution criticises certain aspects of P.
Clawson’s analysis of the development of capitalism in Egypt (Khamsin
9). Roberto Sussman’s reply to I. Shahak’s essay on the Jewish religion
(Khamsin 8 and 9) criticises Shahak’s ‘moralistic’ attitude and disputes
his view of Jewish history in the Middle Ages. Shahak’s controversial
essay has attracted much comment, and the debate around it will no
doubt continue.
Pax Hebraica

Emmanuel Farjoun

One thing is utterly clear and obvious about Israel’s war in Lebanon. Namely, that the level of violence and destruction inflicted upon the population in general and the Palestinians in particular has been much higher than needed in order to occupy Lebanon south of Beirut and to destroy the military power of the PLO, driving its armed forces out of the country. With all their deep-seated, though eroding, pro-Israeli bias the Western media have captured this elementary truth. The highlights of Israel’s violence were:

1 Utter destruction of whole Palestinian communities in Lebanon. This was done not only during the fighting itself, by massive bombardment, but also by systematic house-to-house destruction of the largest refugee camps in Tyre and Sidon (Al-Rashidiyya and ‘Ain Hilwa) and Beirut – using bulldozers, dynamite etc.

2 Systematic elimination (by killing, expulsion or detention in concentration camps) of all male Palestinian population between the ages of 14-65. According to well-corroborated reports, no Palestinian males of these ages are to be found in the area controlled by Israel.

3 Deliberate destruction of Lebanese towns, especially along the coast, but also elsewhere.

4 Attempts to expel as many Palestinian families as possible out of Lebanon. An Israeli reserve colonel, Dov Yirmiah, resigned his post in the army after he had been specifically instructed by the government not to extend any help to the Palestinian children and women who were wandering around the destroyed communities. In fact, on 18 June, he was told by a cabinet minister to ‘push the Palestinians eastwards’. He was not to allow them to set up tents as shelter against the intense heat. He was not even allowed to let anyone else take care of these refugees.¹ The Israeli hope was that this combination of starvation, lack of shelter, and mass arrest of the male population would eventually force hundreds of thousands of Palestinians out of Lebanon into Syrian-held territories.

5 Brutal bombardment of Beirut, using anti-personnel weapons such as cluster bombs and phosphorous shells, under the pretext of flushing
out the PLO. The two main Palestinian neighbourhoods in Beirut were destroyed by combined attacks from air, sea and ground – driving all the population to the heart of Beirut, where they were subjected to further anti-civilian showers of bombs. The siege of Beirut lasted more than nine weeks and deprived the population of food, water, gas and electricity. This, as well as the destruction of hospitals and the deliberate bombing raids against blocks with heavy Palestinian refugee population, has been amply documented and widely reported.

Genocide

In the light of all this, we see that the war in Lebanon has been much more than a war of occupation against the Palestinian forces and their Lebanese allies. In plain language it amounts to nothing less than a policy of genocide against the Palestinian people in Lebanon. Genocide in the literal sense of the word, namely the physical destruction of as many Palestinians as possible and the expulsion, scattering and detention in concentration camps of the rest. Israeli soldiers were under specific orders to kill as many ‘PLO members’ as possible. But, for better or worse, the PLO in Lebanon was a sort of quasi-state, with its own extensive bureaucracy and services – schools, clinics, hospitals etc. Therefore virtually every Palestinian in Lebanon was associated with it from birth to death in one way or another. The call for the destruction, annihilation and killing of the PLO infrastructure was simply a euphemism for a policy of utter destruction of the 500,000 strong Palestinian community in Lebanon as a national entity, and their elimination as individuals.

Dov Yirmiah, who had resigned his post as head of an Israel army unit dealing with the civilian population, wrote:

‘Whoever put the unit together did not assign to it the right people. Most of them knew no Arabic and some hated Arabs to such an extent that it obstructed the activity of the unit . . . The Red Cross aid was not accepted and I know of other attempts to help which were rejected – among them aid from Jewish and Israeli organisations. Is it not hypocrisy and cruelty to mention in this context that we distributed 3000 blankets? The story of the tens of thousands of Palestinian children, women and elderly refugees will be told some time in the future and we will all have to pay the heavy human and moral cost. I shall mention only three things . . .

‘1 When Minister Meridor [assigned to the matter by the government] was asked about the fate of the Palestinians on 18.6.82 he replied, “Push them eastwards”.
‘2 The only policy of our commanders towards them was strict prohibition to deal with them in the framework of the unit. “Let UNRWA take care of them”.'
'3 They were not allowed to set up tents plenty of which were in UNRWA's hands. This was an inhuman and cruel act and it teaches us about the "humanity" boasted of by [the present commander] Maimon.'

Notice that Col. Yirmiyah refers only to children, women and elderly Palestinian refugees. The menfolk were nowhere to be seen. They had 'vanished' into the concentration camps and eastward to Syria.

Once this genocidal dimension is recognised as being the only one in which one can comprehend Israel's conduct in the war, the question naturally arises: Why did Israel go to such extremes of destruction, alienating the whole Middle East, including its newly-found ally Egypt, as well as both European and American public opinion? After all, the policy of destruction of the Palestinians in Lebanon will not itself bring any closer the resolution of the Palestinian problem; neither for the two million Palestinians who live under direct Israeli control in Palestine, nor for the many hundreds of thousands of Palestinian diaspora scattered around the Middle East.

The 'Big Thing'

To answer this question one must comprehend both the short-term and long-term policies of the present government—plans which are direct continuations of the former Labour government's policy of colonisation of the territories occupied in June 1967.

The short-term policies are well known: destroy the PLO, thus depriving the Palestinians of national cohesiveness and unity. This, Israel hopes, will make a de facto, and later formal, annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip much easier.

Israeli political analysts had long predicted the war with many of its appalling dimensions precisely on these grounds. The administrator of the occupied territories, M. Milson, had said at the beginning of 1982 that 'we are entering into the most crucial stage of the war with the Palestinians since 1948', thereby correctly setting the framework of the present war. Thus in the immediate sense the war in Lebanon was a war over the eventual possession of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel hopes to set up there a collaborationist structure around the Village League—an Israeli-sponsored organisation which however weak at the present is already entrusted with the conduct of many aspects of civilian day-to-day life such as licences, road building, emigration, schooling etc. In addition, for the first time in Zionist history Palestinian armed militias were formed to enforce the quislings' rule. These are still no more than armed gangs who act as bodyguards and fascist thugs. But given time Israel will try to develop them into the core of a Palestinian repressive regime—to repress and help extinguish any opposition to the policy of rapid colonisation and land-grabbing.
This West-Bank dimension of the war is extremely important and widely recognised. It explains the attempts to destroy the PLO as a viable organisation. But it does not explain directly the genocidal aspect of the war. This aspect is derived from the wider context, present and future, of the war in Lebanon. Because, with all its immediate and far-reaching implications, the war is but one link in a whole strategic plan. This plan is the brainchild of Defence Minister A. Sharon and is referred to in Israeli parlance as the 'Big Thing'. It revives an old ambition for a drive to the north-east, which was on the cards already in the days of the first Israeli prime minister, D. Ben-Gurion. 3

The Lebanon war had its roots in the traumatic experience of the 1973 war with Syria and Egypt. No one in Israel has forgotten the spectre of the two Arab armies attempting to recover their national lands taken in 1967. Of course, the Egyptian army, even in a combined attack with Syrian forces, represented no real danger to the State of Israel as such. The trauma was caused by the fact that there could not be a knock-out Israeli victory; that despite huge effort during three weeks the Israelis could not roll back the Egyptian soldiers who were using modern weaponry; that despite many thousands of losses on both sides there was no decisive Israeli victory. The 3000 Israeli soldiers who lost their lives had to be taken into account. In 1973 the mighty Israeli army had lost its credibility as an invincible force in the eyes of the Arab armies; and this state of affairs could not be tolerated for too long.

In the eyes of most Israeli politicians, the whole of Sinai was much too high a price to be paid for a peace with Egypt. The Israeli army had the awkward feeling that the loss of Sinai was the direct result of its inability in 1973 to achieve a rapid victory and the need to get American supplies in the midst of the war – supplies which emphasised Israel’s day-to-day dependence on the United States.

Therefore Israel undertook a complete renovation of its armed forces from A to Z. New aeroplanes, tanks and troop carriers and huge stores of supplies and ammunition were built, produced and bought with generous American help. The next war was to be fought without an American airlift of supplies – and with minimal Israeli casualties. Ever since 1973 Israel had been looking desperately for a large-scale war to test its renewed war machine and to re-establish its reputation as a local military superpower.

When Begin came to power he drew far-reaching lessons from the 1973 fiasco. His conclusions were radical and clear. Israel could no longer fight a major war on two distant fronts, north and south, and still achieve a decisive victory at acceptable costs in terms of loss of life and political dependence on the United States. One should not forget that the 1973 fiasco had also brought in its wake a sharp increase in the emigration of Israelis, with total net ‘losses’ from the immigration/emigration balance of about 40,000 Israelis according to official statistics: a very large number indeed by Israeli standards. Unable to fight wars successfully on two fronts, Begin decided that Israel’s future
strategy would be to concentrate military action on one front—the north-eastern. In order to achieve this, he agreed to give up Sinai to the last inch of territory—in exchange for peace with Egypt. Israel’s relations with the Arab world, including Egypt, with the Palestinians both in Palestine and outside, as well as with the United States would be determined and decided by the military development on this one front.

The essential difference between the new north-eastern front, which includes Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and the old Egyptian front is that in the former wars must be fought in densely populated areas. Three major Arab capitals—Beirut, Damascus and Amman—are within about an hour’s drive from Israeli-held territories.

Begin and Sharon decided that this fact opens up an immense new possibility for Israel. From now on, while concentrating on this front, Israel would strive to go much further in its wars. The aim of war would be not only to destroy Arab armies in order to defend old territorial expansions and acquire more land. An important strategic aim on this front would be to intervene directly in the political structure of the Arab countries around it. Israel would try to set up regimes which would suit its colonialist ambition on the West Bank, in southern Lebanon and beyond. For that it needs direct lines of communication and control over the nearby Arab capitals. This shift in Israel’s war aims has been amply illustrated recently.

First, one of the aims of the war in the Lebanon was to establish there a ‘strong state’ which would make peace with Israel and would be controlled by Israel’s allies in the Maronite community. The model of this state was set up by Israel several years ago in the shape of ‘Free Lebanon’ under Major Haddad—a direct Israeli agent. Israeli papers discussed openly day after day the need to establish direct Israeli-Phalangist control over the whole of Lebanon. This was achieved by the forced election of Bashir Gemayel to the presidency. B. Gemayel was not exactly an Israeli stooge but a longstanding ally, who would have depended on Israel for his very stay in power. The ‘need’ to station Israeli troops in Lebanon for the foreseeable future was pointed out by many Israeli analysts.

Another example of the same kind is the famous statement by Defence Minister Sharon that, had he been Prime Minister, he would have given King Hussein of Jordan 48 hours to leave Amman, his capital, thereby opening the way to the establishment of a ‘Palestinian State’ on the East Bank of the Jordan river.

The ideological and political driving force behind this new strategy is of course the old and by no means exhausted Zionist colonisation project of ‘The Land of Israel’ whose exact boundaries are to be determined by future developments.

The Israeli leaders shudder at the prospect of a hurried peaceful solution to the Middle East tangle which would integrate Israel too quickly into the region. It was realised with horror in Israel that the Sadat initiative, fuelled by Begin’s agreement to give up Sinai, would
have a natural continuation. The continuation, as exemplified by the Saudi plan of King Fahd (which was endorsed in September 1982 by the Arab summit conference at Fez) implies Arab willingness to accept Israel into the Middle East club, on one condition: namely, that it is cut down to its ‘natural size’ – the 1967 borderline. This would imply that Israel must play a relatively minor role in the region’s politics, that the Palestinians would get a mini-state and that Israel’s further territorial ambitions are to be checked. This prospect is abhorrent to the Israeli leaders, not because they do not want peace, but rather because it would seal Israel within the 1967 border and throttle the Zionist project which they believe is still in its full swing.

Sharon and Begin do want to join the Middle East club but only on their own terms: as a local military and political superpower. Therefore as soon as the Sadat peace initiative started to spread to other Arab countries and especially to the PLO itself, something had to be done quickly to halt this development. The PLO’s approval of King Fahd’s plan and its rigorous adherence to the 1981 cease-fire agreement along the Israeli-Lebanese border were signs of moderation and acceptance of the diplomatic approach. This moderation is the very thing Israel fears most. Professor Yehoshua Porath, a distinguished scholar of Middle-East history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, author of several important books on the history of the Palestinian national movement, went so far as to say that Israel started the war precisely because of the very clear signs of moderation and strict control shown by the PLO. But this is only one part of the picture.

After Lebanon – Jordan?

In order to understand the nature of the Lebanon war one must put it in the context of Sharon’s grand plan, which goes far beyond the Lebanese involvement. It has at least two further interlinked elements: transforming Jordan into a Palestinian puppet state and concentrating the Palestinian people on the East Bank of the Jordan.

Let us recall that an eventual annexation of the West Bank and Gaza – which is the official government policy and the single most important project of Begin – implies a grave problem for the Jewish character of Israel. This is because in Palestine as a whole there are two million Palestinians living alongside about three and a half million Israeli Jews. If these Palestinians were granted Israeli citizenship, then in a generation or two the Greater Israel will have more Arab than Jewish citizens, and this is inconsistent with the Zionist notion of a Jewish State. If the territories are to be annexed without giving their inhabitants the same rights that half a million Palestinians already have in the pre-1967 lines – then this will create a severe national, social and juridical problem which will become ever more explosive with the growing dependence of the Israeli economy on Arab labour, and will
confirm the trend of creating a society on the South African model. Both alternatives are extremely unattractive to Begin, or any other Zionist for that matter.

Thus the grand plan of Sharon calls for ‘satisfying the national aspiration’ of the Palestinians by turning Jordan into the ‘new Palestine’—opening the way for a large wave of ‘population transfer’ of Palestinians from all over the Middle East into ‘their own state’, namely Jordan. In plain language, this calls for the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza into Jordan.

The systematic expulsion of Palestinians from Lebanon in the war was a prelude to a much wider design in that direction. Israel hopes to put immense pressure on Jordan to accept them. Sharon’s plan may seem crazy at first sight, but then who would have believed at the beginning of 1982 that the subsequent atrocities against an Arab capital with a million inhabitants were possible? Further, let us not forget that in the 1967 war hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and Syrians were driven away from their homes and camps in the Golan, Gaza and the West Bank. They have not been able to return up to now.

The Jordanian-state solution to the Palestinian problem is discussed daily in all seriousness in the Israeli press; it is widely accepted in one form or another, even by many ‘moderate’ Israelis, as a just solution. The United States had to give special assurances to King Hussein that it does not support this solution. Hussein has taken special care recently to play down Palestinian influences in Jordan, where more than a million Palestinians live. Furthermore, in an editorial the New York Times\(^5\) writes: ‘Winning Jordan’s help will require persuading King Hussein that his throne is at stake’. This thinly veiled threat against Jordan shows that at least this aspect of the ‘crazy’ Sharon plan has become a living, necessary, element of political manoeuvring in the Middle East. It has very wide support not only in Begin’s Likud but also in the Labour Party. The other part, namely the expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine, is more speculative and draws much less support in Israel—mostly because other Zionist parties consider it too risky and wild. Not that they would not be very happy with it if it could be carried through without shattering Israel’s future in the Middle East. The code word in Israel for expulsion is ‘the truck-loads solution for the Palestinian problem’, referring to the need to load most of them on trucks and send them away. It is a very serious proposition; and given half a chance, say in the shape of a war on the eastern front or a popular uprising in the West Bank, Israel may attempt to carry it through.

The most consistent outspoken supporter of the solution is Professor Yuval Ne’eman, Israel’s Minister of Science, representing the rather powerful Tehiya (Revival) Party. In several interviews he expressed his opinion that after the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel would have to deal with the demographic problem and that he thinks that within Greater Israel (= Palestine) there could be a minority
of a million or so Palestinians. This implies expulsion of one million out of the two who currently live there.

Thus in the minds of Begin and Sharon the Lebanon war is an opening move in the one-front strategy. The aim of this strategy is to build around a greater Israel a zone of direct Israel presence and influence. A zone of *pax Hebraica*, in which Israel will have direct lines of communication and control over its immediate neighbours: Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and by implication over the entire Arab East from Egypt to Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

**Will Israel be checked?**

It is highly doubtful whether actual developments in the field will go according to the above lines. The difficulties are enormous and quite obvious: to accomplish the first step, namely setting up an Israeli 'strong-state' protectorate in Lebanon, will be difficult by itself and in the coming years Begin and Sharon will find themselves bogged down in a Lebanese morass. They think that by brute force and with American acquiescence they can do it — but this is far from clear. If they do however, this will be a very long step in the direction of *pax Hebraica* because Israel would then be controlling a substantial portion of Lebanon, so neither Syria nor Jordan are safe. The less than friendly relations between these two Arab states will keep many options open for the Israelis to intervene both directly and otherwise.

But even if Sharon will not be able to carry through his ideas and ambitions, their influence will be felt throughout the Middle East in the coming decade. An era of fierce struggle, wars and strife is at hand — unless the United States decides to cut all this short. Because it is the United States and only the United States that can check Israel at will. Without the 4 billion dollar yearly handout to Israel, and without the diplomatic blank cheque given to Israel, none of the above can be carried through. Even if Begin or Sharon will try to ignore real pressure from the United States, the bulk of the Zionist political structure will not allow them to pit Israel against the United States for long. The economic and social implication of going it alone even for a few months are enormous and will topple anyone who will try to do so.

In the Lebanese war Israel very shrewdly used a window of confusion and indecision in American foreign policy: it had complete American support for all the immediate and long term aims of the war: 30 miles' security strip, which simply means occupation by Israel’s stooges of the Lebanese land up to the Litani River; destruction; expulsion of the PLO, which means mass expulsion of Palestinians and setting up a strong state while leaving Israeli troops as long as the Syrians remain there — namely for a long time indeed.

Such complete and open support has never been given before, not
even in 1967 when the United States did not endorse the annexation of Jerusalem.

The exact lines of American foreign policy are of immense importance for the future of the Middle East, but they are slow in forming. The longer Israel has a free hand in shaping the actual realities in the region, the more these new realities will become irreversible and the closer will the emerging American policy have to correspond to the \textit{pac Hebraica} plan.

\textbf{References}

2. \textit{Ibid.}
3. According to Ben-Gurion's own diaries (as reported by his trusted biographer, M. Bar-Zohar) he proposed the following plan in a secret meeting held near Paris on 22 October 1956, in which he and the French Prime Minister finalised the plan of the Suez war: 'First of all, the liquidation and overthrow of Nasser. Then — Jordan to be partitioned by giving the West Bank to Israel and the East Bank to Iraq [then still under Western tutelage]. From Israel's point of view, the condition for this is that Iraq should sign a peace treaty with Israel and agree to settle the refugees on its own soil. Lebanon to be cut up by giving part of it to Syria and another part, up to the Litani River, to Israel. In the remaining part a Christian state will be set up. In the enlarged Syria the regime will be stabilised under a pro-Western ruler.' Ben-Gurion's grand plan was rejected by France and Britain. See Michael Bar-Zohar, \textit{Ben-Gurion, A Political Biography}, (Hebrew), Am Oved Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1977, vol 3, p 1234f.
The Lebanese communities and their little wars

Magida Salman

Will the election of Amin Gemayel as president of ‘all of Lebanon’ finally put an end to the ghastly pageant of civil war in that country? Many Lebanese hope so, but their desires are as mangled and bewildering as were their heroes of yesterday – or their martyrs, whose portraits still cover the bullet-ridden walls of Beirut.

Seven years of wars great and small – all of them waged by all camps in the name of victory, with Muslims, Christians, leftists, and rightists ever flashing the V sign – have forged myths and reinforced them. Chief among these is the myth of Lebanon ‘the way it used to be’, that battleground of two rival visions, on the one hand the three b’s – brothels, banks, and brawls – on the other the crossroads of civilisations, Switzerland of the Middle East. The old Lebanon, in which pro-Western and Arab nationalist outlooks vied with one another, is now becoming an object of joint nostalgia: the lost paradise that must be regained at any price. Lebanon’s population now believes that it faces a choice between a strong state and the anarchic and arbitrary rule of rival armed groups and neighbourhood gangs. The former option seems to be carrying the day, at least for the moment.

This view is shared by the various religious communities. Christians of all sects, Sunnis, Shi‘is and Druzes have suffered the same calamities and identical violent daily tragedies, and each community has drawn its own conclusions. These remain divergent, but they concur in the desire to rebuild an everyday life that approximates normality. By forcing the Palestinian resistance to leave Lebanon, by destroying those buildings that were still standing, Sharon’s army has offered the Lebanese an opportunity to weave illusions about a future peace that will not be without its scapegoats: the Palestinian population of the refugee camps.

The Christian community in Lebanon, although heterogeneous in its class structure, has nevertheless always been united in its feeling that it constitutes a threatened minority and in its need to assert its specific identity, which it calls Lebanese. A statement by Bashir Gemayel epitomises this sentiment: ‘We were under attack as Christians, we defended ourselves as Lebanese.’ Such is the Christian conception of Lebanese nationalism, intransigent in its opposition to Arab nationalism, which the Christians regard as a clear and present danger menacing their traditions and culture (which, however Arab it might be, is nevertheless
The Lebanese communities and their little wars

non-Muslim). The Christians saw Nasser's Arab nationalism purely as a threat, to integrate Lebanon into a 'rapacious Islamic entity' within which the Christians of Lebanon would enjoy the same unenviable status as the Iraqi Christians or the Egyptian Copts.

The choice confronting the Christian community in Lebanon seemed to be defined in stark terms: Islamisation or Westernisation. The Christians of Lebanon have long gazed westwards with affection. Their oppression during the Ottoman era (the Porte cleverly playing on Muslim unity in an effort to cement its rule), as well as their economic marginalisation (paralleled by that of the Armenians), encouraged them to look in directions in which the sea afforded openings the Ottomans lacked the power to block. To this day the nationalism of the Lebanese Christians is imbued with the heroic memories and romantic literature of the struggle against the 'Turkish oppressor'.

The attitude to France was not so one-sided. Although French competition crushed the Christian silk workshops of the Lebanese mountains, which were unable to meet the challenge of the city of Lyon towards the end of the nineteenth century, the French won the gratitude of the mountain populace by making their future friends the merchants for the silk trade, and soon for other commodities as well.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War and the formal Allied recognition of French hegemony in the post-war order transformed the status of the Lebanese Christians from one of a cautious minority to a majority fiercely defending a new political system and national borders that entailed privileged representation in the ruling institutions of the Lebanese state. Ever since the establishment of the National Pact in the mid-fourties, the Christians have viewed the confessional structure of the state as synonymous with its very existence. Whether they were workers (and 45 per cent of the Lebanese working class was Christian, especially Maronite, on the eve of the outbreak of the civil war), rich traders, or petty bourgeois, the Christians saw what they called the 'Lebanese formula' as the only alternative to their absorption into the dominant Arab-Muslim current of the Middle East. Hence the label 'isolationists' slapped on them by the 'Islamopressive' forces during the civil war.

This tendency to confound the very existence of any Lebanese state with the confessional partition of the state power was especially deeply rooted among the Maronites, while the Greek Orthodox Christians enjoyed neither such a healthy slice of the pie nor the same history of struggle in the Lebanese mountains. But the dynamic of the civil war itself, although it concentrated political power in the Christian sector in the hands of the largely Maronite Phalangists, paradoxically integrated the adherents of Greek Orthodoxy more closely into the Christian community. The mortars, bombs and bullets slung back and forth indiscriminately between Christian and Muslim neighbourhoods made no
distinctions between one sort of church and another, or between one sort of mosque and another. When the feeling of being subjected arbitrarily to sudden death becomes paramount, it is difficult not to come to believe in the forces shooting at the other side from your own neighbourhood, whoever they may be.

Like any minority seeking to preserve its own specific character in the face of a perceived threat, the Christian community combined hatred and contempt for their adversary: Arabist Islam. The ideology that embodied this sentiment saw itself as based on so-called Western values: 'We represent European civilisation in this backward and under-developed corner of the world.' ‘At least our men don’t marry four wives.’ But these European pretensions nevertheless remained firmly anchored in the Arab Mediterranean reality of which these same Christians so clearly are part; pure and simple confessionalism, and belief in a highly politicised god and church are themselves characteristic of that reality.

After 1967, the Palestinians, most of them Muslim, were no longer ‘only’ refugees in Lebanon. They became a political and military force that bolstered the ‘Arabist’ camp, the exponents of a cause that was more Arab than Lebanese, a cause that was intermingled with that of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and other Arab states.

The Phalangists, representative par excellence of Christian Lebanon, became the vanguard in the counter-attack against ‘this new reality’. The little wars and armed clashes that erupted sporadically between Phalangists and Palestinian organisations rather coyly known as ‘events’ and resulting regularly in handfuls of injuries here and there—heralded the big ‘event’, the civil war that broke out in the spring of 1975.

The Palestino-Muslim camp was always far more heterogeneous than the ‘Christian camp’. Hence the fluid, vague—and false—appellations that were attributed to it: ‘Islamo-progressive’, ‘progressive forces’, or ‘nationalist forces’.

Among the components of this camp were the Sunni Muslims, their allegiance divided among the traditional Muslim leaders (like Saeb Salam and Rashid Karameh, two former prime ministers), various Nasserist formations, the largest of which was the Murabitun, and various rival Ba’thist factions. The Lebanese left (Jumblatists, the Lebanese Communist Party, the Communist Action Organisation of Lebanon) joined—or rather, merged with—this component.

The Lebanese Sunnis were as heterogenous as the Christians in their class composition, except that the proportion of workers was even smaller among this Muslim community. Their integration into the Lebanese economy paralleled that of the Christians and was similar to it. In the realm of ideology, however, things were completely different. The Sunnis had no phobia against the Syrians, Egyptians, and other
Arabs and could afford to flirt with the idea of Arab unity. Large photographs of Nasser were proudly displayed in the streets of West Beirut along with, less frequently, this or that Ba‘thist leader in the act of praying with some Sunni personality from Beirut or Tripoli.

But the Sunni elite lacked the political instruments with which the Maronite leaders were endowed. They had no political party in the modern sense of the word. The relationship between voters and leaders thus remained more traditional, resting not only on the inherited authority transmitted from father to son within the ruling family, but also on the patriarchal or tribal relationship between representative and represented.

This element is essential in understanding the proliferation of dozens of armed groups and grouplets and the power acquired by their ga‘ids in the streets of West Beirut.

Historically, southern Lebanon was by-passed by the anarchic development of the country. An agricultural region dominated by the cultivation of tobacco – in small plantations of peasant families or agricultural workers employed by large landlords – southern Lebanon remained one of the most disadvantaged regions of the country even after the Second World War and the boom of the sixties. Until that decade, the super-exploited peasants of the South never questioned their loyalty to their traditional leaders, the scions of rich families. These families garnered fat profits either by directly appropriating the produce of these peasants or by selling it to the state tobacco monopoly. These profits were never reinvested in the South but were put into commercial transactions and companies headquartered in Beirut. Despite this, the families of notables – Assad, Zain, etc. – remained masters in the South.

The persistent Israeli attacks after 1967, along with the great migration of Shi‘i workers to the cities, especially Beirut, where they formed a pool of cheap or perennially unemployed labour huddled together in large families in the periphery of Beirut, eventually transformed the political climate within the Shi‘i community and thereby within Lebanese Islam.

From the early seventies onwards, Imam Musa Sadr, religious chief of the Shi‘i community, forged his popularity out of this base, first in the South and later in the suburbs of Beirut.

In the best Shi‘i tradition, he launched a movement of the mahrumin, the ‘dispossessed’. It was an essentially populist movement whose vague social demands were married both to religious masochism (self-flagellation ceremonies during ‘Ashurah) and to the more general sentiments of a deprived and neglected community.

This movement, whose slogans and statutes (an assembly around a religious chief) were easily adaptable to the political consciousness of poor peasants and workers freshly crammed into the Beirut suburbs, had little difficulty reducing the left organisations first to secondary competitors and then to enemies within the Shi‘i community.
With the civil war, the movement of Musa Sadr (called Amal, or Hope) grew apace in both size and force of persuasion, for the war drastically worsened the conditions of the poor layers of Shi‘is, who rapidly lost even their status as workers and peasants, and became instead mere groups of refugees, now feeling the South as a result of Israeli attacks, now pouring out of their densely populated neighbourhoods in and around Beirut, caught in the fighting between the enemy factions in the civil war.

The example of Naba‘a, a neighbourhood adjacent to the Palestinian camp of Tel al-Za‘atar, is illustrative. At the start of the war it was an agglomeration of insalubrious buildings and shanties often inhabited by as many as a dozen people each, an enclave in Christian East Beirut, most of whose population were Shi‘i workers, with a small minority of poor Christians.

At the beginning of the civil war, the inhabitants of Naba‘a supported the various organisations of the Palestinian movement or of the Lebanese left, which had located their central headquarters in this geographically strategic neighbourhood. But the longer the war dragged on, as the bombing and shelling took their mounting toll of lives and a stifling blockade strangled the neighbourhood, the more the enthusiasm of the inhabitants of Naba‘a gave way to rancour. The organisations of the ‘Islamo-Palestinian left’ cared little about the problems faced by the local population in their daily civilian life (housing, food, and so on), and acted exclusively in the military domain. Shi‘i communal sentiments were inflamed again, and flared higher when Musa Sadr established a small hospital in the neighbourhood, in sharp contrast to the politico-military organisations, which had spent money only on arms.

Soon afterwards, when Naba‘a fell to Phalangist assault, the Shi‘i population did not resist; in a battle between rival ‘occupation forces’, the neighbourhood’s inhabitants felt themselves unconcerned.

This involution, the last resort of self-identification, spread and deepened as the Shi‘i masses were increasingly transformed into permanent refugees finding no place to house their families except in miserable agglomerations in the proximity of Palestinian camps. Amal, the Shi‘i movement, made ever wider use of its arsenal, which turned out to be far from negligible. After 1980, the political and military life of Beirut and the cities of southern Lebanon was dominated by battles between Amal and the Palestinian organisations and between Amal and the Lebanese Communist Party. A new dimension was added to the already intricate amalgam of religious sects, currents, and politico-military organisations in Lebanon.

‘With the introduction of arms, a radical change in roles occurs. Weakness becomes strength. The weapons acquire an exaggerated, almost magical, quality: a defence and a shield, the symbol of a new identity. Hence the vanity of the oppressed man displaying his weapons. It is an
exhibition of that new existence which has finally put an end to resigna-
tion...and thus it is that the act of liberation, unless organised and
channeled, is transformed into a kind of magical revolt. It is as if liber-
ation itself consisted in the act of bearing arms, which has opened the
way to individual liberation...The inferiority complex cedes to the
superiority complex, the complex of submission to that of omni-
potence. The old complex of non-identity, the status of lack of status,
gives way to the status of exceptionality. For the oppressed man who
has taken up arms, anything is possible, including any excess.'*

To sum up the atmosphere that prevailed in the streets of Lebanon
during the civil war, it is sufficient simply to observe how this 'psycho-
logy of under-development' operated in practice and determined the
fate of the Lebanese population. A 'state of exception', not decreed by a
dictatorial state but brought about by a multitude of tiny dictatorships,
destroyed the life of the country's inhabitants during the civil war, and
constituted the only politics the Lebanese actually experienced.

On the one side were the civilians, the victims of both camps, and on
the other those who bore arms, the members of the politico-military
organisations that enforced their own law. Within just a few months of
the outbreak of the civil war, that law had become the survival of the
fittest, or of the best armed, a sadistic and arbitrary regime under which
the whim of this or that gang, this or that powerful individual, could
and often did decide the fate of any person's life and property.

Auto theft, burglaries and robberies of houses, harassment on the
street-corners, where the militants of the various politico-military
organisations would establish their barricades and search, pester, insult
and sometimes murder passers-by — these things, little by little, came to
constitute the bulk of the activities of the members of political organi-
sations, when they were not simply engaging in indiscriminate shelling
of the 'enemy' neighbourhoods. On the other hand, these same organi-
sations protected the neighbourhoods in which they were based against
eventual murderous attacks by 'the other side'. The result was an agonis-
ing contradiction for the helpless populace. 'The local thief is our
protector' was a frequent lament, discreetly voiced, in both Lebanese,
Christian and 'Palestino-Muslim'.

In the Christian part of Lebanon, or at least in East Beirut, the Pha-
langists slaughtered their opposition with sufficient ruthlessness to
create a unified order, a state controlled by the dominant Phalangist
militia. Such was not the case in West Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and other
cities, where the militias gave rise to dozens of mini-states, often com-
peting with one another for control of even the smallest neighbour-
hoods. In East Beirut, for example, the Phalangists alone taxed the
population, after their victory over the other Christian militias. They
were thus able to impose taxes according to some regulation, as the
Lebanese state had done previously. Although the inhabitants of East
Beirut complained about militia-law, they nevertheless felt that a single
strong militia was preferable to 'the anarchy that reigns on the other
side'. In the West, Muslim Lebanese increasingly came to envy the security that had been imposed on the Christians in the East. There were more and more complaints about the competition between rival militias, the cost of which was paid by the population in fear and human life. The Syrian army itself acted as just another militia along with all the rest, one that used its influence to intimidate the population the better to participate in the multifarious exactions the militias had made their way of life.

It was not long before the old reflexes re-asserted themselves. The most facile outlet for frustration is to blame all the trouble on the Palestinians, who are after all not Lebanese (and the PLO, moreover, flaunted its friendship with the heartily detested Syrian army), even though their behaviour was not a whit different from that of the 'Islam-progressive' militias.

A double language thus took root in 'Islam-Palestinian', or 'Islam-progressive' Lebanon. Hate-filled denunciation of the Palestinian Resistance and the Palestinians themselves was voiced in private, while publicly the press and the militias repeated the immutable slogans: 'Lebanese-Palestinian solidarity', 'Lebanese-Syrian solidarity'. Even Berri, the leader of Amal, declared ceaselessly in the press that his organisation stood side by side with the Palestinian resistance in its struggle against Israel, whereas in reality that organisation was waging an equally relentless armed battle against the Palestinians in southern Lebanon and in the neighbourhoods of West Beirut.

The Israeli invasion, with its thousands of victims in the space of a few weeks, with the devastation of cities by bombing and shelling, put an end to the slew of permanent little wars that had come to constitute the daily life of the Lebanese population. For most of that population, the available choices were as pressing as the shock was terrible. On the one hand was the strong state, whoever might stand at the helm, on the other not merely anarchy, but the real possibility of an even more sweeping devastation.

But the peace longed for by the population is fragile. The Israeli and Syrian armies stand head to head, exchanging angry looks and communiqués, threatening to resort to more lethal projectiles. The future of the regions controlled by these two occupying powers is impossible to predict. Confessionalism, further inflamed by the war, is once again rampant in these areas. In the Israeli-dominated region, Druze and Maronites savagely attack one another sporadically but continually. In the Syrian-dominated regions of the north, warfare between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims erupts from week to week. Both occupations have imposed their own law, but neither has brought about order.

Only in Beirut, where the international forces (Italian, French, American, and British) are stationed, has there been a modicum of peace. But even there, it is doubtful whether the return to normality will be able to survive the withdrawal of the foreign troops, for none of the factors that caused the little wars of the Lebanese has been resolved by
The Lebanese communities and their little wars

the civil war or by the subsequent outside intervention, from whatever quarter.

Reference

Letter from the West Bank on the war in Lebanon

‘Adil Samara

Israel started its invasion of Lebanon in perhaps the most favourable political circumstances possible in this period. On the Arab front, Egypt had withdrawn from the arena of the struggle against Israel. Political and economic relations between Egypt and the other Arab regimes are being restored to such an extent that some of these regimes demanded that Egypt be invited to participate in the first Fez Summit Conference, which failed. The significance of this demand is that, by making it, these regimes were signalling their approval of the Camp David accords. In other words, the Arab bourgeois regimes are prepared to recognise Israel and come to an agreement with it, which implies that the PLO must be forced to accept this position and implement it.

However, the acceptance of this position by the PLO could be made possible only by smashing its military structure in Lebanon. This explains the total lack of Arab assistance to the PLO against the Israeli invasion. Indeed, this invasion was in accordance with the interest of the Arab regimes to smash the Palestinian Resistance, just as it was in accordance with Israeli interests.

The international circumstances in which the invasion took place were likewise favourable for Israel. American imperialism is in political and economic control of the region, as a consequence of the fusion of economic interests of Arab capital into the world economic order led by the US. The Arab bourgeoisies see their true interests in tail-ending this order. It is therefore necessary for them to remove any obstacles in the way, and the PLO is one such obstacle. In addition, account must be taken of the decline of Soviet presence in the region. This presence has in fact become restricted to artificial relations with Syria and Libya. As for the People's Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) — its role and ability to influence events in the Arab world are very limited.

As far as Israel itself was concerned, an additional encouragement to start this war was provided by the guaranteed neutrality of Egypt in a war against the PLO. To all this one must add the effect of the semi-truce that had existed since the summer of 1981 between Israel and the PLO in the North: the longer this semi-truce lasted, the more difficult it would be for the Begin-Sharon government to launch a war against the PLO. From the point of view of this Israeli warmongering clique it was therefore preferable to start the war as quickly as possible, lest the semi-truce become a real one.
Letter

Goals of the War

Israel’s intentions in invading Lebanon were determined not only by its military strength and the amount of territory it controlled, but also by the objectives behind its presence and role in the region and its expectations for the future. These goals can be summarised as follows.

- To crush the military structures of the PLO and evict it from Lebanon.
- To gain control over parts of southern Lebanon for a transitional period, initially under the excuse of security. In the course of time, new realities would be created. There would be joint economic ventures; for example, a project for utilising the water of the Litani. This would be followed by territorial expansion. It is therefore no surprise that the Israeli government allowed the rabbis to distribute in the army maps showing Lebanese towns and villages with Hebrew names.
- To sign a treaty of peace and mutual recognition with Lebanon, with the intention of asserting dominance over the Lebanese economy, as well as crippling that country as an Arab cultural centre—a role which the semi-democratic Lebanon used to play in the midst of a repressive Arab world.
- To test Israel’s own ability to exercise regional dominance over other countries, in preparation for further expansion in the future.
- To throw the blame for Israel’s economic crisis on the cost of the war, thus justifying the raging inflation inflicted on the people, and creating an argument for increased American aid.
- To place the population of the occupied territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) in a critical juncture, which would force them to negotiate with Israel on terms dictated by the latter, and through ‘representatives’ hostile to the PLO.
- To initiate a big new wave of colonising activity, in order to complete the creation of conditions for final annexation.

Consequences of the War

The war has had effects on all the peoples of the region, including the Israelis, with which we shall start.

Although the PLO, as the genuine leadership of the Palestinian national struggle, is the main enemy of Zionism, this war has been unprecedented in revealing a new protagonist, albeit a timid one, on the Israeli street—an internal opposition voicing an anti-war sentiment, calls for the fall of the government, recognition of the PLO, and so on. Moreover, although this opposition has no clear class basis (rather, it is formed of sections of various social classes in Israel) it is nevertheless the seed for the development of future class positions. We regard this phenomenon with great appreciation, particularly those aspects of it that have involved soldiers and democratic officers who refused or held
back from participating in the war. While the class participation of the Israeli proletariat is limited or unclear in scope, the Israeli left's participation in the opposition, in all its currents, is the nucleus for a much stronger ideological opposition.

I mention these two aspects—class and ideology—not only for their intrinsic importance, but because they have been the motor forces of this war: in perpetrating the war, the bourgeois ruling class was, on the one hand, serving its own class interests, but on the other hand it was also acting under the impetus of the Zionist ideology and using it as its spiritual weapon.

The weapon of Zionist ideology itself is the obstacle to a widening of the base of the opposition to this war and to those that preceded it. There can be no doubt that the increase in the government’s popularity (as revealed by public opinion polls) is an emphatic manifestation of the hegemony of Zionist ideology in Israeli society; it is a factor which must be taken into account by all those who study that society.

In the occupied territories, there has undoubtedly occurred a heavy psychological shock which, although it had been foreseen by some, has not in fact been as deep as expected by the triumvirate Begin–Sharon–Shamir. The national movement, rather than moving into conflict with the PLO and towards acquiescence in the occupation, has supported the PLO as sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and has reacted with increased bitterness towards the Arab regimes. Even those whom Israel labels ‘moderates’, who represent the commercial and comprador bourgeoisie with economic interests in Jordan and other Arab countries, have been unable to decide to come out against the PLO. On the contrary, they have rallied round it, although at the same time they have proposed some concessions which they regard as justified.

As for the other Arab peoples, I believe they are unable to speak their mind; any movement is threatened with direct repression. This is why the only positions visible on the surface are those of the regimes. The Arab regimes, having maintained silence during the war, became very energetic after the fighting had stopped. The second Fez Summit was postponed until the Resistance had departed from Beirut. Although it was agreed in Fez that a Palestinian state should be established, there was nevertheless a much greater inclination to accept the Reagan plan, according to which the Palestinians are to be represented via Jordan. The regimes have also revealed their willingness to recognise Israel and to put pressure on the PLO to do likewise, particularly in view of the fact that the PLO is now under the direct influence of the Arab regimes.

The Problem of the PLO

The PLO, with all its political currents, is facing its historical problem
today: adopting a policy under the circumstances of defeat in Lebanon and subjection to the influences of the Arab regimes.

Foremost among the tasks facing the PLO is the preservation of Palestinian national unity. This is a demand common to all currents, particularly within the present circumstances. However, the moderate leadership of the PLO, while seeing the need for maintaining national unity, believes in the necessity of a rapprochement with Jordan, allowing King Hussein to act as representative on behalf of the Palestin-
ians, under the slogan of ‘saving what can be saved, before it is too late’. The left organisations, on the other hand, while also seeing the need for preserving national unity, advocate closer ties with Syria, as opposed to Jordan.

The need for national unity increases the likelihood that it will be maintained. But the liquidation of the Palestinian identity and its subsumption under one Arab regime or another will threaten this unity with breakdown.

The dilemma facing the Palestinian Resistance today is critical and dangerous. This is why even those who advocate negotiations via Jordan can support their case with some logical arguments. Those who support closer relations with Syria also have reasonable arguments and excuses of their own. Neither have a clear-cut case. Moreover, it seems to me that there is no appreciable difference between the positions of the two bourgeoisies, the Syrian and the Jordanian; and in any case, what can possibly be achieved through Arab diplomacy?

How can it be demonstrated that Israel will withdraw from all or part of the occupied territories, which it considers as ‘liberated’?

What guarantee is there that Reagan will force Israel to withdraw, however partially, from the occupied territories?

Who can vouch even that Israel will concede the whole of southern Lebanon?

How can Israel and America be expected to do all this (and it is quite a lot) in a situation characterised by: the open willingness of the Arab regimes to recognise Israel; the departure of the PLO from Lebanon, and the loss of any territory from which it can make its independent decisions, or the decision to wage armed operations against Israel; the disintegration of the Arab ‘front of rejection and steadfastness’, and its total lack of support for the PLO; the absence of any role for the Soviet Union, whose position towards the last war was determined by reasons of State rather than by reasons of revolution? In the face of all this, why should Israel and America make any concessions?

The West Bank,
January, 1983
Books on the war in Lebanon


This well-researched report is the product of the deliberations of a distinguished self-appointed international commission. It sets out to analyse Israel’s actions in Lebanon during the summer of 1982 from the standpoint of international law. Of the commission’s six members, five were lawyers. The chairman, Seán MacBride, is a former minister for external affairs of Ireland, a leading figure of the international peace movement, and himself a lawyer. Beyond ascertaining Israeli violations of international law, the commission aimed ‘to create a climate in which public opinion insists upon adherence by all states and political movements to the international law relative to war’ (p xiii). With this in mind, it presents the legal guidelines concerning the recourse to war and its subsequent conduct.

The first of the book’s three sections discusses the initial act of invasion. It shows how Israel’s proclaimed aims as well as the official legal and political justification shifted as the invasion advanced. As new aims emerged, fresh justifications had to be presented. It transpires, then, that in reality the Israeli invasion had very little to do with ‘self-defence’ (as the label ‘Peace for Galilee’ was intended to suggest) but was motivated by aims for which no legal basis exists. These were, according to the commission, the wish to re-draw the political map of Lebanon and break the Palestinian national will. Other aims and justifications – some genuine, if subsidiary – also provide no legally sustainable grounds for the war.

At this point the commission engages in a somewhat confusing discussion of Israel’s attack on the Palestinian right to self-determination. The confusion results from the commission’s presentation of this right purely in terms of UN resolutions, which in reality reflected only certain aspects of the Palestinian issue. The impression gained here is that the Palestinians acquired the right to self-determination only as a result of the 1967 war. This impression is only dispelled in Chap. 4, which presents a potted history of the issue, but introduces new vagueries. Uncharacteristically, the commission fails to explain how and why international discourse had shifted from recognising Israel in the
Borders of the 1947 UN partition resolution, to a recognition of Israel in its borders of 1949-1967 (the 1949 Armistice Lines). The commission almost ignores the difference between the two borders, and consequently does not explain the shift in international perception from the original ‘national home for Jews’ as reflected in the 1947 plan to ‘various Security Council resolutions [which] underpinned Israel’s legitimacy behind the frontiers of 1967’ (p25).

The commission goes on to describe the international-legal recognition of the PLO as a national liberation movement, particularly during the period 1974-76. This fourth chapter ends with a quite unnecessary digression in which a ‘solution’ to the Palestinian problem is proposed. There are many views as to a possible solution, and it is not within the commission’s self-defined brief to come down in favour of a particular formula. (It favours the ‘two state’ solution.)

The report’s second section deals with Israel’s conduct of the war. Through clear and well-structured documentation, it shows that the IDF (the Israeli armed forces) broke virtually every law of war. These violated laws range from the widest principles to the most detailed rules governing the use of specific weapons. The mass of collected evidence shows clearly how the IDF violated, without sustainable justification, the internationally recognised principles of ‘military necessity’, ‘proportionality’, ‘discrimination’ and ‘humanity’. The quotations from Israeli servicemen and press reports are particularly impressive. The commission gives perhaps insufficient weight to the murder of individual civilians by members of the IDF. Nevertheless the themes of ‘blanket bombing’ of the civilian population and the ‘incidental’ victims of land, sea and air bombardment are extensively dealt with.

Israel’s often contradictory justifications in relation to civilian deaths are all rejected by the commission on legal grounds. One of the most shocking facts to emerge in this connection is that Israeli servicemen had no specific training and instruction on the conduct of war in civilian populated areas. This is a serious indictment of Israeli military training, and a condemnation of those who planned the attacks on Sidon, Tyre and other civilian centres.

The report’s third section deals with Israel’s actions in Lebanon as an occupier. Israel still refuses to acknowledge that it is an occupier in Lebanon; it says it is merely ‘present’ there. In this way Israel is trying to disclaim certain obligations incumbent upon an occupier in international law. The commission shows that Israel is in fact an occupying force in the strict sense of the term, and goes on to expose serious violations committed by Israel in this capacity. The damage done to the Lebanese economy, the extensive arrests, the lack of proper status for the enormous number of detainees, and the Israeli aid to and use of certain militias are all critically assessed. Here the commission is quite right to go beyond its brief, in trying to explain the probable political motive for Israel’s occupation. Few could argue with the commission when it ‘... concludes on the evidence before it that [Israeli occupation
policy] was to push Palestinian people out of the occupied zones and even out of Lebanon’ (p138).

The siege of Beirut and the massacre at Sabra and Chatila are each covered by a separate chapter. It is shown that Israel’s use of certain weapons and the deployment of militias were conscious violations of international law, and that they were designed to terrrize, kill and maim the civilian population of West Beirut.

Concerning the massacres, the report concludes that ‘wider political and historical findings of the Commission suggest that events at Chatila and Sabra were not inconsistent with wider Israeli intentions to destroy Palestinian will and cultural identity.’ In view of the evidence presented, this conclusion is, if anything, too cautious. Israel’s responsibility for and control over what happened emerge quite clearly. Indeed, in one of the report’s strongest passages it is pointed out that Israel’s dehumanisation of Palestinian people, and its alleged aim (at Sabra and Chatila) of ‘mopping up 2000 terrorists’ provided the murderers with what was ‘virtually a mandate for the indiscriminate slaughter of “2000 Palestinians”, whether armed or not, whether identified as PLO fighters or not’ (p181).

On the whole, the chapter on the massacres is most impressive and alongside the first Appendix on genocide and ethnocide it constitutes a powerful indictment of the Israeli state and not just (as in the Kahan report) of certain individuals.

The limitations of the legalistic approach to the invasion of Lebanon and the ‘Palestinian problem’ in general are obvious, and emerge several times in the text. But this very readable report is both comprehensive and instructive within its self-imposed limitations.

Daniel Machover


This book consists largely of selected despatches by Selim Nassib, a Lebanese journalist for the French leftist daily *Libération*, arranged in chronological order. Caroline Tisdall has contributed a rather rambling general introduction and a fairly impressive final section on the massacres. The photographs by Chris Steele-Perkins are superb.

On the whole, this is a rather disappointing and uneven book. To follow one reporter, however good, through the summer of 1982 is not the best way towards an appreciation of the atmosphere that prevailed in Beirut, or a fuller understanding of the political and social upheavals caused by Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and siege of Beirut. No single reporter could always be in the right place at the right time, or find the most interesting people to interview. No one person could gain a
Books on the war in Lebanon

sufficiently comprehensive view of the events, at the time when they were unfolding. If the reader is disappointed, it is because of this central flaw. Some of Nassib’s reports have their merits, but others are singularly uninformative and a few indulge in romanticising Arafat or the events of the siege.

The early despatches capture the mood of initial fear and uncertainty, but even here Nassib’s tendency to romanticise the Palestinian fighters and their allies is evident. As the siege tightens, the despatches become steadily less informative, though the odd piece is impressive. The account of the destruction of Tyre (pp79-82) is particularly good, whereas the next despatch is largely aimless though perhaps entertaining.

An interesting fact which emerges very clearly is that by mid-July the principle of withdrawal of the PLO was widely accepted, and the problem of ensuring the safety of those living in Palestinian camps was the topic of a fierce debate within the organisation.

There is a ten-day gap in despatches during a vital period (20-28 July) — which underlines the difficulty of relying on one journalist to supply good material.

The August despatches often verge on the absurd; that of 13 August ends with the exclamation: ‘... this resistance of the weak has become a challenge for the future. From tomorrow, who will dare say that the Palestinian people is not a reality?’ Perhaps this sounds better in French.

Finally, Nassib’s interview with Arafat and the introduction to it are the worst pieces of romantisation and uninformative interviewing.

The chronology that accompanies Nassib’s despatches is quite comprehensive, though the various goings on at the UN are not fully covered.

Caroline Tisdall’s introduction is both the best and worst part of the book. She exposes quite effectively the continuity in Zionism, represented by the massacres of Deir Yassin (1948) and of Sabra and Chatila. But her rambling account of the PLO’s development is too uncritical and, again, tends to romanticise. The events preceding Black September 1970 are inadequately assessed, and the civil war in Lebanon — not an easy topic to describe briefly — is given no greater depth.

Tisdall ends her passage on ‘the lessons of the civil war’ with a piece of over-indulgence towards the PLO: ‘Unhindered by Lebanese government control but under the watchful eye of the Syrian contingent of the Arab Deterrent Force, they began to restructure and fortify their revolution.’ This is just not good enough. It is necessary to highlight some of the problems raised by the PLO’s policies and conduct in Lebanon, if only to put them in context and assess their effects. Bland remarks and insufficient criticism are not a healthy approach to any political movement, however worthy its cause.

Tisdall’s section on the massacres is generally very impressive but the final ‘why?’ passage is a somewhat unsatisfying end to a very uneven book.

Daniel Machover

28
In two consecutive general elections – in 1977 and 1981 – the lower and middle echelons of the Israeli Jewish working class, consisting mainly of Oriental Jews, gave massive (though by no means unanimous) support to the traditional party of the private bourgeoisie, the Likkud, headed by M. Begin. To be more precise, the Likkud is an electoral bloc whose two main components are the fiercely nationalistic Herut (Freedom) Party and the conservative party of traditional bourgeois Zionism, the Liberal Party.

The second vote of support came during a period of very rapid inflation (about 130 per cent per year) which had taken its toll of the standard of living of the poorer sections of the working class. Only six months before the 1981 election the economic conditions of wage earners were deteriorating so fast and the popularity of the first Likkud government had sunk so low that hardly anyone believed that Begin would be returned to office. In the event, his party greatly increased its power. Inflation was generated deliberately by government policies as a tool for controlling the economy by manipulating prices, taxes and wages. Just before the elections, the government allowed an artificial but significant reduction in the prices of both foods and durable goods – and it seems that the electorate had been waiting for just such an excuse to sweep the Likkud coalition back to office.

This demonstrated ability of the Likkud to retain power even in the face of grave economic difficulties for the mass of their voters raises several questions. In view of the well-known political programme of the Likkud (as demonstrated by the war in Lebanon) these questions are of fundamental importance for understanding Israeli society and its future.

It is clear that among Oriental Jews (who form the bulk of the Jewish working class) support for Begin's Likkud is greater and more solid than among Ashkenazi Jews. In wide sectors of the Oriental population, commitment to Begin is apparently overwhelming and virtually unconditional: he is seen as Saviour.

What are the reasons for this phenomenon? How does the voting pattern reflect the specific structure of Israeli society?

Obviously, such a clear-cut and powerful sentiment is overdetermined: it has several interlinked causes, related to the present social and economic position of the Oriental Jews in Israel, as well as to the painful process of their integration into the Ashkenazi-dominated
Class divisions in Israeli society

Israeli society, and to their cultural-political background in the Arab countries.

The usual explanation for the voting patterns of Oriental Jews in Israel is that on the whole the nationalist rhetoric and explicit anti-Arab chauvinism of the Likkud appeal to them much more than the relatively moderate and cautious tone adopted by the Labour Party.

While this explanation does contain an element of truth, it suffers from several weaknesses.

First, in many cases the actual policies of the first Begin government (1977-81) towards the Arab countries, as well as towards the Palestinian Arabs in Israel and the occupied territories, were more open and less harsh than those of former Labour governments. For example, it is now a known fact that when the Labour Party was in office it refused to give up the whole of Sinai in exchange for a comprehensive peace treaty with Egypt; the Egyptians proposed such a deal on several occasions, but were repeatedly rebuffed. Begin’s decision to give up the whole of Sinai and to dismantle the Israeli settlements there in exchange for a peace treaty with Egypt was most vehemently opposed by predominantly Ashkenazi extreme right-wing nationalist groups such as the Tehiyyah (Revival) Party and Gush Emunim; it was also opposed, albeit less vigorously, by the Labour Party. On the other hand, the peace treaty was very popular with Israel’s Oriental communities.

Thus, while Begin’s rhetoric is undeniably more openly chauvinistic than that of the Labour Party, his policies were not invariably so, until well into his second term in office.

Further, the central and most important plank in Israel’s anti-Arab policy throughout the post-1967 period has been the massive colonisation of the West Bank. But this rapid expansion of the dense network of Israeli settlements has never been popular among the poorer sections of Israel’s Oriental communities. They perceived correctly that to accomplish this massive colonisation the government must channel considerable resources to the small groups of (mostly Ashkenazi) settlers, and away from the ‘development towns’ inside the pre-1967 borders, where a large proportion of the Oriental population resides.

Here we would like to consider an entirely different root cause of Begin’s popularity – a deep-level class factor which has had and will continue to have a decisive influence on the political structure of Israel. The existence of such a factor is betrayed by the very form of the support that Begin enjoys among wide sectors of the Jewish working class and petty bourgeoisie: it is an overwhelming and unconditional support, apparently independent on the precise nature of his policies, and often accompanied by strong aversion towards the Labour Party.
Class divisions

In fact, a detailed analysis of the public support given to the two major party blocs shows that it is closely related to important divisions in the working class. This division turns out to run parallel to divisions within the Israeli bourgeoisie. Together, they form a striking pattern which has a decisive influence on Israeli society and politics.

Let us examine this pattern. The Israeli economy is divided into two major sectors, roughly equal in size: the bureaucratic-capitalist sector owned by the state or the Histadrut and its affiliated organisations, and the private capitalist sector. Obviously, these two sectors are connected to each other by a multitude of economic (and other) ties; in particular, many firms are owned jointly by capital from both sectors. However, there are important characteristic differences, some of which are summarised in the table which follows. This table is no doubt schematic, but it nonetheless highlights some of the characteristics of each sector.

One crucial point is the following: the economic sectoral division of the lower echelons of the working class in Israel, between those who work in the bureaucratic and private sector respectively, corresponds rather closely to the national division of that class, between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. This is not a mere coincidence; it is rooted in the very nature of Israel as a Zionist settler-state, and its consequences are far-reaching.

Ever since the beginning of the Zionist colonisation of Palestine, the Zionist labour movement sought to create a Jewish monopoly in certain key sectors of the economy. This was done by excluding Arab workers from these economic activities. This policy continued after the 1948 war: industries and economic activities which were under the control of the state or the Histadrut (including its affiliated organisations, such as the kibbutzim) were generally closed to Arab workers.

With the rapid development of the economy, especially after the 1967 war, a total ban on Arab labour could no longer be maintained, since there was an acute shortage in labour-power. Thus the public construction industry came to depend on Arab labour. Today the giant Solel-Bonel construction concern relies almost exclusively on Arab manual labour. This concern belongs to the Histadrut – the peculiarly Zionist bureaucratic structure, which combines in one entity the country’s only legally recognised trade union and largest industrial holding company.

But in most other Histadrut-owned enterprises Arab workers are not to be found. As for state-owned industrial firms – they are almost hermetically closed to Arabs. Thus Arabs are excluded not only from the huge state-owned arms industry, which employs over 100,000 people, but also from the oil and chemical industries, electronics, aviation, ports, the sophisticated parts of the engineering industry, shipping and airlines. It goes without saying that tele-communications, the electricity and gas industries and the like are also closed to Arabs. All these are
## Class divisions in Israeli society

### Dual structure of Israel's economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Bureaucratic sector</strong></th>
<th><strong>Private sector</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size and character of firms</strong></td>
<td>Large modern enterprises</td>
<td>Large proportion of small businesses; some medium-size firms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic branch</strong></td>
<td>Weapons and other military products, chemicals, energy, oil, cement, large-scale construction, large agro-business, public transport</td>
<td>Consumer goods (metal, wood, textiles, food), small and medium-size construction and services, small-scale agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td>Strong orientation towards export</td>
<td>Local consumer market; sub-contracting for state enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workforce</strong></td>
<td>Almost exclusively Jewish (except in construction); very high proportion of Oriental Jews among production workers</td>
<td>Large proportion (about ( \frac{3}{5} )) of workers are Palestinian Arabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pay and conditions</strong></td>
<td>Low pay, but relatively high job security, good working conditions and fringe benefits</td>
<td>Very low pay (less than $200 a month), no job security and negligible fringe benefits (except in electronics and engineering subcontractors for arms industry – where no Arabs are employed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership and management</strong></td>
<td>Managed by largely Ashkenazi Zionist elite (including kibbutzim); very few Oriental Jews; no Arabs</td>
<td>Large proportion of Oriental Jewish owners, especially in smaller enterprises; a very small proportion of Arabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical political affiliation of owner or manager</strong></td>
<td>Labour Alignment (Labour Party, Mapam)</td>
<td>Likkud Bloc (Herut, Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
considered strategic areas, and Jewish monopoly is maintained in them not only at management level but also, with very few exceptions, among the workforce.

The technique of keeping Arabs out is simple: all employees are required to have a record of military service and a security clearance. This automatically rules out all but a very small number of Arabs. The few exceptions — mostly members of the Druze religious sect, who are conscripted to the army — are dealt with individually. Even the Druze are excluded from most ‘sensitive’ and strategic areas of employment, but their exclusion is not total. Thus, for example, about half of the manual workers in Israel’s biggest sea-port, at Haifa, are now Druze Arabs: the shortage in manpower was so acute that they had to be admitted into this former bastion of exclusively Jewish labour.

The policy of keeping Arabs out of the strategic industries has created a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled labour in these industries. Since the mid-1970s, the shortage has been getting progressively more acute, because military-related production has become the fastest growing area of Israel’s economy; by now, it employs about one quarter of the country’s total labour force. As a result, the Jewish workers in these industries have been able to obtain relatively good working conditions and fringe benefits: higher pay, shorter working week; longer holidays, greater job security. Managements have been forced to grant all this, in order to attract enough Jewish workers. Similar conditions do not generally exist in private industry, except where the work-force is highly skilled and purely Jewish — again for ‘security reasons’.

The Arab worker is forced to seek employment in the private sector. The only major exceptions are the large public construction firms, which use mostly Arab labour on the actual construction site; but here again, only Jews can be found in the office rooms, where design, finance and other paper-work is done.

Some of these points are well illustrated in the following excerpt from an article in a local Jerusalem newspaper.

‘...There are types of industrial enterprise where, because of their defence-related character, there is not an Arab worker to be found — such as most of the military industry. In Jerusalem I visited a large enterprise of this kind, employing 500 workers. Jewish workers only. They operate automatic machines of the most modern type. Their starting wage is relatively low, at $250 a month, while the average wage for the country is $350 a month. The firm works a five-day week schedule [instead of the usual six-day week]. Two meals a day are provided free of charge. The neighbouring non-military firms find it difficult to recruit Jewish workers. In Jerusalem there are thousands of industrial firms, mostly tiny, which together employ 17,000 workers, of which 5,500 are Palestinian Arabs. Typically, the proportion of Arab workers is still higher in the newly established factories, built with
government support in the occupied territories. There, except for one large factory, most of the 2,800 workers are Palestinian Arabs. 14

As a result of this division, firms in the private sector are utterly dependent on Arab workers. From the viewpoint of the private employer, this state of affairs is not an unhappy one: while there are political barriers to the super-exploitation of large sections of the Jewish working class, Arab workers do not enjoy similar political protection. The private employers can therefore go much further in squeezing the utmost out of their workers, while keeping wages and working conditions to the minimum level that the labour market will bear.

These developments in Israel's private sector were given a tremendous boost by the outcome of the 1967 war, which opened to the civilian consumer-goods industry a huge new market. Israeli consumer goods are sold not only in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but are also carried (often after being repackaged, to disguise their origin) across the 'open bridges' into the Arab countries. At present, this accounts for about one third of Israel's total exports. At the same time, the territories occupied in 1967 provided Israel's private industry with a large new labour market, more than doubling its reserve of Arab workers. More than 100,000 workers from these territories are now employed in various branches of the Israeli economy.

These developments, which matured during the 1970s, have had two important political consequences that concern us here.

First, the ranks of the private Jewish bourgeoisie were swollen and it became considerably more independent of the state bureaucracy. The ability of the private sector to take care of itself economically and politically was greatly enhanced. Its appetite for political power, to complement and reflect its newly acquired economic muscle, was rapidly whetted — and it now had the financial means to mount a proper large-scale election campaign.

Second, due to the vast expansion of the public-bureaucratic sector, especially the arms industry, and the resulting shortage of Jewish labour-power, the Jewish working class also became increasingly independent of the state and Histadrut bureaucracy and its political arm, the Labour Party. One no longer had to vote Labour in order to get a proper job.

The division of the working class according to nationality, between the public-bureaucratic and private sectors, is supplemented by an important division of the Jewish wage-workers along the major ethnic cleavage which divides Israeli Jewish society: between Oriental Jews (mostly immigrants from Arab countries, and their Israeli-born descendants) and Ashkenazim (Jews of central and eastern European origin). The bulk of the Jewish working class — especially in non-managerial, manual jobs, whether skilled or not — is made up of Oriental Jews.
While the formula for separating Arabs from Jews is 'military service' and 'security clearance', the euphemism used for excluding Oriental Jews is 'education'. Most white-collar government jobs are filled by Ashkenazim. Some government departments, such as the Post Office, have no educational requirements, and indeed a very high proportion of workers there, including white-collar employees, are Oriental. However, for most Oriental Jews, especially those who live in 'development towns', far from the central government sites of Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, the only way to secure a respectable job is to join some firm owned by the state or the Histadrut (including firms owned by organisations affiliated to the Histadrut, such as the big public transport firms and 'regional enterprises' owned jointly by several kibbutz-im and employing hired labour). As mentioned above, these firms are dominant in 'strategic' branches of the economy such as arms production, the chemical industry etc. Competition with Arab workers in the private sector makes that sector very unattractive to Oriental (let alone Ashkenazi) Jewish workers. Of course, this does not mean that no Jewish workers are employed in the private sector; many are. But their preference is to work in the public-bureaucratic sector.

The pattern which has resulted from the operation of these selective forces over the years is that the typical employment of the 'average' Oriental Jewish worker is in a blue-collar job in the public-bureaucratic sector, usually in a 'strategic' industry.

Class consciousness of Israel's Oriental Jews

Let us now return to our original question and see how the political inclinations of Israel's Oriental Jews are affected by their specific position within the country's economic and cultural life.

As we saw, the vast majority of Oriental Jews are employed in manual jobs, mostly in the public-bureaucratic sector. While their position is superior to that of the Arab workers, it is inferior to that of the Ashkenazim, who hold most of the managerial and professional jobs.

Ever since the early 1950s, when large waves of Jewish immigrants arrived from Arab countries, these immigrants were regarded by the Ashkenazi Zionist elite as an inferior group who must somehow be 'raised' to the true cultural level of Jewry – represented by the Ashkenazim. Clearly, some groups of Oriental immigrants had to go through a painful period of adaptation in order to acclimatise to a society fashioned by European, bourgeois-liberal and mostly secular traditions. But this difficult process of adaptation was made worse by the attempts at a forced Europeanisation of all aspects of their life. Although as a matter of fact many of the new Oriental immigrants had belonged to the middle-class and professional strata in their countries of origin, a stereotype of Oriental Jew was created in the image of the
least educated and most backward (from a bourgeois point of view) among them.

The logic of the whole period of development was to mould these Oriental ethnic groups into a hard core of the Israeli Jewish proletariat, working under the supervision of Ashkenazi managers and professionals. The fact that the Oriental immigrants had many cultural traits in common with Arabs made it easier for the Ashkenazi elite to relegate them to an inferior socio-economic position.5

When the Oriental Jews were slowly and painfully integrating into Israeli economic life, they always faced the Ashkenazi Jew as a contemptuous boss who was ordering them about and on whose goodwill their very livelihood depended. Their immediate class enemy—the boss—was most often a Labour-Party bureaucrat put in control of this or that Histadrut or state enterprise. Moreover, their trade-union ‘representative’ in the Histadrut was again an Ashkenazi, nominated from above or entrenched in this position since the old pre-state days. The government and Histadrut offices in charge of their education, housing, welfare, employment and health-care were also staffed almost exclusively by Ashkenazim. For many years they were coerced to vote for the party of this state-bourgeoisie and union bosses—the Labour Party. This political coercion was most effective outside the main urban centres, in villages and smaller towns populated almost exclusively by Oriental Jews. There, improvements in employment, housing etc. could be made conditional on ‘favourable’ electoral returns. (In the large cities this type of blackmail was less effective, and a large proportion of Oriental Jews living there indeed used to vote for Herut even in the early days.) Political coercion of this kind was gradually becoming more difficult to enforce, with the general liberalisation of Israeli economic and political life, especially after the fall of the first Big Boss, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister and for many years leader of the old Labour Party (Mapai).

What routes of upward socio-economic mobility were open to an Oriental Jewish worker? In the public-bureaucratic sector (including the armed forces) such mobility was slow and difficult, if not entirely impossible. Managerial and supervisory positions in this sector were firmly held by Ashkenazim. The educational route upwards was also largely blocked: to this day, the number of Oriental Jews in universities is relatively very small, partly because tertiary education is economically beyond the reach of most working-class families and partly because children of Oriental families are handicapped by the inferior quality of primary and secondary education accessible to them.

On the other hand, there was a route of advancement open to an Oriental Jew—that of becoming self-employed or an owner of a small private business. In the free market of the private sector, the way up was much easier than in the public-bureaucratic sphere. As a result, there
sprang up a very substantial number of small independent businesses owned and run by Oriental Jews.

The typical aspiration of an Oriental Jewish worker — if there is such a thing as 'typical aspiration' — is to rid himself of his dependence on the Ashkenazi bosses and start his own small workshop, where he would employ, say, three, four or even twenty Arab workers, with whom he has a lot in common culturally but who would be kept in their 'proper place' by the national social barrier. Nor is this mere wishful thinking; thousands of businesses of exactly this type — restaurants, small construction firms, carpentries, garages and the like — have come into existence, and many have prospered.

The complex reality determines class consciousness. The Labour Party is correctly regarded by most Oriental Jews as the party of bureaucratic bosses, hated by workers and small businessmen alike. The Likud is regarded as the party of the class they identify with, the class of small businessmen, to which most Oriental Jews would like to belong and some do already belong. The working-class rhetoric of the Histadrut bosses is seen and despised for what it is — mere rhetoric which attempts to cover up the role of the Histadrut as the biggest employer in the country.

The Labour Alignment (including the Labour Party itself) is also strongly associated with the kibbutz movement, deeply hated by most Oriental Jews. This hatred combines resentment at social discrimination, and class hostility towards a powerful collective employer.

A large proportion of Oriental Jews brought to Israel were settled — it felt more like being dumped — in small 'development towns' in remote corners of the country, with meagre economic base and few resources for real development. In the same localities, heavily subsidised kibbutzim have prospered as small agro-industrial communities. The 100,000 odd members of kibbutzim form a peculiar layer of Israeli society; it can perhaps be best described as Israel's equivalent of the English landed gentry.

The cultural, social and political background of the kibbutz is totally alien to the Oriental Jews, who therefore find it virtually impossible to join these oases of prosperity. Even in the rare cases when they try to join, their 'mentality' is usually judged to be 'unsuitable'. On the other hand, the rapidly developing economy of the kibbutzim has become increasingly dependent on the exploitation of wage labour. About half of the labour-power employed by the kibbutzim comes, in the form of wage labour, from the Oriental communities in such 'development towns' as Qiryat Shmonah in the north or Shderot in the south. Some of these workers are hired by individual kibbutzim; many others work in 'regional enterprises' owned and managed jointly by several kibbutzim and relying exclusively on hired manual labour. These Oriental hired workers of the kibbutzim sometimes work alongside Arab workers, but they rarely meet kibbutz members except as bosses, managers and supervisors.
Class divisions in Israeli society

Here is an excerpt from an Israeli newspaper report on the town of Qiryat Shmonah, where public meetings of the Labour Party, addressed by the party’s leader, Shim‘on Peres, were broken up by the angry Oriental inhabitants.

‘Qiryat Shmonah, which from time to time reaches the headlines, is a good model for a close study of the relations between the two sides [namely, the town’s Oriental inhabitants and the nearby kibbutzim]. From government publications one can learn that... about 80 per cent of Qiryat Shmonah’s population do hard physical work, with very limited prospects for on-the-job advancement. Half of all the workers are employed by the kibbutzim in regional enterprises such as a bakery, plants for processing agricultural products, hotels, quarries, as well as in various kinds of hired work inside the kibbutzim. Some time ago, when unemployment in the town was high, the government was forced to set up a plant of the arms industry, in which there are higher-level jobs and therefore the feeling of the workers is better. Here wages are also better, and so are the prospects for advancement. When the father of a family comes back home from his work in the kibbutz and tells about his experiences there (wages which are sometimes low, hard physical work, kibbutz snobism) the family absorbs these stories and the pronouncements, so it seems, pass from father to son.6

It is perfectly natural that the relationship between the two communities is that of total estrangement. The kibbutzim are perceived as the darlings of the state, who have got the best land, water and other resources, such as cheap credit, and who thrive by exploiting the miserable living conditions and the political weakness of the Oriental Jewish workers.

This political weakness is what Israel’s Oriental Jews are trying to reverse by voting Likkud. The Labour Alignment is closely identified with the kibbutz movement; during election campaigns, kibbutz members go into the development towns to solicit votes for Labour; and a relatively high number of Labour candidates are members or ex-members of kibbutzim. For most Oriental workers it is unthinkable to vote for such people, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. They are seen as arrogant bosses, who should be politically checked, not encouraged.

Conclusions

The political allegiance of Israel’s Oriental Jews to the Likkud, and their rejection of Labour, are firmly rooted in the history and class structure of Israeli society. It does not depend very much on the position taken by the Likkud on this or that national or economic issue. Begin will have their support both in taking chauvinist positions and in
Class divisions in Israeli society

adopting more moderate stands. This contrasts sharply with the support that Begin enjoys in the fascist-religious milieu of Gush Emunim or the Tehiyyah (Revival) Party, whose members are mostly Ashkenazim. This latter support is entirely conditional on the Likkud's commitment to a Greater Israel, from which Palestinian Arabs are to be expelled.

The political support of the Likkud among Israel's Oriental Jewish working class can be expected to continue for quite some time. It may decline slowly, following changes in the ethnic composition of the state-bureaucratic section of the Israeli bourgeoisie. Such changes may come about precisely as a consequence of the Likkud staying in office long enough, especially if it will succeed in capturing the Histadrut, in addition to the state apparatus which it already controls.

References

1 For a survey on Israel's arms production and exports and the militarisation of the Israeli economy, see Esther Howard, 'Israel, the sorcerer's apprentice', MERIP Reports 112, February 1983.
2 The normal working week in Israel is six days.
3 For details on the role of Arab labour in the Israeli economy, see E. Farjoun, 'Palestinian workers in Israel – a reserve army of labour', Khamsin 7.
4 Qol Yeruslayim, 19 February 1982.
5 Concerning the attitudes of the Zionist elite to Oriental Jews, see R. Shapiro, 'Zionism and its Oriental subjects', Khamsin 5.
6 Ha'aretz, 4 November 1982.
The Oriental support for Begin — a critique of Farjoun
Avishai Ehrlich

Careful consideration of the article by E. Farjoun raises a series of questions about several of the 'facts' presented, conclusions derived from them and his method of analysis which consequently appears incomplete. That the Oriental support for Begin is a form of protest against the Labour Party is not a new theory; what Farjoun claims to add is:

1. That this support is neither dependent on Begin's national or economic policies nor is it an indication of agreement with these policies.

2. That the protest is an expression of (working) class antagonism against the Labour corporate bureaucracy.

The 'facts' disputed

To prove the first point, Farjoun argues that: (A) Begin's Oriental supporters voted for him despite his economic policy which affected them adversely. (B) That the return of Sinai was more popular with the Orientals than with the Ashkenazim. (C) That the poorer sections of the Oriental community which support Begin are also against his policy of massive colonisation of the West Bank.

These arguments are incredible and spurious to say the least, as they fly in the face of known facts.

(A) In contradistinction to most right-wing governments in the present world crisis, Begin's government has continued and increased government deficit spending. This has exacerbated the balance of payments situation and the foreign debt; but, together with a sophisticated system of indexation which exists in the country and other welfare mechanisms, it has enabled most of the population to retain and even increase their standard of living. Moreover, this high-inflation policy allowed the government to maintain a very low rate of unemployment (about 4 per cent) among Jews. The main attack by Labour on Begin's policy was that it was mortgaging the future for short-term benefits. These benefits, among others, included the satisfaction of the economic interests of his supporters. Farjoun argues that they voted for Begin
despite suffering economically under him; but in fact they voted for him because they would have suffered more under Labour.

(B) To argue that the Oriental community was more in favour of the return of Sinai, as part of the peace agreement with Egypt, than the Ashkenazi community is also unfounded. It is, however, correct that the extreme right movements which were against the withdrawal (the Revival Party, Gush Emunim, the Jewish Defence League, etc.) are mainly Ashkenazi in composition. This fact, nonetheless, is only half the truth, because the other half is that the organised support for the return of Sinai and for the Sadat agreement was also mainly Ashkenazi in composition (the Peace Now movement). There was never a wide public movement among Orientals for the withdrawal from Sinai prior to the agreement. The unpleasant truth is that most Oriental public opinion passively trailed behind the official policy.

(C) With regard to Oriental attitudes towards the massive colonisation of the West Bank, it is again correct that in the first phases of colonisation most of the settlers were supporters of the extreme right which is, in the main, Ashkenazi. However, so was, and is, the opposition to the colonisation. Zionist pioneer settlement of frontier zones was always carried out by ideological movements which were Ashkenazi. Once the framework was established, Oriental Jews were brought in. This was the case with the newly occupied territories after the 1948 war, when the first to move in were kibbutzim; and only afterwards was the area densely populated by villages and 'development towns' whose inhabitants were mostly Oriental. The pattern recurs at present with one variation. With the exception of the Golan Heights, the kibbutz movements, which are mainly Ashkenazi, were reluctant – for political reasons – to be the vanguard of settlement in the occupied territories. Their pioneering role was taken by new movements of the political 'right', also mainly Ashkenazi.

At present, the Begin-Sharon government has entered into the second phase of the settlement and absorption of the West Bank. Massive building of urban and semi-urban neighbourhoods is being completed. These apartment blocks are offered at cheap, heavily subsidised, prices to young families; and those finding housing a major problem, mainly Orientals, are beginning to flock in. It will not be long before the West Bank (which, with the exception of Jerusalem, has so far been sparsely populated by Jews) will have a much larger Oriental Jewish population. In this way the accusation that the settlements divert funds which would otherwise go towards improving the conditions of Oriental Jews is being averted. The government argues that the solution for the Oriental urban poor is in their settlement in the West Bank. The claim that there is wide Oriental opposition to the settlement of the West Bank is unfounded; only marginal Oriental groups (supporters of the Black Panthers etc.) have raised their voices against it. An even greater willingness to move to the West Bank is only checked by the lack of employment in the immediate vicinity of the new settlements, which compels the settlers to commute.
The Oriental support for Begin – a critique of Farjoun

Summarising, I have shown that Farjoun’s argument that Oriental support for Begin is economically altruistic is simply wrong. Also unfounded is the implication that the Oriental supporters of Begin have positive attitudes towards withdrawal from the occupied territories and are against their settlement.

The incomplete sector analysis

Farjoun’s refusal to acknowledge the positive reasons for the support for Begin and his policies among Orientals is carried into his second argument, which attempts to analyse the distribution of Orientals and Ashkenazim into class positions within the public and private sectors of the Israeli economy. He reaches two conclusions:

1 That in the public sector Orientals and Ashkenazim face each other in antagonistic class relations: semi-skilled and skilled labourers against supervisory, managerial, corporate bosses.

2 That the main way towards upward mobility for Orientals was through entrepreneurship in the private sector. These upwardly mobile sections of the Oriental community relate with antagonism to the public sector, where their mobility was restricted, and thus identify with the party of the private bourgeoisie.

Here too the claim is that the support for Begin is due to his being Labour’s opponent rather than because of what he actually stands for. Farjoun and I share the view that a class analysis of Israeli society must include both the ethnic and the national divisions. A class analysis of the Israeli social formation must account for the inter-relationship and changes in the triangle: Occidentals-Orientals-Palestinians. Farjoun’s conclusions are based on a concentration on just one pair of relationships within the triangle: the Occidental-Oriental couple, and ignore the Oriental-Palestinian, Occidental-Palestinian couples. It is my contention that his conclusions are the result of an incomplete analysis.

In a capitalist economy, a sudden increase in the supply of unskilled labour will tend to have the following effects (other things being equal):

1 The price of unskilled labour-power will tend to decrease.

2 The differential between the prices of skilled and unskilled labour-power will tend to increase.

3 The ratio of cost of labour versus cost of capital will decrease – encouraging labour-intensive processes of production.

If however, as in Israel, the economy has two sectors, one of which does not utilise the increased labour supply, the effects on this sector of the introduction of the new supply of unskilled labour will tend to be:

4 A wider differential of labour prices between the two sectors.

5 A tendency to increase capital-intensive processes of production.

These simple theoretical conclusions are of particular significance in the class analysis of Israel. They account for some of the consequences of the segregation of the Jewish and Arab economies in Palestine in the...
The Oriental support for Begin – a critique of Farjoun

pre-state period; they are also fruitful for the understanding of the impact of waves of immigration to Israel, in particular the Oriental immigrations. Since 1967 they are important for understanding the impact of the absorption of the Palestinian labour force and they are also illuminating for the understanding of the relationship between the kibbutz sector and the rest of the Israeli economy.

The effects of Palestinian employment on the Jewish working class

What were the main consequences of the absorption of a large Palestinian labour force on the Jewish working class? In the private sector the new source of cheap labour made it possible for larger numbers of Jews, Oriental and Occidental, to move from positions of employees to becoming employers. These very small capitalist enterprises stand or fall on the continued supply of cheap Palestinian labour. The 1967 occupation signified for them the opportunity to move out of the working class. At the other end of the labour force there was a fraction of the Jewish working class, almost entirely Oriental, which was unskilled. The introduction of cheap Palestinian labour threatened to further reduce their wages. To mitigate the effects of this competition, the Histadrut and the Ministry of Labour intervened to enforce basic minimum pay rates, but only where the workforce was mixed. The main trend, however, was towards the division of labour along national lines, which opened channels of upward mobility for Jews within the class.

In the segregated sector of the Israeli economy, where Arabs are not admitted, the effects of the Palestinian workforce were indirect. It made the supply of the Jewish labour force more scarce and thus increased the pay differentials between the Jewish and mixed sectors. The scarcity of labour and its high price was also a cause for capital-intensification, which itself increases the demand for more skilled labour thus raising the differentials even further. It is possible to argue that this sector of the Jewish working class also benefited from the incorporation of Palestinian workers into other sectors of the economy.

Although the effects of the incorporation of Palestinians on the Jewish class changes require more research, it is easy to see even from the above sketch that the Jewish working class, not only the bourgeoisie, benefits from the incorporation of Palestinians into the economy and has an interest in the continuation of this situation. The converse is also true: wide sections of Jewish working class and new small capitalists have much to fear in terms of personal status, incomes and mobility from the discontinuation of Palestinian employment. To the extent, therefore, that the Labour Party is perceived as willing to negotiate Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, this is seen as a socio-economic threat to these sections. On the other hand, Begin’s
stance — no return of the territories — coupled with actions to make the separation of the West Bank from Israel impossible, is in line with their material interests.

There is no contradiction between the hostility of many Oriental workers to the Labour bureaucracy and their interest in maintaining the Arab labour force. Indeed, some, mainly the new Oriental entrepreneurs, may combine the two, as they may well imagine that the return of the territories would necessarily mean the stoppage of mass Palestinian employment in the Jewish economy and that this could create a return to the situation in the 1950s, where in the absence of Arabs they themselves were forced into the lower echelons of the working class, subordinated to the Ashkenazim.

The view of many Jewish workers that they do benefit from the incorporation of Palestinians into the economy may lead them to object to the return of the territories but also to be against massive expulsions of the majority of the Palestinians. Thus, not many workers support the most extreme right, fascist movements who call for the expulsion of Palestinians from ‘Greater Israel’. Both extremes of Zionism have in common the aspiration of Israel as purely Jewish. The difference is in the method, and the scope of what is seen as Israel, but not in concept. The interest in permanently retaining the Arab labourer in the Jewish economy as a subordinate presupposes the open and formal institutionalisation of an unequal status to Arabs — discriminated, but tolerated.

I have tried to show that Farjoun’s analysis is incomplete, that wide sections of the working class and of new small capitalists support Begin, not just against Labour but also positively endorse what he stands for. Furthermore, that there is no contradiction between a protest against Labour and a positive support for Begin’s policies.

**Is the Oriental reaction a particular class antagonism?**

Farjoun claims that it is so, but this is very much a matter of an operational definition. To reach his conclusion, he conflates the Orientals and the working class; and simultaneously, to create the ‘class’ enemy, excludes Occidentals from the working class. If we define the working class as those who do not own means of production and make their living by selling their labour power, we still find that a majority of Occidentals are workers, perhaps highly skilled, professionals, perhaps not proletariat, not in the productive sectors but workers nonetheless. At most we could say that Occidentals and Orientals are differentially distributed in various fractions of the working class. This argument echoes a current debate among Marxists, whether to define the working class minimally or maximally, a debate which reflects the complex division of labour in advanced capitalism as well as different political strategies.
One of the effects of the incorporation of the Palestinian labour force into the Israeli economy has been to open up and diversify the class composition of the Oriental communities. It is now less correct to assume a class homogeneity of Oriental Jews than it was at any time since their arrival in Israel. It would be of interest to find out whether the Oriental supporters of Begin, a subset of the Orientals, are concentrated in particular class positions, whether these positions are mainly working class and in particular in which fractions of the working class. The concepts ‘lower’ and ‘middle’ echelons are inadequate; they mean, presumably, lower and middle income groups – but this is not a particularly Marxist criterion of class determination. I have doubts as to whether the staunchest supporters of Begin among the Orientals are also the most proletarian elements among them, that is, workers in the productive sectors of large industry.

There is a need for more detailed empirical data on various aspects of the composition of the Oriental community before this debate could be taken further. However, it has occurred to me that if Oriental support for Begin is indeed a class protest against the Labour Party, it should have been reflected more in the elections to the Histadrut than in the elections to the state’s parliament. A larger percentage of the voters to the Histadrut are workers. If, as Farjoun argues, most of them are Oriental and most of them view antagonistically the Labour Party, then there should have been a larger swing towards the Likkud in the Histadrut than in the Knesset – in fact the opposite happened:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likkud</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


To be precise, I do not argue that the Oriental support for Begin is not a protest against the Labour Party; it probably is. What I question is whether this is a class protest.

Other related issues

My criticisms have been confined to Farjoun’s two main theses, but his article is unclear on wider issues. It is not clear whether it wishes to explain the causes of Begin’s ascent to power or whether it only confines itself to explaining the Oriental vote for Begin. This vote is only one, albeit important, reason for Begin’s rise but it is by no means the only one. Begin’s first government of 1977, the watershed point which signified the breakdown of Labour hegemony, was made possible not just by Oriental protest but by the protest vote of Occidentals for
Yadin's Democratic Movement for Change, and by the deep transformation in the ranks of the religious bloc of parties—traditional coalition partners of Labour which deserted it. These shifts as well as the continuous crisis of Labour still require proper analysis.
Observations in Gaza
S. Ur

On Friday, 9 April 1982, uniformed Israelis shot at worshippers outside the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. This incident triggered off a wave of protest throughout the occupied territories. In the Jabaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, just north of the town of Gaza, Israeli soldiers used firearms to disperse the demonstrations. Seven-year-old Suhail Ghabin, who was playing in the sand with his eleven-year-old sister, was hit by a bullet and seriously wounded. Unlike the demonstrators, who were aware of the danger and could try to seek shelter or flee, the children playing in the sand were sitting ducks. A Red Crescent ambulance called to evacuate the boy was stopped by the Israeli occupation authorities; and when finally the ambulance was allowed through, it was too late. Suhail died on the way to hospital.

In cases of this kind, the occupation authorities try to take possession of the body in order to prevent a public funeral. A secret burial is arranged in the middle of the night, under heavy military supervision and attended only by a few close relatives of the deceased. Suhail’s family, guessing the authorities’ intention, hurried to the mortuary and stole his body.

A public funeral was held. Thousands of people came out of their homes and walked towards the military compound. According to eyewitness reports, it seems as though fear had been transcended: women clad in black mourning attacked soldiers with their bare hands. Little children ran up to the patrolling jeeps and, baring their chests, teased the soldiers, ‘Shoot me! Shoot me!’ Old tyres, which are normally used by the refugees to weigh down the roofs of their huts and which the military had scrupulously confiscated a few days earlier and placed in a large heap inside the military compound, were set on fire by youths who managed to infiltrate the compound. The soldiers responded by shooting at the crowd and at the water tanks on the roofs of the huts – a common practice designed to punish the refugees by stopping their water supply. At the end of this round of shooting, curfew was imposed on the camp.

This incident was recounted to us in the course of our first evening in Gaza – a sort of initiation into the Gaza world – in the home of friends. We were given a factual account of the events that had taken place in the Gaza Strip during the week following the al-Aqsa incident. (Our hosts referred to those events in English as the ‘troubles’, a term apparently also used in Northern Ireland.) The tales of repression and resistance
we were told that evening, as well as the accounts and testimonies we were to hear during the next few days, are hardly known outside the Strip. 'There is no Hilton Hotel in this town,' remarked a Gazan friend, 'and journalists hate discomfort. They never stay here longer than a couple of hours.'

Wednesday, 21 April

The Gaza Strip begins some twenty minutes' south of the Israeli town of Ashkelon, at a road-block. A road-block is a rolled barbed-wire fence, or a strip of metal with protruding spikes stretched across the road. Beside this particular road-block, at the northern entrance to the Strip, under a large tent, sit four or five soldiers – border-guards and reservists – who supervise the entry and exit of vehicles and people travelling on this road. A road-block, as every Israeli Jew and every Palestinian Arab knows, has one purpose: to distinguish, to discriminate, ultimately to set apart. The road-block is directed at Palestinians, it is there to scrutinise them, to exercise power over them.

A Palestinian is firstly distinguished by the licence plate of his or her car; it is blue or grey (while Israeli vehicles have yellow plates) and bears a Hebrew letter denoting the locality where it was issued – R for Ramallah, N for Nablus, G for Gaza.

A Palestinian is, secondly, distinguished by name: an Arab name in an identity card sets the bearer apart as the sought-for object of scrutiny. Thirdly, the identity card distinguishes between religions – Jew, Muslim, Christian – or, in the more familiar binary classification: Jew and non-Jew. In Israel there are officially no Israelis – only Jews and non-Jews. A Palestinian is also identified by appearance: poverty, sweat and dirt, rotting teeth and matted hair, clothes in assorted third-world colours mark the Oriental manual labourer after a day's work – the Turk in Berlin, the Algerian in Lyon, the Palestinian in occupied Palestine.

The road-block encounter should not be construed as a symbol of occupation, neither should it be seen as an isolated facet of daily experience; for it is that experience, it is the truth of occupation. The road-block is a paradigm of power which undergoes many transformations yet remains the same. In it the Palestinians are not merely distinguished by number-plate, name or appearance; they become that number-plate, that name, those clothes. Abu Salam from Rafah does not possess a blue number-plate, nor does he bear and display an ID card with his name. In the road-block encounter, he is that blue number-plate marked with an 'R', or that official piece of paper.

A few kilometres past the road-block – through which my friend and I, being Jews, were allowed to pass on the nod – the driver has the choice between following the road straight through the town of Gaza or using the bypass which goes round the town and rejoins the straight road further south.
Road planning in Israel aims at bypassing areas which are predominantly inhabited by Palestinians. When driving from Haifa to Tiberias, for example, one could never tell that one is passing through a district whose population is predominantly Palestinian (the Galilee). Arab villages appear in the distance on the mountain slopes, rarely alongside the main road, as quaint reminders of the Galilee’s rusticity. Road signs hardly ever display directions to Arab localities. The same principle guides road construction in the territories occupied since 1967. A cursory glance at the map of projected settlements and roads in the West Bank reveals the intention. A Jew living in Gush Segev, a settlement block in the northern part of the West Bank (‘Samaria’), will soon be able to drive to Jerusalem or Tel-Aviv without going through Nablus and Ramallah and without meeting a single Palestinian. At the same time, a Palestinian wishing to go from Hebron to Bethlehem will have to travel right through Jewish towns such as Efrat. He will be forced to see occupation. The colonisation network and road grid in the occupied territories are designed so as to make Palestine invisible, and the Palestinians objects for inspection and scrutiny. This is why ‘Judea’ and ‘Samaria’ are not merely the names given by Israel to the north and south of the West Bank; rather, they denote an object distinct from the West Bank.

The Gaza bypass was designed for the Jewish settlers of the Rafah enclave and of Gush Qatif in the southern end of the Gaza Strip.

We drove into Gaza town. It has been compared to Pakistan, to North Africa. ‘This place looks like the Third World,’ remarked an Israeli friend who recently accompanied me through the streets of Gaza. He was referring to the ubiquitous poverty, heat, dust, sand and colours that range from yellow-brown to grey.

Our hosts, to whose home we promptly drove, did not conceal their distress at the recent deterioration of the situation in occupied Palestine. The ‘bestialisation’ of the Israeli military – as a major Hebrew daily recently called the wanton brutality increasingly practised by the forces of occupation – was the first topic of our conversation. Our hosts were agitated, yet spoke calmly in a measured tone, citing examples such as the one reported above.

In the Shati camp in Gaza town, Israeli Shin-Bet officer ‘Abu Sabri’ drove past a burning tyre. (Shin-Bet officers customarily decorate themselves with Arabic noms de guerre by which alone they are known to their Palestinian subjects.) He stopped, got out of his car and, finding no-one around who might be ordered to extinguish the fire, he rolled the burning tyre, pushing it with a stick towards the nearest house. He then opened the door and rolled the tyre onto a mattress on which a man was lying asleep. The victim, a family guest, woke up to find his blanket on fire, and threw it off while ‘Abu Sabri’ watched calmly. ‘Abu Sabri’ then opened a wardrobe, rolled into it the still burning tyre, closed the door and departed.

In Khan-Yunis, one quarter of the refugee camp was placed under
curfew after a gun had allegedly been stolen from a soldier on duty. We were told that this is what had really happened: a group of women surrounded the soldiers, disarmed him and forced him at gunpoint to shout pro-Palestinian slogans. Then they let him go but kept his weapon.

In the years 1967-72 the Gaza Strip had been the main centre of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. It was 'pacified' by Ariel Sharon, then military commander of the area. In an intensive counter-insurgency operation, during which tens of people were killed and hundreds jailed, Sharon brought to an end a situation in which 'the IDF ruled by day, the PLO by night,' as Gazans put it. Although active popular resistance had largely been suppressed, resentment against Israeli rule remained as powerful as ever. Israel's recent attempt to enforce the 'autonomy' plan—a regime of collaborators propped up by Israeli bayonets and bribes—was the match that rekindled the flame of resistance. This in turn has been met with a terrifying avalanche of repressive measures.

Thursday, 22 April

Nine days have elapsed since the curfew was imposed on Jabaliya. For the ninth successive day forty thousand people have been shut up in their homes, allowed out for two hours in every twenty-four in order to buy food. The catch is that no supplies are allowed into the camp and the local shops were emptied during the first few days of the curfew.

Jabaliya is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the area, numbering 40 to 45 thousand inhabitants according to UNRWA estimates. It is the only refugee camp with an Israeli military compound in the middle: a whitewashed edifice dating from the British Mandate period, surrounded by several rows of barbed-wire fences. Four tanks and a few jeeps are parked in the enclosure. Machine-gun barrels protrude from between the sandbags heaped on the roof and window sills. An Israeli flag flies from a tall pole on the roof: the symbol of the liberated Jewish people in its homeland.

As a child I lived in Jerusalem. On Saturdays I would go for walks with my father and see the border fence which, before 1967, ran between the west and east of the city. My father is not a militarist and at home I was never taught to regard Arabs as enemies. But I recall so well the sight of the Jordanian Legion border-guards, the barrels of their rifles protruding from between the piles of sandbags on the roofs and window sills of buildings along the other side of the fence. I knew they were my enemies; I read their hostility in that sight of sandbags and weapons. Uniforms and guns and sandbags speak a language which every child can understand, the more so when they are directed against him.

We wanted to enter the Jabaliya refugee camp, but were not allowed
Observations in Gaza

in. We tried the three entrances to the camp but finally had to settle for a view, from the outside, of a road-block encounter. Barbed wire and soldiers with a smattering of vulgar colonial Arabic arguing with various people who were trying to get into the camp. The curfew had been imposed by order of the local commander, with immediate effect; so many Jabaliyans who were not in the camp at the time were not allowed to return to their homes during the nine days. On top of this, if found outside the camp in the course of a routine identity check, Jabaliyans were liable to pay a heavy fine for . . . breaking the curfew. Therefore many Jabaliyans, workers and students, who happened to be outside when the curfew had been imposed, were left with the choice: either stay out in hiding at the home of a friend or relative, or try somehow to get back on.

In a sense, curfew is the opposite of a road-block. While the latter sets the Palestinians apart and trains the spotlight of power upon them, curfew throws the spotlight onto the holder of power himself. The only people to be seen on the street are the soldiers, patrolling, checking that order is maintained, that the Palestinians stay confined in their houses. Here power displays itself, shows its muscles and turns the Palestinians into spectators, a passive audience.

At about 4 pm the curfew was lifted for two hours. People streamed into the streets. Children, having been penned in all day, ran out to play. Although the curfew was suspended, the camp remained sealed – no-one was allowed in or out. Since food supplies were running low, and in some cases were exhausted altogether, many women used the chance of the recess to sneak out of the camp through the cactus thickets, and made their way to the nearest grocery shop outside the pale of Jabaliya. We saw them walking fast, almost running, the grocery bags on their heads, trying to keep off the main paths where they could be spotted by the occasional military patrol. The women were helping each other along, while people on the street were constantly on the lookout for Israeli patrol jeeps, sounding an alert whenever they spotted one.

The sense of solidarity displayed here is very different from the ideology of cooperation and social solidarity inculcated in the Israeli youth movements, an ideology which is part of the Zionist myth of the pioneering spirit. As an adolescent in post-1967 Israel, I had always regarded this spirit with suspicion. It seemed to me to be a politically manufactured myth, a piece of (possible) history transformed into a virtually official ideology. Standing outside the road-block at the entrance to the camp, I realised that what makes their type of solidarity real for these Palestinians is the fact of occupation, the experience of oppression. The consciousness of unity among Zionists is formed by the collective memory of persecution, while the uniting principle for the Palestinians is the reality of living under occupation. Paradoxically, occupation enslaves the Israelis by making them dependent on ideology, while it liberates the Palestinians by grounding their experience in social realities.
Observations in Gaza

Friday, 23 April

We spent the day in Rafah, which in a few days’ time would become a border town between the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip and Egypt. Rafah is much smaller than Gaza and the local refugee camp intermeshes with the town in such a way that it is hard to tell where the one ends and the other begins. We followed the Israeli armoured vehicle in its provocative glide down the main street. The four soldiers on it were helmeted and heavily armed. The machine-gun mounted on the vehicle was pointing at the pavement. The armoured jeep came to a gradual halt outside the mosque, just when the worshippers were coming out. I tried to imagine how they must feel, coming out of the mosque into the firing range of a deadly weapon. Later that day we learned that a week earlier the soldiers fired directly into the mosque while the people were still inside. We were shown the bullet holes in the walls.

Some friends took us on a tour of the ‘Canada’ camp. This camp was constructed by the Israelis several years ago, after they had bulldozed entire sections of Rafah in order to widen the streets and facilitate counter-insurgency operations. Rafah camp residents were allowed to move into the shacks erected in an area which in the years 1956-1967 had been used by Canadian units of the UN force. This is how the new camp got its name. Some five hundred refugee families presently live there.

The problem for these ‘Canadians’ on 23 April was that their camp was actually in that part of Rafah which in two days’ time was to be handed back to Egypt. As late as Friday, the residents had not been notified what their status would be as of the following Sunday. They had no guarantee that they would be able to cross from Rafah (Egypt) to their workplaces and schools in Rafah (Palestine). Neither were they sure that the Egyptian government would accept them. A feeling of helplessness was conveyed by the people we spoke to.

The border fence, newly erected and prepared for the final ceremony of withdrawal, put ‘Canada’ on the Egyptian side. In a few places the total lack of concern for the inhabitants stood out in all its absurdity. For example, four families whose houses happened to touch the barbed-wire border fence were ordered by the Israelis to block up with cement their windows and doors facing Israel and build new doors facing the other way. In an architectural sleight of hand, Palestinian dwellers of, say, 15 Jaffa Road became overnight the family on 23 Alexandria Boulevard.

The shiny barbed-wire fence mockingly bisected someone’s fruit orchard. During the 25 April hand-over celebrations at the newly built border terminal, just outside Rafah, the Egyptians let off fireworks. Two of the rockets fired actually burst into brilliant colours high up in the air; the other three ineptly dropped into the orchard, setting apricot trees on fire. Nobody seemed to care—the journalists on both sides were too busy admiring and filming the incandescent rockets of light.
against the greyish sky, and completely overlooked the subtler meaning of the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement, which was symbolically acted out on the ground.

Saturday, 24 April

Persons wounded by Israeli soldiers must pay their own hospital fees. This we learned on a visit to Gaza’s Sha‘fa hospital. In addition, they are liable to heavy fines, because being shot at or beaten up by soldiers is, according to the logic of the occupation, a sure sign that one was breaking the law. For this reason, many cases of injury are never reported, for fear of getting into worse trouble with the authorities.

In the hospital one learns the many meanings of the term ‘wounded’. We tend to measure the extent of brutality by body counts, not maimings; but in addition to the twenty or so unarmed civilians killed by Israelis during March and April, many more (probably several hundred) adults and children were wounded, maimed and disabled for life. Many blinded, many with mutilated faces, many who will never be able to have children, to breathe independently or to digest their food.

Outside Sha‘fa hospital, near the pavement, crouches the omnipresent military patrol jeep, and a pair of flashy rimless sunglasses scrutinise the passers-by.

Curfew was lifted in Jabaliya, and we drove into the camp which hitherto we had only seen from outside. Jabaliya camp – trench town, Palestine; the sandy roads charred with the molten black rubber of burning tyres; rows upon rows of shacks, mud huts, tin huts, breeze-block huts; television aerials. Masses of children playing in the wide open spaces where homes had been destroyed in the early 1970s, during Sharon’s ‘pacification of Gaza’, to make way for the tanks.

In the home of the Ghabin family, mourning services were led by a local Imam. According to custom the service should have been held a day earlier, on the seventh day; but the murdered boy’s eleven-year-old sister explains: ‘Well, yes, today is the eighth day, but we couldn’t hold the service yesterday because of the curfew.’ Very simple; the curfew prevented the gathering of friends and relatives, so the Imam issued a dispensation postponing the service to the next day. For the girl, curfew is ‘objective reality’ which at times conflicts with tradition, that’s all. Outside the Ghabins’ home, some fifty metres down the road, the grey-green military jeep, our ubiquitous chaperon, was lying in wait.

Sunday, 25 April

Rafah, day of withdrawal. The actual ceremony was to be held at noon at the main border terminal on the outskirts of Rafah. Only the Egyptians celebrated this final stage of withdrawal; in Israel it was regarded almost as a national tragedy.
Observations in Gaza

Most of the journalists and TV crews had been congregating at the terminal since early morning. In Rafah itself there were few reporters. Salah al-Din Street, named after the liberator of Palestine from the crusaders (known in the West as Saladin), was to be blocked in the middle with barbed wire. Two segments of fence stretched out, one from each side of the street. At noon, they will be joined up with another segment, completing the separation of Rafah-Sinai from Rafah-Palestine.

A unit of Israeli soldiers was stationed near the fence to supervise the final division of the town—jobs like disconnecting electricity and telephone lines, drilling holes in the tarmac road for the last segment of barbed-wire fence.

The local inhabitants filtered into the street. Women stood in groups and talked, shopkeepers curiously watched the crews at work and the children gathered in a growing multitude. No lessons were held on that day because parents did not want to send their children to school, for fear that at noon they might be left on the wrong side of the fence.

There was something like a continual contest between the children, who were moving closer to the fence and the soldiers, who were unsuccessfully pushing them back; a sort of ebb and flow of children and soldiers. The latter looked very tense; they pushed the children back not so much because these were getting in the way of the work on the fence, but because their very presence was felt by the soldiers as a kind of threat. The kids clearly realised this and used every chance to taunt the soldiers, to argue with them and appeared thoroughly entertained by the latter’s manifest nervousness. The border-guards used truncheons and rifle butts to push the children away. When some kids succeeded to slip through, the soldiers pointed their rifles at them and shouted in broken colonial Arabic, ‘Go away! Everyone your home! Go home!’; but the children were persistent. In about half an hour it was as tough they had learnt the rules of the new game: push forward, argue with the soldiers, get pushed back and shouted at, turn around and edge forwards again.

Suddenly, pak-pak-pak—the sound of shots reverberated through the whole street. The kids fled and within seconds all the shops were closed down. Four or five soldiers ran down the street, firing single shots in the air. Stones were thrown; I heard them land on the street but I was too far to see them. A few more shots were fired and then a tense silence descended on Salah al-Din Street. Now the pneumatic drill near the fence could be heard clearly, and the barbed wire, as it was drawn from one pole to the other across the road, made an electrifying sound.

Within fifteen minutes, the children were back on the street, the shops had been opened and everything seemed as though life was going back to normal following a minor disturbance. The young people once again moved up to see and the soldiers, feeling threatened as before, pushed them back. I moved away from the soldiers and the fence and stood among the crowd. Then I saw the crowd around me turn around and run, pursued by the soldiers who were firing. Instinctively I realised
that I must run with the children, escape the soldiers, take cover. I fled into a half-closed shop where a number of young workers had taken shelter. They let me in. I put my hand on my chest, to signal fear; they smiled.

A problem I faced in this as in other encounters with Palestinians in the Strip was one of disguise: I could not speak Hebrew, because then I would have been identified as an Israeli and the people would have been suspicious of me. Neither could I use Arabic, for then my Israeli accent would have betrayed me. Willy-nilly I found myself speaking English. But since most young Palestinians do not understand English well enough, I had to settle for a kind of pidgin English, which I found uncomfortable. My discomfort was compounded by the fact that many of these young people spoke good, idiomatically rich colloquial Hebrew, which they have acquired as workers in Tel-Aviv or in other Israeli towns which attract cheap Palestinian labour. In an encounter with a foreigner who does not speak Arabic, they naturally turn to Hebrew, which for them is the first foreign language. And so I found myself in countless situations in which I was speaking intentionally poor English and answered back in fluent Hebrew, which I pretended not to understand.

I recalled the experience of an Israeli friend who had participated in a demonstration held last November in Ramallah by the Israeli Committee for Solidarity with Birzeit University. The demonstrators were assaulted by border-guards, who used tear gas. In the judgement of many Israeli dissidents, that demonstration was a watershed in the history of the Jewish opposition to the occupation, for it signalled an end to the privileged status of Jewish protesters. I do not know whether this judgement is correct, but it is certainly true that many demonstrators were deeply shaken by that experience. My friend stood among the other demonstrators when the tear-gas canisters were fired, but for some reason she felt immobilised, unable to run. She had to be led away by local Ramalla youths who had been watching the entire confrontation from the sidelines. They took her away from the troubled area and gave her a lift to the main Ramallah-Jerusalem road. They instructed her to cover her head with a red kufiya as a disguise, so that the soldiers would not notice her. She arrived in Jerusalem safely, but deeply shaken. As a patriotic Israeli, she felt disturbed at having to disguise herself as a Palestinian, with a head-dress often associated with PLO guerrillas, in order to escape the Israeli soldiers.

I thought of her as I stood in the shop looking out at the occupation in action. The soldiers were running up and down, shooting in the air and lobbing tear-gas canisters into the alleys. The children used every chance, every moment when the coast was clear, to come out of the houses and hurl stones at the street or at the closed shops. Two vehicles bearing Israeli licence plates were demolished in next to no time.

The young workers in the shop said to me in broken English: ‘See what they do to us. We shall kill al-Yahud!’ I had heard similar statements
Observations in Gaza

on previous days, and almost as a rule the soldiers were referred to as ‘al-Yahud’ or ‘the Jewish’. I venture to say that in this context ‘Yahud’ does not mean ‘Jews’ in the general sense of this term. To these Palestinians, ‘al-Yahud’ means the soldiers, the conquerors, the foreign oppressors. An American friend who had recently visited the Galilee told me that although he persistently introduced himself as an ‘American Jew’, the Palestinian villagers just as persistently referred to him as ‘an American, not a Jew’.

The Zionists have made a lot of political capital out of such supposedly antisemitic expressions which are common in Palestinian anti-Israeli rhetoric. But I think that the Palestinians, or at least those young Palestinians who have only known the Israelis as occupiers and oppressors, are merely using the term that the Israelis use when referring to themselves, ‘the Jews’. In the media, in official publications as well as in daily discourse, the Israeli Jews commonly speak of themselves simply as ‘the Jews’ rather than ‘the Israelis’ or ‘Israeli Jews’. To accuse Palestinians of antisemitism because they express hostility towards ‘the Jews’ is to misunderstand their language. It is also to commit slander, by attributing to the Palestinians a uniquely European prejudice and doctrine, a product of European society and culture. When they speak of ‘the Jews’, Palestinians mean their Israeli enemy.

On returning to Gaza later that afternoon, we heard that Rafah had been placed under curfew.

Wednesday, 27 April

We visited Jabaliya camp again and spoke to two families whose homes had been demolished. The only remains of what used to be the homes of two ten-member families were the floor tiles and a wall or two. Both homes had been pulled down in the middle of the night, at short notice, because their sons were suspected of ‘terrorism’.

In the Israeli-occupied territories, such demolitions are carried out on the basis of suspicion rather than conviction. In theory at least a young man can be held as a suspect, then be fully acquitted in court and sent back to his family whose home has in the meantime been bulldozed.

The families are not allowed to rebuild their houses for a number of years. They must therefore live without a roof over their heads; at most, they may put up a tent in which to shelter during the winter rains.

Speaking to numerous Palestinians in the camp, I was impressed with a sense of optimism shared by the younger generation of Palestinians. I think that in this they differ from the older generation. I was struck by the extent to which the younger Palestinians, those under 30, showed a subtle understanding of Israeli society, politics and culture. I think they derive this understanding from their daily experiences as manual labourers in Israel. Going to work there, they enter into direct relations
of production with Israelis, learn their language and observe them at close quarters, thus gaining a view of Israel stripped of its myth, no longer as an all-powerful monolith but as it really is—a society cracked and riddled with deep conflict, like every class society. In this sense, working in Israel is exercising a profound influence on the minds of the Palestinians; it grants them a view of reality which is potentially revolutionary.

The sense of optimism which I detected in the words of those refugees' children conveyed, in simple terms, something like this message: 'The Israelis depend on our oppression, but we exist despite of it! This is the source of our strength and their weakness.'

**Thursday, 28 April**

Today is Israel's Day of Independence, and official colonisation ceremonies are being held in eleven new *Ma'ahazim* (military settlements, later to become civilian) in the occupied territories. One of them, Nahal-Nissanit, is in the north of the Gaza Strip.

The speakers were a Jewish Agency official, a senior army officer and a rabbi, representing the trident of contemporary Zionism—land-grabbing, military force and religious indoctrination. The first speaker explains, in broad outline, the colonisation programme for the Gaza Strip. The intention is clear: to surround Gaza with Israeli settlements. The Qatif block, south of Gaza, has been in existence for some time and the new Nahal-Nissanit is the first of a cluster of settlements planned to watch over Gaza from the north. I turn to one of the soldiers manning what is still a military outpost and ask, 'Where is the land planned for cultivation by the future settlers?' He points at the Palestinian citrus groves in the valley below and explains, in all sincerity, 'On such fallow, uncultivated territory'.

I turn back to face the stage where Rabbi Simhah Stetel, regional rabbi of the Qatif block, is expounding on Zionist semantics: *Nissanit* is a name which is not mentioned in the Scriptures. It is the name of a wild flower. A wild flower has a distinct quality—it clutches the ground, it strikes deep roots rapidly, all the more so if it is tended, cultivated. Then it takes such deep hold of the ground that it cannot be eradicated.'

*Gaza, May 1982*
The Palestine Communist Party 1919-48 Arab and Jew in the struggle for internationalism by Musa Budeiri 304pp £10.50

Mediation and Assassination: Count Bernadotte's Mission to Palestine in 1948 by Sune Persson A detailed investigation of an attempt to arbitrate in the conflict 366pp £10.50

Communism in the Arab East 1919-26 by Suliman Bashear The origins and early figures in the movement 200pp £8.50

Debate on Palestine edited by Fouzi el-Asmar, Uri Davis & Naim Khadr With contributions & documents by Fred Halliday, Mauzpen, Akiva Orr, Abna al-Balad etc – a sequel to Towards a Socialist Republic by the same editors £7.50 & £3.50

Iraq & the Kurdish Question by Sa'ad Jawad about 360pp £11.50

Nationalism and Self determination in the Horn of Africa edited by Ioan Lewis Contributions by Hussein Adam, Paul Baxter, Patrick Gilkes, Sally Healy, I. M. Lewis, James Mayall, David Pool, Michael Reisman, Allesandro Triulzi, Joseph Tubiana, Hakan Wiberg £6.00

Terramedia: themes in Afro-Arab relations by Mohamed Omer Beshir paper £4.50

Israel in Lebanon the Report of the International Commission to enquire into reported violations of International Law by Israel during its invasion of Lebanon The authoritative and devastating report which on the basis of international law examined the motives, conduct and weapons of Israel in an invasion which killed over 20,000 and made 100,000 homeless paper £4.50

War, Revolution and British Imperialism in Central Asia by Rick Stanwood

Palestinians over the Green Line edited by Alexander Schöchl Studies on the political and social relations between Palestinians either side of the 1967 Green Line, contributions by Reinhard Wiemer, Ibrahim Dukkak, Kamal Abdul fattah, Emile Sahliyeh, Alexander Flores £6.00

The unJewish State: the politics of Jewish Identity in Israel by Akiva Orr A fascinating account which through Supreme Court and Knesset documents reveals a fatal flaw in the zionist enterprise, for in spite of its atheistic foundation it relies on religious criteria for nationality determination £6.00

Women of Iran edited by Farah Azari A collection of papers written by members of the Iranian Women's Liberation Group showing how Islam has been interpreted and used to oppress women and how the present revolution has developed in its treatment of the movement paper £4.50

Journey through the Labyrinth – a photographic essay on Israel/Palestine by Kenneth Brown and Jean Mohr Studies in Visual Communications VIII, No.2 £4.00

Yemeni Agriculture and Economic Change by Richard Tutwiler and Sheila Carapico AIFS £6.00

Palestinian Rights: Affirmation & Denial edited by Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Medina £4.50

Ithaca Press 13 Southwark Street London SE1
The rise of Islam:  
What did happen to women? 
Azar Tabari

This article was written several years ago, as a discussion paper. Since then, a lot more literature on the same topic has come to my attention and new works have been published. I am nevertheless submitting it for publication without any updating, because I believe that some of what it contains may still serve as a starting point for further discussion and clarification.

Introduction

The recent emergence of Islamic movements in the Middle East, particularly during the Iranian events, has led among other things to new interest in historical investigations into Islam. Such investigations are long overdue, but are particularly important now, when prevailing mystifications and falsifications regarding the history of Islam serve to consolidate the ideological grip of a very reactionary political movement. Of no other single social issue is this more true than the situation of women under Islam. Not only do the present-day proponents of Islamic governments propose a most reactionary and retrogressive set of norms, values and rules of human behaviour as the sole salvation of women, but they also claim that Islam has already proved once before the validity of its emancipating mission by liberating Arab women from the oppressive circumstances prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia, in the dark period of so-called Jahiliya (ignorance). To be sure, the proponents of Islam do not claim that it granted women equal rights; neither do they propose to do so today. They argue that equality of rights, as understood and interpreted by Western thinkers and their followers in the Muslim world, is but a diversion from a real emancipation of women, because in this context equality has come to mean identity of rights. This, they argue, is both unnatural and unjust. Islam has offered the proper solution by assigning suitable responsibilities and rights to the two sexes. And in the recognition of these rights and responsibilities lies the only road to the emancipation of women.¹

Even on the Marxist left, although most agree on the reactionary character of Islamic codes for women today, there is often an unspoken acceptance that perhaps Islam did carry some positive gains for women as woman when it originally arose almost fourteen centuries ago. As a universalist religion, Islam provided the basis for the emergence and

59
consolidation of a centralised state that, no matter how one may judge its role today, served to propel Arabia forwards from its tribal pre-state conditions to a world empire.

How valid are such claims concerning the emancipatory role of Islam for women, either as argued by proponents of Islam today, or accepted almost as an article of a faith in historical progress by many on the Marxist left? What was the real status of women in pre-Islamic Arabia and how did it change as the Islamic community shaped itself? Did pre-Islamic Arab women really bury alive their female infants? Were pre-Islamic Arab women deprived of property rights? What were the rights of fathers, brothers and husbands over women and how did Islam modify these traditional norms and customs?

In attempting to answer some of these questions and open a discussion on others, two caveats have to be made. First, it is not the task of this essay to give an analysis of Islam in general. Therefore, statements related to this general question, the conditions of the rise of Islam and its subsequent impact and development, will be asserted rather than demonstrated. One justification for this choice is the already existing literature on this topic.²

The second caveat is more problematic: I am referring to the problem of sources and documentation. As Rodinson has summarised the problem, ‘There is nothing [in Muslim literature and sources] of which we can say for certain that it incontestably dates back to the time of the Prophet.’³ The Qur’an itself, the only text over which there is almost general agreement amongst all Muslim schools and sects, was not committed to writing during Muhammad’s lifetime. It is said to have been collated during ‘Uthman’s caliphate, some twenty years after Muhammad’s death. Being accepted as the word of God, it remains to this very day closed to scrutiny and not in any need of documentation and historiography as far as Muslims are concerned. The hadith, the body of oral tradition that is supposed to go back to the time of Muhammad himself, was collected in the second and third centuries of Islam, and the Shi‘i version only in the fourth century. The Abbasids in particular, in their attempt to run a vast empire on Islamic precepts, needed a thorough codification of laws, social and political guidelines to run the state. This had to be developed through formulations of precedents and interpretations of the Qur’an set by the Prophet himself, as in Islam the legislative powers belong solely to God, and His laws were conveyed only through the Prophet.⁴ The hadith, therefore, cannot be depended upon for factual and historical documentation. As Goldziher has aptly noted, the common formula that opens each hadith, ‘the Prophet said’, simply means that the matter as explained further is correct from a religious point of view, or more often that the matter as explained by the hadith is the right way of handling the given problem, and perhaps the Prophet would have also agreed to this.⁵ Nonetheless, the hadith is not without historical value of a different kind. Apart from facts that can be extracted from the stories told, they
reflect what the emerging Muslim community and state legislated, thought, and attributed to a previous period. Here I tend to agree with W. Robertson Smith's evaluation of the hadith and other such literary sources: the stories could be purely fictitious, but the hypothetical social settings could not be invented arbitrarily.6

The anthropological data on the period under discussion are also meagre and uncertain. Despite these difficulties, one can attempt to project certain logical and historical hypotheses, which – due to the difficulties just mentioned – must remain open to further documentation and challenge, and serve only to initiate a long-overdue historical investigation.

The historical setting

The emergence of Islam as a universalist religion and a centralising political movement led to and necessitated three inter-related social developments in early Islamic society (as compared to pre-Islamic Arabian society), which are relevant to our discussion of the situation of women.

First, the emergence of a centralised state, demanding total loyalty from all its subjects instead of the old traditional tribal loyalties, required the universalisation of all norms throughout the Islamic community. One unified code had to replace the multiplicity of norms, customs and arrangements that varied from one tribe to the next.

Second, this disintegration of the tribal system and the emergence of the larger community, while dissolving the tribal networks, responsibilities and mutual contracts, consolidated the smaller patriarchal family unit (composed of husband, wife and children). As against the larger and much looser kinship network, the individual family was now defined, delineated and consolidated through a whole series of regulations. Perhaps this affected the lot of women more than any other part of Islamic legislation.

Third, the individual was emphasised as against the tribe or other kinship networks. It was the individual that was responsible for his own salvation through conversion to the faith. It was the individual, and not the tribe, as was the custom of pre-Islamic Arabia, that was to be punished for any contravention of the social code.7

It was this combination of the emergence of the larger community of Muslims, coupled with the consolidation of the smaller family unit and the emphasis on individuality, all against the background of a disintegrating tribal system and the breaking-up of the larger kinship networks, which explains the changes that occurred in the situation of women. To examine these changes we shall start from a discussion of the family and the various legislations and codifications surrounding it. This will cover most of the points related to women. Other issues, such as female infanticide, will be dealt with at the end.
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

Tribe, family and individual

There has been a long-standing discussion about the existence or otherwise of a matriarchal period in Arabia. W. Robertson Smith, whose book *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* remains to this day the single most valuable source on the topic, makes a strong case for the predominance of the matriarchal family in Arabia. However, much of the evidence that is marshalled in support of the matriarchal theory could be explained even more convincingly in other and simpler ways. For example, one need not adhere to a matriarchal theory to explain the factually established pattern of women staying with their own tribe (rather than moving to the husband’s tribe) after marriage. One only has to remember that a very large number of young and middle-aged men spent prolonged periods (measured in years) away from their place of residence with trade caravans. Under these circumstances it would seem quite natural for the woman to stay with her own tribe to enjoy their protection and help, rather than move into an alien tribe. It seems more likely that at the time of the emergence of Islam, the Arabian peninsula was not going through a transition from matriarchal to patriarchal family. Rather, it was going through a period of consolidation of the family unit (which was patriarchal, to be sure) at the expense of the larger kinship networks and tribal fluidity. The earlier, tribal norms were in some ways more favourable to women, accepting a laxer attitude to sexual and marital relations. In certain cases they gave women *de facto* rights to divorce, and even allowed polyandrous practices. (This may have been connected with the long periods during which a man was away from home, making it acceptable for a woman to take another husband.) Let us look more closely at some of these pre-Islamic customs.

There seems to be sufficient evidence that in pre-Islamic Arabia there existed three types of marriage, which differed from each other in the arrangements for the residence of the wife and children. (It should be pointed out that, in the eyes of contemporary society, the main issue was the eventual tribal affiliation of the children rather than the location of the wife.)

First, the woman could leave her own tribe and join the husband’s, in which case all the children would automatically belong to the husbands tribe, unless the wife’s tribe had stipulated conditions to the contrary.

Second, the wife could stay with her own tribe and the husband would pay her occasional visits. In this case the children would belong to their mother’s tribe, or join their father’s tribe after the first few years of infancy. It is apparently this mode of marriage that provided the basis for the later Islamic legislation, according to which the mother has guardianship of her sons and daughters up to the ages of two and six respectively.

Third, the woman could stay with her tribe and the husband would join her. Here the children would belong to the mother’s tribe.
W. Robertson Smith cites many examples from different sources to illustrate these different types of marriage. Here is one such story:

"An illustration of this kind of union as it was practised before Islam is given in the story of Salma bint 'Amr, one of the Najjar clan at Medina (Ibn Hisham, p88). Salma, we are told, on account of her noble birth (the reason given by Moslem historians in other cases also for a privilege they did not comprehend), would not marry any one except on condition that she should be her own mistress and separate from him when she pleased. She was for a time the wife of Hashim the Meccan, during a sojourn he made at Medina, and bore him a son, afterwards famous as 'Abd al-Mottalib, who remained with his mother's people. The story goes on to tell how the father's kin ultimately prevailed on the mother to give up the boy to them. But even after this, according to a tradition in Tabari, 1:1086, the lad had to appeal to his mother's kin against injustice he had suffered from his father's people... The same conditions underlie other legends of ancient Arabia, e.g., the story of Omm Kharija, who contracted marriages in more than twenty tribes, and is represented as living among her sons, who, therefore, had not followed their respective fathers."

Amina, Muhammad's mother, is said to have stayed with her tribe, and 'Abdallah, Muhammad's father, paid her a visit. Muhammad himself is said to have lived with his mother until her death, at which time his father's kin took charge of him.

More interestingly, it seems that it was acceptable for a woman to ask for sexual intercourse (outside any formal union), or to reject her husband's demand for sexual intercourse, without incurring any shame or guilt. Again the stories implying such norms are post-Islamic; but regardless of their factual value—which is often not very great—they show that even several centuries after Islam the Muslim historians did not find it necessary to associate shame or guilt or scorn with these pre-Islamic customs. Robertson Smith quotes from Aghani (16:106) a story related to the marriage of Hatim and Mawiya: 'The women in the Jahiliya, or some of them, had the right to dismiss their husbands, and the form of dismissal was this. If they lived in a tent they turned it round, so that if the door faced east it now faced west, and when the man saw this he knew that he was dismissed and did not enter.' He later summarises the three features characteristic of the marriage of Mawiya as follows: 'She was free to choose her husband, received him in her own tent, and dismissed him at pleasure.' We must add parenthetically that the same story and many similar ones also show that the later Muslim theologians' boast that in Islam women cannot be married off against their wishes, unlike the Jahiliya period when women are supposed to have been treated like cattle, is unfounded. At least in some parts of Arabia, a woman would only marry the man she chose. It is likely that Muhammad, as in many other cases that will be discussed later,
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

selected among the existing customs those that were most suited to the general development of a universalist religion with emphasis on the individual.

The story associated with the conception of Muhammad himself contains at once a case of rejection and demand on the part of a woman of nobility:

'Taking ‘Abdullah by the hand ‘Abdu’l-Muttalib went away and they passed — so it is alleged — … the sister of Waraqa b. Naufal … When she looked at him she asked, "Where are you going Abdullah?" He replied, "With my father." She said; "If you will take me you can have as many camels as were sacrificed in your stead." "I am with my father and I cannot act against his wishes and leave him," he replied.

‘Abdul-Muttalib brought him to Wahb … and he married him to his daughter Amina …

'It is alleged that ‘Abdullah consummated his marriage immediately and his wife conceived the apostle of God. Then he left her presence and met the woman who had proposed to him. He asked her why she did not make the proposal that she made to him the day before; to which she replied that the light that was with him the day before had left him …

'My father Ishaq b. Yasar told me that he was told that ‘Abdullah went in to a woman that he had beside Amina b. Wahb when he had been working in clay and the marks of the clay were on him. She put him off when he made a suggestion to her because of the dirt that was on him. He then left her and washed and bathed himself, and as he made his way to Amina he passed her and she invited him to come to her. He refused and went to Amina who conceived Muhammad.'

Note, by the way, that according to the story Waraqa’s sister was not only very rich (she offered to give ‘Abdullah 100 camels for his sexual favours) but also had the power to dispose of her property as she wished.

Marriage and sexual codes under Islam

Muhammad, in his attempts to ban all forms of marriage except those regarded as proper in Islam and to strengthen the family headed by the husband, had to impose very severe punishments for zina’ (sexual intercourse outside marriage or concubinage): 100 lashes to each partner if the woman is unmarried, death if the woman is married. And the husband of a disobedient wife is recommended to take recourse to a whole range of punishments, ranging from cutting off her allowance to beating. It seems unlikely that such strict punishments would have been necessary if extra-marital sexual relations and rejection by the wife of her husband’s sexual advances were very unusual or were already stigmatised as socially unacceptable and subject to scorn and contempt.
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

Numerous Qur'ānic verses (I have located 15 at one count) describe in amusing detail what sexual relations are permitted, which ones are prohibited, and whom one can or cannot marry. In pre-Islamic Arabia, a whole range of marriages existed and were acceptable. Some, such as the musha‘ marriage where several men shared a common wife, were acceptable and existed only amongst the poorer members of the tribes, those who could not each afford a bride-price. Other marriages, such as istibdha‘, where a husband would send his wife to a strong man in order to get strong offspring, were short-termed and had a specific goal. Many marriages, particularly among the heads of tribes, were political acts. One source lists ten different types of marriage, most of which were later explicitly banned in Islam. Apart from musha‘ and istibdha‘, which we have already mentioned, he cites the following: istibdal, where two men would temporarily swap their wives—banned in the Qur’an (4:20-21); maqt, that is, the automatic right of a son to inherit his father’s wives—banned in the Qur’an (4:19); mut‘a, temporary marriages that are automatically annulled at the end of the specified period—still prevalent amongst Shi‘is and Malikis, but banned in all other Islamic sects; shighar, an arrangement between two families where each marriage would count as the mahr (the bride-price) for the other, so that no bride-price would be paid—banned under Islam by the ruling that the bride-price must be paid to the woman herself; sifah, basically amounting to prostitution—banned in many Qur’ānic verses (along with khiddan, that is taking free lovers), e.g., 4:25, 5:5. There seems to have also existed a custom of offering one’s wife’s sexual services to another man in exchange for certain favours. Several verses in the Qur’an forbid husbands to prostitute their wives. One’s female slaves were also not to be forced into prostitution against their wishes, though otherwise it was not banned.

A word must also be said here about polygamy. Muslim apologists have offered various justifications and interpretations of this topic. Some hail it as the proper solution for correcting the supposed arithmetical imbalance between men and women. There are always, they argue, more women than men—especially in times of war, and Arabia at the time of Muhammad was certainly a war-ridden zone. Others claim that the famous Qur’ānic verse (4:3) which commands men to be just to all their wives practically outlaws polygamy, as it is impossible for a man to practice such justice. More pragmatic theoreticians accept that Islam neither invented nor banned polygamy. But they claim that by restricting the number of wives to four and by commanding the practice of fairness towards all wives, Islam improved the status of wives. Mutahhari devotes almost a quarter of his aforementioned book to the discussion of polygamy and insists that Muhammad strictly enforced the ‘four wives only’ law to the extent that if men with more than four wives were converted to Islam, he would force them to abandon their extra wives. He cites several hadith in support of his argument—none of which stops him from also recognising without the slightest hint of
any moral or religious qualm that Muhammad himself in the last ten years of his life had ten wives and many more concubines. Shari‘ati, on the other hand, who does not like portraying a Muhammad who does not practice what he preaches, dates the revelation of verse 3 of *sura* 4 to the eighth year after hijra, that is, when Muhammad already had all his ten wives and it would have been unfair and inhuman to abandon any of them. The generally accepted date of the marriage legislations in *sura* 4 is shortly after the battle of Uhud, in the third year after hijra.

But there are several problems with this whole line of justifications and interpretations of *sura* 4, verse 3.

First, as Rodinson has noted, 'It is, in fact, by no means certain that polygamy was so widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia. It is hard to see how an encouragement to take concubines if one is afraid of not acting fairly towards a number of wives can be a move in the direction of the supposedly more moral ideal of monogamy. Moreover, the Koranic text is clearly not a restriction but an exhortation, somewhat vaguely (for us) connected with fairness to orphans. Probably, as a result of battles and other factors, the community of Medina included more women than men. Those who had lost their fathers, and women especially, were not always well treated by their guardians, who took advantage of their position to rob them. Muslim widows and orphans had to be married off as soon as possible. Once again, in order to understand a phenomenon, it is necessary to set it in its historical context before allocating praise or blame in the name of supposedly eternal moral, religious or political dogmas.'

Second, the verse in question is not only highly exhortative; it is by no means restrictive. The numbers two, three, four, are used in the verse merely as numerical examples and in no way can one take the verse to mean *no more* than four. Other verses in the Qur’an, e.g. 4:24, encourage men to take as many wives as they can afford. What does in fact call for a historical explanation – something that has never been offered, and which I am myself unable to provide – is why the later Muslim theologians took *sura* 4, verse 3 to be a restrictive clause at all.

As already mentioned, Islam banned some of the previously practised forms of marriage in an attempt to universalise norms and customs across the Muslim community and to supersede varying tribal practices. Some legislation clearly aimed at eliminating what was considered spurious sexual relations and at consolidating the family unit (e.g., banning *sifah*, *khiddan*, and *istibda‘*). Other prohibitions would both strengthen the family and establish the primacy of individual over tribal and kinship rights – an important element in all universalist religions, which call for individual conversions and responsibilities, and promise individual salvation (as opposed to group rights and responsibilities). The ban against *shighar* and *maqti* would seem to emphasise the importance of woman as an individual. The same observation goes for the insistence on paying the bride-price to the
woman herself rather than to her father. This practice, however, was already becoming dominant before the emergence of Islam.\textsuperscript{18}

Closely related to the consolidation of the family and the new emphasis on individualism was Islam's insistence on the certainty of fatherhood, clearly a problem with practices such as musha', istibdal, or offering one's wife's sexual services in exchange for favours. Strict observation of a waiting period for a woman prior to a new marriage was also imposed to the same end (3 periods after a divorce — Qur'an, 2:228 — and four months and ten days after the death of the husband — 2:234 — the extra forty days are presumed to be for respect of the dead man).

Correspondingly, divorce became more restricted and was regarded unfavourably. In pre-Islamic Arabia, at least in those parts where women stayed with their own tribes and retained their own tent, it seems that they had the right to discontinue the marriage at any time; so had the men, of course. The only constraint seems to have been that the woman's tribe would have to pay back the bride-price to the man's tribe. Moreover, if a man divorced his wife but did not claim back the mahr he had paid, he would retain the right to go back and claim the wife again.\textsuperscript{19} Islam outlawed this practice by discouraging men from keeping women 'suspended', as it was called; it limited the time within which a man could go back and seek reconciliation to the three-period waiting time of the divorced wife; and it prohibited remarriage with the same woman after three consecutive divorces, unless the woman was first married to another man (Qur'an 2:230).

In mut'a marriage, the contract was automatically terminated after a prescribed period. This was a very common practice, considering the 'mobile' life style of many men. Rodinson quotes Ammianus Marcellinus saying of the Arabs in the fourth century AD: 'Their life is always on the move, and they have mercenary wives, hired under a temporary contract. But in order that there may be some semblance of matrimony, the future wife, by way of dower, offers her husband a spear and a tent, with the right to leave him after a stipulated time, if she so elects.'\textsuperscript{20}

Robertson Smith considers the mut'a already a restriction on the previous rights of women, where they could divorce their husbands at any time.\textsuperscript{21}

Apart from mut'a, Islam further restricted women's divorce rights by leaving it only to the husband to decide on divorce. Although the practice of foregoing one's mahr for a divorce continues to exist in Muslim countries up to now, it no longer guarantees the wife a divorce: the husband has the right to refuse a divorce even if the wife is prepared to forego her mahr. Only very limited circumstances (such as disappearance of a husband over four years, or extreme physical deformities leading to sexual impotence) entitle a wife to ask an Islamic judge for a divorce. The final decision is left to the judge, however.
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

Honour, shame and the veil

Along with these elaborate and restrictive rules of marriage and divorce, new concepts of honour, chastity and modesty for women began to emerge. We have already noted that in many stories on pre-Islamic Arabia, in poetry and in hadith (related to the circumstances of Muhammad's conception)—regardless of the factual value of such stories—no concept of shame or dishonour comes through regarding women's lax sexual relations and frequent marriages. We have argued that the severe punishment against zina was aimed at uprooting these practices. The question of the veil itself also makes sense in this context of trying to create a new image of modesty in women. The origin of the veil (the large scarves that women wore in Arabia) remains in dispute. What is clear, however, is that, regardless of its pre-Islamic functions, in the Qur'an women are urged to cover their bosoms, to conceal their ornaments, and to avoid making noises with their ankle ornament (khalkhal) as a sign of modesty and to show these only to their husband or to those with whom they could or should not have sexual relations. Here is the full text of sura 24, verse 31:22

'And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward; and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or what their right hand owns, or such men as attend them, not having sexual desire, or children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's private parts; nor let them stamp their feet, so that their hidden ornament may be known. And turn all together to God, O you believers; haply so you will prosper.'

That is, women are commanded not simply to cover themselves, but to cover themselves for a specific purpose: to keep men's eyes off them, not to try to attract men through physical display and sensuous games.

Muhammad's wives are ordered even more severe restrictions—these are presumed commendable for all Muslim women to abide by:

'Wives of the Prophet, you are not as other women. If you are god-fearing, be not abject in your speech, so that he in whose heart is sickness may be lustful; but speak honourable words. Remain in your houses; and display not your finery, as did the pagans of old... '(33: 33-34)

And further in the same sura:
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

'O believers, enter not the houses of the Prophet, except leave is given you for a meal, without watching for its hour. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have had the meal, disperse, neither lingering for idle talk; that is hurtful to the Prophet, and he is ashamed before you; but God is not ashamed before the truth. And when you ask his wives for any object, ask them from behind a curtain; that is cleaner for your hearts and theirs. It is not for you to hurt God's Messenger, neither to marry his wives after him, ever; surely that would be, in God's sight a monstrous thing.' (33:53)

Up to this day, any physical contact between a man or a woman who may be sexually attracted to each other is forbidden in Islam. Mutahhari recommends that women working in modern offices or going to universities must wear gloves at all times to avoid possible accidents of touch. Even touching through gloves or other clothes is permissible only if there is no intention of enjoyment or games.23

The last two issues to be discussed are that of inheritance and female infanticide. Muslim writers on the subject of inheritance often state that Islam instituted inheritance and property rights for women, something that they were presumably deprived of in pre-Islamic Arabia.24 This is simply false and in contradiction to many statements in the Muslim hadith itself. For example, if women had no property rights, it becomes inexplicable how a woman such as Khadija (Muhammad's future wife) is supposed to have had large fortunes and sent off sizeable trade caravans, several of which were led by Muhammad. Presumably she had inherited the wealth either from her father or from a previous husband. The story of Waraqa's sister cited before is also testimony to the existence of women with considerable property and complete right over its disposal. There are numerous examples to the same effect.

What the historical evidence points to is that in some cities, such as Madina, where an established patriarchal culture had taken root (possibly under the influence of Judaism from which Islam took over a vast number of its civil codes and religious practices) women do not seem to have had a share in inheritance; while in other cities, in particular Muhammad's own town of Mecca, they did have a traditional share, half that of a man.25 Similar provisions existed concerning blood-money (at the time of Muhammad 100 camels for an adult male and fifty for an adult female) and in witnessing procedure (where the testimony of two women could replace that of one man).26 These Meccan customs Muhammad institutionalised across the Muslim community.

The practice of female infanticide seems to have existed in some areas, but not at all to the extent that has been generally alleged later. Robertson Smith refers to one source indicating 'that the practice had once been general, but before the time of the Prophet had nearly gone out, except among the Tamim.'27 He, along with most other writers, tends to attribute the occasional practice to poverty. He cites several examples where it seems that the practice of infanticide had appeared
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

again only after long periods of severe drought. The practice seems to have affected both male and female children, but more the latter. As men were more mobile and more vital to the continuing of the traditional trade and possibly pastoral life and defence of the tribe, sons were taken care of, while female infants were seen as useless burdens upon already meagre resources.28

The Qur’anic verses concerning infanticide refer to general infanticide in three places (6:141, 152; 17:33) and to female infanticide only once (81:8).

Conclusion

So what can we conclude from this survey? I think the most general observation that can be made today remains roughly the same as was made about a century ago by Robertson Smith regarding the Islamic system of marriage:

‘Though Islam softened some of the harshest features of the old law, it yet has set a permanent seal of subjugation on the female sex by stereotyping a system of marriage which at bottom is nothing else than the old marriage of dominion.

‘It is very remarkable that in spite of Mohammed’s humane ordinances the place of woman in the family and in society has steadily declined under his law. In ancient Arabia we find, side by side with such instances of oppression as are recorded at Medina, many proofs that women moved more freely and asserted themselves more strongly than in the modern East.’29

Remarkable though this verdict may be, it is nevertheless not surprising or illogical. No matter what the impact of Islam may have been in other aspects of social life in Arabia and elsewhere as it spread through countries and continents, it invariably had the effect of institutionalising the subjugation of women. The disintegration of tribal ties and emergence of the community of Muslims may have given the general community new strength in the face of outsiders, but it lost women a source of protection they had enjoyed, that of their tribal solidarity. This, along with the consolidation and rigid institutionalisation of the patriarchal family, put women in a weaker position within the family. In the face of undesirable marriages they could no longer ask for a divorce or enjoy the support of their tribe in such a dispute, and had to abide by newly instituted norms of modesty and be more and more secluded ‘behind a curtain’, as Muhammad’s wives were advised. That Islam became from its inception a state religion par excellence – in the words of Rodinson, Muhammad combined Jesus Christ and Charlemagne in a single person – has contributed to the consolidation of this subjugation in a particular way: throughout the centuries the forces backing the perpetuation of this subjugation were not limited to economic and social factors, customs and cultural pressures, families,
etc. It was directly the state itself, its laws, its ideology, and the culture it regenerated, that at every level reproduced and enforced the subjugation of women in Muslim societies. To this day this remains the distinguishing feature of the subjugation of Muslim women.

References

1 An exhaustive coverage of these arguments is given in Murteza Mutahhari’s book, Nizam-e Huquq-e Zan dar Islam (Persian text, The System of Women’s Rights in Islam), Qum, 1974, particularly Chapter 5, entitled, ‘The Human Status of Women in the Qur’an’, pp107-142.

2 Amongst such works, to mention only a few contemporary sources, are: Marshal Hodgson, The Venture of Islam, three volumes, Chicago, 1974; Bernard Lewis, The Arabs in History, London, 1950; and Maxime Rodinson, Mohammed, London, 1971.

3 See Rodinson, op cit, pp x-xii.


5 Goldziher, op cit, p89.


7 For a fuller discussion of these points, see I. Goldziher, op cit, pp14-19; M. Rodinson, op cit, pp25-37, 140-152; and M. Hodgson, op cit, vol. 1, pp130-135.

8 For this discussion see also Hodgson, op cit, vol. 1, p181; and Rodinson, op cit, pp229-232.

9 See W. Robertson Smith, op cit, pp76-79; Rodinson, op cit, p230.

10 W. Robertson Smith, op cit, pp85-86.

11 Ibid, pp80-81.


14 M. Mutahhari, op cit, pp413-414.

15 Ibid, p416.

16 Shari’ati, Zan dar Chashm-o Del-e Muhammad (Persian text, Women in Muhammad’s Eyes and Heart), p32.

17 Rodinson, op cit, p232.

18 See Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1961, p447: ‘But even before Islam it had already become generally usual for the bridal gift to be given to the woman herself and not to the guardian.’


20 Rodinson, op cit, p15.

21 Robertson Smith, op cit, p83.


23 Mutahhari, Mas’alay Hijab (Persian text, The Problem of the Veil), Qum, pp243-244.

24 See, for example, Mutahhari, Nizam, p247.
The rise of Islam: what did happen to women?

25 See Rodney, op cit, p232; Robertson Smith, op cit, pp116-117.
27 Robertson Smith, op cit, p292.
29 Ibid, pp121-122.
30 Rodinson, op cit, p293.
State capitalism in Egypt
A critique of Patrick Clawson
Clive Bradley

Patrick Clawson’s analysis of the development of capitalism in Egypt (Khamsin 9) is a serious contribution to our understanding of the relationship between Egyptian capital and imperialism. It is a major advance over the conceptions prevalent on the left, which are based on the analysis of the Egyptian Marxists Anwar Abdel-Malik, Mahmoud Hussein, and Samir Amin.1 In particular, Clawson has demolished the myth that Egypt’s poverty is a product of foreign interference. In demonstrating the growth of Egyptian capital from the internationalisation of (money) capital, he has broken with the nationalist assumptions of those previous analyses that have worked within the sociology of underdevelopment. But there are major gaps in Clawson’s theoretical framework, and serious problems—and errors—in his analysis. Since most of the anomalies in Clawson’s position are in his sections on the Nasser period, and since an understanding of this period is most crucial in grasping the political questions now posed, I shall concentrate on his account of ‘state capitalism’. However, since this cannot be taken in isolation, a few words on the preceding history are in order.

Capitalism and class struggle

‘The history of Egypt over the last two centuries is the history of class struggle—primarily, the struggle of the international capitalist class to mould the Egyptian economy to their needs... The history of Egypt’s economy is therefore primarily a history of capital’s advances’ (p109).2

Clawson’s history of Egyptian capitalism ‘from above’ argues that resistance to capital’s advances has not been successful. This theme, which permeates his analysis, is both theoretically and politically disorienting. It is unfortunate that few of his political conclusions are more than implicit; yet this lack of explicitness is a consequence of the focus of his analysis. Effectively, Clawson simply ignores the question of anti-capitalist struggle, whether potential or actual, on the part of the working class or the pre-capitalist classes. In part, this may be due to lack of information about the working class movement. But some information is available, and no account of the development of capital can be complete unless it recognises that capital can exist only in a
context of class struggle. No country’s history presents a unilateral process of capitalist hegemonisation, and Egypt’s is no exception. If we are to arrive at strategic conclusions for a future struggle for socialism, we need to know at least as much about the working class as we do about its oppressors.  

The internationalisation of capital is certainly a valuable analytical starting point. Elsewhere Clawson has dealt in more historical detail with the way the circuits of capital are internationalised. But however useful his perspective is, it remains incomplete without an analysis of the precise relationship between the various circuits of international capital and pre-capitalist modes of production, and on this point he is weak. Such an extension of his outlook would provide some crucial elements lacking in his analysis of Egypt: an explanation of class alliances and an investigation of the transformation of the labour process. Clawson fails to probe the actual relationship between ‘capital’s advances’ and the reorganisation of production, and consequently fails to examine the locus of class conflict. The dynamics of capitalist production are therefore never specified, and the nature of capitalist ‘development’ in its historical totality is not conceptualised.

The Origins of Commodity Production

Clawson argues that Egyptian cotton production arose as a result of the needs of commodity capital undergoing a process of internationalisation. Long-staple cotton thus became a commodity for foreign capitalists, whilst production within Egypt remained organised along pre-capitalist lines. ‘The internationalisation of capital’, he writes, ‘not any conditions internal to Egypt, was the primary factor behind the growth of cotton production, and therefore of the market, in Egypt’ (p80). Yet it ought to be asked, why did the Egyptian state under Muhammad ‘Ali choose to begin commercial production of cotton for export? Marxist tradition argues that the penetration of capitalism into pre-capitalist societies requires a high degree of violence to break the resistance of traditional classes. Whether violence is actually necessary, of course, is debatable. But the least that can be said is that the state in Egypt was extraordinarily willing to serve the needs of commodity capital. His monocausal view of capitalist development prevents Clawson from even raising the question. The decision to begin long-staple cotton production and the consequent initial reorganisation of cultivation was only one of Muhammad ‘Ali’s efforts to change the economy he had inherited from the Mamluks. It was accompanied by a small-scale industrialisation programme, an extensive project of rural infrastructural development, the abolition (and later the partial re-composition) of the tax-farming system, and so on. It was not imposed on the Egyptian state, but was actively chosen. It is thus one-sided at best to attribute the origins of cotton production simply to the needs of the
internationalisation of capital. That was certainly one factor, but another was the need of the Egyptian (pre-capitalist) state itself to augment a (pre-capitalist) surplus that had been enormously eroded by Mamluk/tax-farmer rule. Muhammad 'Ali's 'modernisation' programme was at least in part a strategy of the ruling class within Egypt (chiefly, at this point, the state) designed to extract a surplus with improved techniques. The sale of cotton was one such attempt.

It is significant that Clawson's treatment of 'Ali's industrialisation programme appears to overlook the theoretical problem involved. In explaining its demise, he writes: 'The failure of Ali's factories was due not only to market forces . . . but also to the European powers, who imposed free trade on Egypt . . . The dominance of capitalist industry in Europe meant the internationalisation of commodity capital only.' (p85).

But it is difficult to square the implication that 'Ali's factories were capitalist with Clawson's insistence that Egypt was not capitalist at the time. The major reason for the failure of 'Ali's factories was that no capitalist dynamic sustained them. Since they were designed not to accumulate capital ('Ali not being a capitalist), but rather to fuel a 'modernisation' process made requisite by pre-capitalist dynamics, machinery was not renewed and the factories simply crumbled. Far more important than the small-scale growth of non-capitalist industry in the Muhammad 'Ali period was the phenomenal extension of corvée labour in rural 'public' works. The underlying dynamic is that of a pre-capitalist state, but Clawson's one-sided view of capitalist penetration leads him to fail to follow through the logic of his own analysis.

Recognition of the role of the pre-capitalist mode of production in Egypt's history provides an explanation of the class alliances upon which the Egyptian state was based; the mutual interests of foreign capital and the Egyptian state, though temporary and ultimately partial underlay the transformation of Egyptian political economy in the Khedival and colonial periods. Capitalism, of course, ultimately became dominant, but the obstacles to and force of its penetration were not generated by the needs of accumulation in the advanced capitalist countries alone.

Having proposed no explanation of how the Egyptian state emerged from specific political and economic developments, Clawson can give no meaning to the expression 'Egyptian capital'. Why did some local entrepreneurs come to acquire nationalist ideologies? What was the basis for national antagonism between foreign and Egyptian capital? Clawson's optic of the internationalisation of capital can leave one bewildered as to how nationalism emerged in Egypt at-all. Likewise, his silence about the relationship between the bourgeois Wafd Party and the labour movement in the inter-war years leaves a gaping historical vacuum in any analysis of the class struggle that has shaped Egyptian capitalism.
State capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

‘State Capitalism’ and Capitalist Production

Clawson’s analysis of the Nasser period is a polemic against the conception that the regime was socialist. It was instead, he maintains, ‘state capitalist’. He creates considerable confusion by labelling the ‘socialist’ assessment as ‘radical’, a term he also applies to ‘neo-Marxist’ theories, thus suggesting that all ‘radicals’ held that Nasser’s Egypt was socialist. In fact the term ‘state capitalism’ is employed far more widely by Marxists, while the designation ‘socialist’ is pretty well confined to the Nasserists themselves. Clawson’s proof that Egypt remained capitalist thus seems somewhat pointless. It is far more important to analyse how capitalism operated in Egypt, and Clawson’s position here is marred by deep ambiguities. These arise from an unspecified conception of modes of production, and of the capitalist mode of production in particular.

Clawson quite rightly rejects the absurd view of Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein and others, who equate capitalism with the market. His analysis of the internationalisation of capital explicitly situates capital as ‘a movement, not a thing at rest’, as Marx said. He is therefore able to provide insights into many aspects of capitalist development. But he does not spell out its basic dynamics, and at times implies certain conceptions that could be misleading.

The basis of his claim that Nasserist Egypt was not socialist is a comparison between it and a hypothetical socialist society. ‘To demonstrate that Egypt under Nasser was not capitalist’, he writes, ‘we must set forth the features which distinguish capitalism from socialism... The three fundamental features of capitalism are: first, production for a market by units which are forced by competition to maximise profits; second, a large group of people, who are... free to work where they wish and free of any other means of making a living; and third, control over the means of production by a small group of people. All of these are compatible with state ownership of the means of production’ (p101).

These criteria are ambiguous. Capitalism is defined by generalised commodity production (labour-power and the means of production being themselves commodities) under which the drive to accumulate more capital is primary: accumulation for accumulation’s sake. The extraction of surplus-value arises from the nature of capitalist production (not from the need to compete, in the last analysis). It is not just competition on the market, but the capitalist law of value that forces capitalists to continually revolutionise the means of production in order to increase the rate of surplus-value, and so to accumulate. Clawson’s three criteria make no explicit reference to relations of production; arguably, the three together may amount to the same thing, but it is clear that Clawson makes no distinction between ‘socialism’ and ‘post-capitalism’. The precise significance of relation of production thus remains problematic. Thus: ‘The direct producers had
neither political power nor control over production' in Egypt (p101). The implication is that if a society is not socialist it must be capitalist. Later he suggests that the Soviet Union, whose dynamics are quite different from those of Nasser's Egypt, is also state capitalist (p109). This obliterates the differentia specifica of capitalist production: accumulation through the generation of surplus-value (the law of value).

A society can be post-capitalist without being socialist, or without being a healthy workers' democracy.12

Clawson's ambiguity about the hallmark of capitalism is not helped by his somewhat contradictory comments on the effects of state capitalism. He argues that 'the break with state capitalism under Sadat' was the result of an inability to obtain foreign credit to pay for imports: 'The lack of credit was ... the logical consequence of poor productivity and worse profitability of Egyptian industry ... The capitalist system forces all operating within it to pursue [profit] maximisation or pay the consequences: bankruptcy' (p108).

Despite his prior claim that Egyptian state capital always aimed for maximisation, here Clawson is obviously implying otherwise. If it did not, half his case that Egypt was capitalist collapses. If it did, then failure to have done so cannot have been a cause of bankruptcy. Either way, it would seem that 'irrational capitalism' would be a more apposite label than 'state capitalism'. Perhaps this is pedantic. But it does seem that Clawson's analysis of capitalist development ignores capitalist crisis as an intrinsic feature of the system, a consequence of the laws of accumulation. The crisis of Egyptian capitalism is seen as the result of external relations.

In fact, the argument about 'state' capitalism has hindered rather than helped understanding of Nasserist Egypt. It implies that it differs fundamentally from private capitalism. There is, however, only one capitalist mode of production. Moreover, it is a purely empirical and descriptive, rather than analytical, term (Clawson refers to it as a description). What we need to know is how, rather than whether, valorisation took place. But for this we need an analysis of the labour process, or more broadly of the relationship between the state and the working class. This Clawson does not provide.

The State and State Capitalism

Clawson adheres to the 'radical' argument that the Nasserite regime was dominated by the petty bourgeoisie (or new petty bourgeoisie13). He differs from Hussein in particular in rejecting personal greed as a motivation. 'The new petty bourgeoisie, he writes, 'was transformed into a powerful political force by an ideology, an ideology that allowed them to gather the support of the proletariat and the proletarianised masses ... Nationalisation was seen by the petty bourgeoisie as a
mechanism to increase the pace of development — thoughts of personal enrichment were not uppermost in their minds’ (p102).

This petty bourgeoisie is left undefined. Clawson refers to it as an ‘academic-intellectual-military petty bourgeoisie’, which ‘seized economic power’. This kind of catch-all terminology is not very helpful. The precise fractions of the petty bourgeoisie that seized (economic and/or political) power (if it can be treated as a single class in this way) would need to be specified, and their relationship to the bourgeoisie proper analysed. But any such investigation inevitably leads to consideration of the role of the military: it was, after all, army officers that overthrew Faruq. And this means consideration of the role of the state apparatus.

Nasser and his colleagues were certainly of petty-bourgeois background. But some of them, Neguib for example, were high-ranking army officers, and Nasser himself was hardly an NCO. To explain their role in the state apparatus solely in terms of their social origins would make it impossible to understand the nature of the Egyptian state. The state acts in the interests of capital as a whole, in Egypt no less than elsewhere, and what was involved in 1952 was not just a few petty bourgeois usurping power but a wholesale rupture between the state’s military wing and the dominant fraction of the ruling class. The ideology of the Free Officers, which took time to coalesce, was formulated largely as pragmatic responses to particular situations. But these were state responses, not acts of ‘the petty bourgeoisie’ (although petty-bourgeois interests no doubt played a role). It was not their ideology that transformed them into a powerful political force. It would be more accurate to say that as a powerful political force, they developed an ideology involving populist, or semi-populist conceptions.

It is difficult to see what role Clawson means to attribute to ideology. One of the last things that could be said about Nasserism is that its ideology was a sustaining factor in its development (Clawson later says that ‘state capitalism never sank ideological roots in Egypt’, though this too is a half-truth), and certainly it would be difficult to identify a specific ideology as a unifying force amongst ‘the petty bourgeoisie’. Clawson seems to suggest that what unified the new elite was its view of nationalisation ‘to increase the pace of development’, which presumably implies a shift in the class base of the state authorities after 1956 (in which case the ‘new petty bourgeoisie’ would be a yet-to-be-created class different from that which actually seized power). One other possible interpretation is that this new petty bourgeoisie is defined by its (petty-bourgeois) ideology, which, as has been pointed out elsewhere, is sheer tautology.

An analysis of the role of the bourgeois state in a capitalist society, and of ideology in legitimating, or attempting to legitimate the role of capital, is, of course, extremely important. Clawson’s use of the term ‘petty bourgeoisie’ inevitably ignores the question of the bourgeois state in a social formation as a whole. In Egypt it seems most accurate to
see events after 1952 as shaped by a shifting set of class alliances, ranging from sections of the bourgeoisie to sections of the ‘petty bourgeois’ state personnel, within which the (bourgeois) military was pivotal. The structural conditions of capital accumulation in Egypt conditioned the ideological responses of these classes or fractions of classes (see below). The military managed to remain the core of the shifting alliances, and corporate interests played some part in later developments. What was more significant in ending the initial alliance between the regime and the industrial bourgeoisie was the fear generated amongst that bourgeoisie by the state’s expropriations (even though none of them threatened Egyptian capital at first). Rising opposition intensified after 1958, particularly in Syria. Fear inhibits investment, and investment was obviously necessary for ‘development’; so the state stepped in. To a large extent, though not entirely, the ideology followed, rather than generated, statist developmental measures. The regime also had to build a power base, which it found primarily within the state bureaucracy. It is therefore not surprising to find it deepening that base prior to 1967. Combined with the dynamics of capital accumulation within the state enterprises, which were transforming the role of state bureaucrats, this served to create a powerful bourgeois class within the state apparatus. Tension between the needs of this new class and Nasserist ideology were inevitable.

State Capitalism in Crisis

Clawson is unambiguous about the causes of the economic crisis that emerged in the 1965-67 period: ‘Hansen and Nashashibi argue strenuously that the stagnation of the middle and late 1960s was not due to the foreign exchange problems alone. Certainly there were other contributing factors, such as the spreading production slowdowns caused by bureaucratic inefficiencies, but the fact remains that the crunch came when and only when Egypt ran out of foreign exchange... The stagnation of the 1960s was the product of a foreign exchange shortage’ (p107).

Lacking an indigenous capital goods industry, which it could not create because of foreign competition, Egypt had to import its capital goods. It therefore needed foreign exchange to pay for them: a shortage of foreign exchange meant no capital-goods imports, and hence economic stagnation. Clawson analyses how the large reserves Egypt had in 1953 were used up, US aid fell, and economic growth had to be slowed.

This analysis remains partial. It might be suggested that behind Egyptian capitalism’s balance of payments problems lay more fundamental things (for a Marxist) than the mere shortage of foreign exchange. Clawson makes no mention of Marx’s theory of unequal exchange,16 but it would seem to be an important aspect of any explanation
of the more general economic problems facing Third World countries. But Clawson does not see economic crisis as flowing from the internal dynamics of capitalism itself: a foreign-exchange shortage is an episodic, conjunctural phenomenon rather than a central feature of all capital accumulation.

As noted above, Clawson does not have a very clear conception of the dynamics of capital accumulation. His view of a crisis caused by scarce exchange reserves is consequently one-sided, for a number of reasons. Most fundamentally, this approach treats economic issues as essentially given policy questions: the 'national economy' has to cope with certain forces outside its control, but the resolution of its problems can be sorted out given the right policy. The economic crisis is not seen as flowing directly from the nature of capital accumulation itself. Of course, Clawson explains the shortage of foreign exchange in the last analysis as an inability to compete in the production of capital goods. But this in itself does not explain very much. Would not a 'socialist state' (as defined by Clawson) face similar problems? Or conversely, if the root of the problem is a shortage of foreign exchange, would not attempts to encourage foreign exchange (as under Sadat) be a good thing? Was the shift in economic policy after 1967 (contrary to Clawson, it began before Sadat came to power) merely an epiphenomenon of the quest for exchange reserves? Clawson is unclear on these questions, because of the deep ambiguities of his treatment of capital accumulation, and in particular of his treatment (or non-treatment) of the relationship between national capitals, or between capital accumulation within a particular nation state on the one hand and the internationalisation of capital on the other. The result is a serious political ambiguity: the struggle for socialism is implicitly reduced to the struggle for an alternative economic policy. Clawson's analysis provides no indication of the precise roles of Egyptian capital and imperialism in meeting the exigencies of capitalism in crisis. As such it provides no basis for a working-class response.

I contend that the crisis in Egypt is a crisis in the accumulation of capital that requires from the Egyptian bourgeoisie a strategy to assault the living standards of the working class. It requires imperialist and Arab capitalist support, but the central contradiction in Egypt is between Egyptian capital and Egyptian labour. This crisis must be seen in the context of the international crisis of capitalism.

The Crisis of Capital Accumulation

There is a sense in which there was a 'dual' crisis by the mid-sixties: a chronic crisis of non-accumulation in Dept. I (the production of capital goods), and a specific crisis of profitability in industry as a whole. The two fuelled each other. But there was no unilinear causal relationship between the former and the latter.
The contribution of machine production (in itself a misleading term, since it consisted mostly of consumer durables) to gross value-added rose from 0.7% in 1952 to 4.4% in 1966-67. Consequently, as Clawson indicates, the Egyptian bourgeoisie had to import its capital goods, its machinery and technology. Basic raw material did not have to be imported. As Mabro and O’Brien note, ‘... Egyptian industry is essentially a producer of consumer goods. Its largest components can be viewed as the last stage of an integrated agricultural system.’

Textile production was by far the most important section of industry, contributing 33.1% of total gross value-added in manufacturing in 1952, and 38.1% in 1966-67. The development of a cotton-based industry producing largely for the home market alleviated some of the tension caused by dependence on imports of capital goods. Much of the problem arose from the organic composition of capital, lower in Egyptian industry than in those producing the foreign imports. The result (given a tendency for the rate of profit to equalise) is a transfer of value out of Egypt, unequal exchange in Marx’s sense. This transfer of value hinders accumulation in Dept. II (production of means of consumption), though it should be noted that as the region’s most developed capitalist country, Egypt has always sought and found markets for its industrial goods where unequal exchange will probably operate in its favour. But even suffering in this way, performance in manufacturing industry has been far from abysmal. The period from 1957-65 saw average annual growth rates of 6%, depending largely on manufacturing outputs. The rate of industrial output reached a peak in 1963-64 of 12.5%, although thereafter it declined dramatically. The share of industry in GDP grew consistently in the fifties and sixties, whilst that of agriculture declined.

### Share of GDP at Factor Costs (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Industry, electricity</th>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952/3</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956/7</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959/60</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964/5</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969/70</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: R. Mabro: The Egyptian Economy, p189.*

Problems, exacerbated by the need to import capital goods, began to reach crisis proportions in the early 1960s. Investment had enormously increased the capital intensity of industry. In other words, there had been a substantial rise in the organic composition of capital, which would tend to alleviate the problem of unequal exchange. But this rise was not matched by an increase in the productivity of labour. Average
labour productivity under the 1960-65 plan was the same as before, per person it even declined. As Hansen and Marzouk comment '...it is disappointing that the big increase in industrial investment has not led to an increase in the rate of growth of labour productivity.' In part this was the consequence of the state's attempt to create an internal consumer market by extensive public-sector employment and relatively high wages. In a sense, Egyptian capital in the 1970s made the same policy shift as its imperialist counterparts: faced with a choice between markets and profit rates, it opted for the latter. A breakdown of income distribution shows the huge proportional scale of profits in Egypt before the crisis of the mid-sixties.

**Distribution of Income in Total Industry, 1959/60**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wages and Salaries</th>
<th>Returns to Ownership</th>
<th>Gross Value Added</th>
<th>Wages and Salaries as % of GVA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotton ginning and pressing</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mines and quarries manufacturing industries</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity and gas</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>155.6</td>
<td>239.1</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All industry</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>182.2</td>
<td>273.4</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Hansen and Marzouk, Development and Economic Policy in the UAR*

Two-thirds of gross value-added in this period was profit. The annual net rate of return on capital in 1960 was 17-18%. Hansen and Marzouk suggest that it was higher in 1952. But by 1974, this had fallen to 2.4% in the public sector. Given the net decline in investment beginning in 1963-64 this suggests a crisis in profitability by 1965, leading to a stagnation in the accumulation of capital. In the late sixties manufacturing industry was contributing no more to national income than previously. As the rate of profit fell, existing equipment was not renewed: Egyptian capital entered a period of acute and sustained crisis. The chronic crisis of Dept. I now coexisted with a crisis of stagnation in Dept. II. In the context of the beginnings of international capitalist crisis, this spelt disaster for Egypt’s capital. Since 1965 the Egyptian state has been seeking ways to resolve this crisis.

Ultimately the logical option was that which began to emerge in the late sixties and which Sadat was eventually to embrace wholeheartedly. Its core was 'infitah' (Opening), an economic liberalisation, and
eventual privatisation based on the encouragement of foreign capital. The statist strategy, having failed, had to be terminated. The class structure it had generated remained (the ‘new’, ‘state’, or ‘bureaucratic’ bourgeoisie, as it had variously been described; a petty bourgeoisie and a working class employed by the state), but as conditions changed, so too did the strategic requirements of Egyptian capital.

This was facilitated by the onset of a major international crisis of capitalism at the beginning of 1974. The promise of high profits was potentially an attractive lure for foreign companies facing a crisis in profitability. To embellish the lure, the Egyptian bourgeoisie had to secure its own stability. A drive towards peace with Israel thus became inevitable.

The Working Class in Egypt

Clawson’s comments on the working class are brief and intended largely as a polemic against Amin’s and Hussein’s view of ‘proletarianised masses’. He writes: ‘... the picture is quite different from that painted by Amin and Hussein. The proletariat (in the strict sense) was a large social force in Egypt, at least 30 per cent of the population. The proletariat broadly speaking includes another 50 per cent (7 million) for a total of 80 per cent’ (p98).

This proletariat, ‘broadly speaking’, includes rural temporary labourers, as well as small farmers and marginalised urban masses who depend ‘primarily on wage income’. Apart from demonstrating the supposed size of the working class, this actually tells us little. Even empirically it is highly questionable, because Clawson plays down the socio-political effects of differentiation within the working class. He does not distinguish between small and large-scale production (merging at times into a distinction between capitalist and petty-commodity production), between the social effects of different kinds of labour, and between fully formed classes and those (or sections of those) only in the process of formation. For Clawson, the size of the proletariat is only a further proof that Egypt is capitalist. Its composition, formation, and organisation — not to mention its history — are not even considered, for they add nothing to the proof.

The problem with Amin’s and Hussein’s analysis of the working class is underestimation not so much of its size as of its political centrality. They subsume the working class into the ‘masses’, who all ‘act’ on the ‘popular stage’ in much the same undifferentiated, ‘patriotic’ way. In a sense, Clawson makes a similar mistake: instead of undifferentiated ‘masses’ we have an undifferentiated ‘proletariat’ but we are none the wiser.

To understand the Egyptian working class it is necessary to know more than how many worked for wages for all or part of the year. The structure of the working class, the relationship between different
State capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

labour processes, and in particular such questions as the sexual division of labour need to be examined.

First of all, we must disentangle the strands of the wage-earning mass presented by Clawson.

By 1970 manufacturing and mining employed about 11% of the total labour force. Obviously the total number of wage earners would be larger than this, but precise analysis is not possible. Abdel-Fadil suggests that the total number of salaried employees and wage earners in 1962 was 63% of the labour force and in 1972 was 66%.23 It is therefore probably safe to assume that in the 1960s about half the urban labour force were wage workers of one sort or another.

This proletariat was quite diffuse. More than 50% were employed in establishments with fewer than ten workers. Of the rest, by the late sixties the majority worked in establishments with more than 500 workers. But many of these were small by the standards of advanced capitalism.

The predominance of small-scale industry has had important consequences for the structure of the urban working class. Low levels of capital accumulation and concentration of workers have limited the development of the industrial proletariat as a powerful class ‘for itself’. Some sections of the working class, notably in petroleum extraction (and since the late sixties at Helwan and other big plants) have transcended this limitation to a certain extent. Comparative wage rates reveal a differentiation due at least in part to the varying strengths of labour unions: the Federation of Petroleum Syndicates has been strong enough to enforce high wage rates and low hours.24

Wages per Week of the Industrial Work-Force by Sector (piastres) 1951 – 1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Manufacturing</th>
<th>Mining and quarrying</th>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Transport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>325/9</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


84
State Capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

A more detailed breakdown of manufacturing industries reveals that far the highest wagees prevailed in transport equipment production.\textsuperscript{25} Wages for women were, predictably, much lower than for men. The averages in manufacturing were as follows (piastres):

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
 & MEN & WOMEN \\
1962 & 219 & 117 \\
1967 & 324 & 229 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}


The pattern of national wage rates suggests high increases in the early years of the 'Revolution', followed by a levelling out before 1960. Then, during the first Five Year Plan, wages rose at rates substantially in excess of the rise in labour productivity:\textsuperscript{26} given the crisis arising from the generally non-productive rise in the organic composition of capital, these wage rises will have contributed to the collapse in the rate of profit by the mid-sixties.

The sparse and not altogether reliable statistics tend to suggest that the chronic inability of Egyptian capital to increase labour productivity despite significant investment — a vital necessity in overcoming unequal exchange — was not offset by an ability sufficiently to reduce the wages of workers in relatively large-scale industry (in other words, to increase the rate of surplus-value). The period in which the current crisis took root — roughly speaking that of the first Five Year Plan — was thus one of intensified class struggles over basic issues, which Egyptian capital was not able to win. This was a formative period for the renascent workers movement, preparation for big explosions to come. The defeat in 1967 was the catalyst for these explosions, which were intensified by the effect of the regime's post-1965 deflationary policies (a decline in real wages) and the working-class resistance provoked by these policies.

As we have seen, relatively low levels of capital accumulation have led to low levels of worker concentration. The few big complexes, such as the Helwan Iron and Steel Works, are surrounded by myriad small factories, some of which are little more than workshops. In 1967, a total of 144,090 manufacturing establishments employing fewer than ten people averaged two workers each. Some 36\% of small-scale industrial activity was carried out in rural areas, but 29.6\% took place in Cairo and Alexandria alone. A vast number of wage earners are thus involved in very small-scale production.\textsuperscript{27} Far more are involved in non-productive work of various kinds (the so-called informal sector). The structure of this section of the labour force has changed a little in the past thirty years. But it has greatly increased in size, and constitutes the vast bulk of the urban population: it is here that most of the rural migrants end up.
State capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

The Structure of Informal Service Employment 1947 – 60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of activity (or occupation)</th>
<th>Numbers employed</th>
<th>% increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1947 000s</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Traditional transport</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Petty trade (street hawkers &amp; peddlers)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Paid domestic servants</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Waiters, porters and caretakers</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Tailoring</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Hairdressing</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Laundry &amp; other services</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 613 100.0 822 100.0 34.1

Source: Abdel-Fadil, p18.

As is clear, the mass of petty traders has been swelled by rural migrants, whilst the number of domestic servants declined following the July coup. Of migrants aged between 10 and 29, women outnumbered men, and many of them continued to find work as domestic servants (particularly those from Upper Egypt).

Employment in Personal Services, by Age and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>Change (000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment of males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 15</td>
<td>48,741</td>
<td>29,333</td>
<td>−19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 and over</td>
<td>285,246</td>
<td>367,748</td>
<td>+82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment of females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>473,808</td>
<td>567,027</td>
<td>+93.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Abdel-Fadil, p19.

Even those opportunities open to women, then, amount to highly exploitative extensions of their familial role. The vast bulk of women, however, remain confined to their own homes.28
Vast numbers of the urban poor find no stable employment at all. In 1972, a total of 224,000 people or 6.4% of the total urban labour force, were unemployed or not classified by any occupation. Of these, 54,000 were women (14.7% of the total female urban labour force). In Cairo 7.0% of the total were in this situation; in Alexandria 11%.

The work-force of the ‘informal’ sector is itself highly differentiated, ranging from self-employed artisans to sellers of cigarette butts. It is thus not a single class, but a somewhat open-ended amalgam of classes, ranging from the traditional petty bourgeois to the modern proletarian, with large numbers constituting a sub-proletariat. Abdel-Fadil has calculated the following figures for the urban traditional petty bourgeoisie, proletariat, and sub-proletariat.

### Petty Commodity Producers, Proletarians and Sub-Proletarians in Urban Egypt, 1970/71

*Approx. No. (000s)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Approx. No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The traditional petty-bourgeoisie:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bottom group of independent professionals</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Small retailers and shopkeepers</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Self-employed artisans</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Salespeople and their assistants</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proletariat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Production workers (inc. railway workers &amp; dockers)</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Workers in the civil service</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sub-proletariat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Casual workers on building sites</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cleaning, maintenance &amp; security workers</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Domestic servants</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Openly unemployed</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Unclassifiable by occupation</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Abdel-Fadil, p99.* (We have not included the figures for the bourgeoisie and “new” petty-bourgeoisie).

Although Abdel-Fadil’s categorisation may be debatable, permanent proletarians clearly constitute the largest group, but are nevertheless an overall minority.

Failure to recognise the complexity of the working class in Egypt is most apparent in Clawson’s bland comments on the rural population. Noting that ‘the 2.5 million farmers with less than 5 acres ... depend primarily on wage income’ (p98), he misses the significant fact that they are nevertheless farmers and not unambiguously proletarian: the small fellahin are engaged in two separate labour processes.
In both town and countryside the role of subsistence labour, often performed within the family, is crucial for the accumulation of capital. If labour-power can be reproduced outside the capitalist mode of production as such, its value will be lower, and the rate of surplus-value higher. The growth of the ‘informal’ sector and the preservation of subsistence production thus serve an objective function for capital.

What is more, the people on whom the bulk of this work falls are women. Clawson says nothing whatever about the position of women in Egypt, yet their role in production is vital for capitalism, in three respects. First there is their role in reproduction, of both people and labour-power, within the family. Second, within the wage-labour force itself, they perform particular jobs with lower incomes, acting as a reserve army of labour and doing kinds of work men shun. Third, since many Egyptian men have migrated to seek work overseas, the role of women in maintaining production (particularly in agriculture) has been enhanced. As Mona Hammam notes: ‘Women, otherwise constrained from entering the formal wage sector, are compelled to seek access to income in the informal, sporadic, unregulated sector in order to supplement a husband’s earnings, or even as the only source of cash for the household. In Egypt . . . it is common for a working class husband to take on a second job in the informal sector while his wife raises chickens . . . for the family’s direct consumption and for exchange.’

In rural areas 82% of working women do unpaid family labour, and dependence upon them increases as families become unable to hire farm labour. The percentage of the economically active population who were women was 5.3% in 1977. Of course, the participation of women in the work-force has increased, predominantly in the textile, paper, and chemicals industries. But significantly, it is only in domestic services that women constitute a majority of the labour force. It is quite clear, then, that whether or not most of Egypt’s population depends upon wage income, the majority are not involved in large-scale modern industry. The labour process is by no means uniformly that of advanced capitalism, the ‘real subsumption of labour to capital’, as Marx put it, in which capital dominates every moment of production.

Instead, the predominant activity is either only formally subsumed under capital (that is, the labour process itself is artisanal) or not strictly capitalist production, but petty commodity production, whether traditional or the outgrowth of rural migrants’ eking out a living by setting up shop.

This has deep implications for the structure of capitalism, and reflects the general backwardness of Egyptian industry, obvious exceptions as at Helwan notwithstanding. Clawson seems oblivious to this, as shown by his comments on the agricultural co-operatives: ‘. . . actual power rested in the hands of a supervisor [who] exercised almost complete control over the cotton production process . . . he sold the cotton, with the peasants getting little . . . from the receipts . . . The peasants lost control over the means of production, over the product,
and over the production process. They had, in essence, become a rural proletariat’ (p95).

Yet this formal subordination of peasant labour to capital is distinct from the increasingly real subordination of landless wage-labourers proper. The distinction is vital in grasping the composition of the working class. It also has important ideological consequences (preservation of conservative peasant values as against the consciousness of the landless worker), and affects the forms of struggle in which the direct producers are involved. Again, the penetration of capital into the countryside is not unilinear; it is a complex historical process that moulds and remoulds the labour processes of various sections of a working class that is by no means homogeneous.

Nasserism and the Working Class

Bent Hansen has commented that Nasserist economics consisted of following ‘the line of least popular dissatisfaction’. The welfare system guaranteed that, within certain limits, ‘social peace was maintained: nearly everyone was able to draw a little something from the system’. Today, in the days of de-Nasserisation, and the attempted dismantling of the welfare system, the left in Egypt has responded by calling for the intensification of the Egyptian ‘socialist experiment’. Influenced at least intellectually by the Marxist intelligentsia that liquidated itself into the Arab Socialist Union in 1965, the official Nasserist left has centred its propaganda in the last decade and a half on the need to ‘defend the principles of the July 23 Revolution’.

The Free Officers came to power during some of the most intense class conflicts in Egypt’s history. Mass strikes, including general strikes, demonstrations, and peasant revolts had racked the country since the end of the Second World War. The class bloc in power, expressed by the Wafid, was unable to maintain social peace; as in many such situations, the army then stepped in. Less than a week after the ‘Revolution’ a major strike and occupation erupted in the textile works at Kafr al-Dawwar. The leaders of the workers’ unions, Mustafa Khamis and Hassan al-Bakany, were arrested and hanged. The new regime wasted no time in establishing its anti-working class credentials.

An Advisory Council for Labour was reconstituted, the basic intention of which was to establish a trade-union movement fully incorporated into the state. The Council, which included union representation, established control over union finances. At the same time, it legalised agricultural unions and enforced a closed shop in any company in which at least 60% of the work-force were already union members. It also strengthened protection against dismissal and raised the minimum wage. But strikes were to be illegal, and unions were barred from political activity.

The primary role of the unions in the view of the state was to increase
productivity. The labour code of 1959 established tripartite boards of government officials, employers, and workers, whose duties, among other things, included improving standards of productivity.

The establishment of an incorporated trade-union movement was central to the political-economic imperatives of Nasserism at all stages in its development. Its incorporation was able to be achieved institutionally only in part; the Nasserist state was never able to create simple state syndicates. But Egyptian capital desperately needed some form of 'social contract' with labour in order to overcome the problems of backward capitalism. We have already seen that an increase in the organic composition of capital had not generated an equivalent productivity increase. That would have to come from a rise in the intensity of labour: workers would have to work harder. If the 'Nation' was to rally around the 'development' of Egyptian capital, an obedient labour movement was vital.

Ideologically, the exigencies of heighening the intensity of labour are central to Nasserism. A casual glance through Nasser's speeches reveals how concerned he and his ideologues were with 'increasing productivity'. The motto of the Liberation Rally was 'unity, discipline, work'..

And later, 'ASU functionaries in Popular Units (i.e. industry) worked towards increasing output and reducing costs; increasing workers' awareness of the need to economise at the plant.' The National Charter of 1962 is quite explicit: labour organisations 'no longer remain a mere counterpart of management in the production operation, but become the leading vanguard of development. Labour unions can exercise their leading responsibilities through serious contribution to intellectual and scientific efficiency and thus increase productivity among labour.'

The worsening dual crisis of capital accumulation conditioned this incorporationist productivism in the official ideology of the state. But at all stages the state failed to achieve sufficient incorporation of the labour movement or to establish a coherent legitimating ideology: intensity of labour was not sufficiently augmented; productivity did not, after all, rise. The organisation of labour process was thus predominantly bureaucratic: there was neither a developed incorporation of labour, nor the conditions for a more 'normal' bourgeois ideology. 'Arab Socialism' was not primarily socialist rhetoric to buy off the masses, and certainly not a genuine quasi-populist ideology generated by the regime's anti-imperialist experience, but an incoherent, largely unsuccessful, and highly bureaucratic attempt to effect the subordination of labour to capital through incorporation. The rapidity with which the workers movement was re-kindled under the impact of capitalist crisis after 1967 is an index of its failure.

Low levels of concentration limited the ability of the working class to defend its interests. But as we have seen, in some sectors (petroleum extraction and mining, quarrying, transport and transport equipment) labour action could secure significantly improved wages and conditions even within the semi-incorporated trade-union system. Class struggles
Persisted within the production process, albeit at a relatively low level. The number of workers involved in industrial disputes tended to be quite small: but industrial action was certainly taking place in the fifties and sixties.

The state's ability to increase productivity was not hindered by working-class resistance alone, of course. The regime's need to incorporate labour and to create an internal consumer market forced it to employ far more workers than it would otherwise have done. Bureaucratic inefficiency (and to a small extent disease) exacerbated the state's underlying problems.

The period of the first Five Year Plan, which coincided with the onset of serious difficulties in capital accumulation, was the time of the regime's 'socialist' stage. It represented a further step in an incorporationist strategy (profit-sharing, reduced working hours, increases in manual wages) which failed (if it ever had any hope of success) because capitalist crisis destroyed its base. Government interference in the labour market at various levels reduced the overall capacity of capital to discipline the work-force, and this no doubt afforded the labour movement some room for manoeuvre, contrary to the intention of its incorporation. By the crisis point of 1965-67, the working class, which had resisted the valorisation process throughout the Nasser period, was well prepared to move into action.

But several factors undermined the capacity of the working class to resist the depredations of capital in crisis. At the most general level, the decisive factor deflecting working-class struggle has been the role of the left.

Significantly, it was in 1965 that the Egyptian Communist Party disbanded, its members joining the ASU as individuals. Several old Communists and fellow travellers have been official left ideologues ever since. It was also in that year that 'Ali Sabri was appointed Secretary General of the ASU. In the mid-sixties, Sabri, the left Nasserist dismissed by Sadat in 1971, had stood at the centre of a national political debate about the role of the ASU in Egyptian social and political life.

At this point, faced with the emerging crisis, the political representatives of Egyptian capital began to splinter into warring factions, a right, centre, and left that persist today. In its first stages, the conflict centred on the related questions of parliamentary democracy and the role of the political 'vanguard'. The argument started around 1965, but it was after June 1967 that it grew into a full-scale national exchange.

The right favoured political liberalisation and a parliamentary system. The left, led by Sabri, Khalid Muhieddin, and others, insisted on carrying forward the 'socialist revolution', intensifying the vanguardist role of the ASU and developing a more coherent socialist ideology.

So it was the left that stood for aggravated incorporation. It was the
State capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

left that opposed democratic liberalisation, that waved the flag of sub-
ordinating all political initiative to the existing party of Egyptian capital
—in the name of socialism. The ‘Marxist’ intellectuals provided the
theory. Unable to recognise the ASU as an integral part of the
bourgeois state apparatus, the left was incapable of developing a
strategy that would challenge capitalism in any sense. As living
standards deteriorated and Sadat moved to the right, a radical response
from the labour movement was needed. Only the left Nasserists were
there to fill the gap. The official left was thus able to consolidate a
hitherto unattained hegemony within the labour movement. Some of
the leftist ideologues abandoned their anti-democratic positions of the
sixties. But acting only as theorists for the left Nasserists, they proved
incapable of taking the workers with them. In 1974 Sadat organised a
series of meetings to discuss a move to a multiparty system. The meeting
of labour unions ‘vociferously rejected a multi-party system and
accused named forces . . . of wanting to abolish not only worker repre-
sentation but the very principles of the July 23 Revolution . . .
unidentified voices attacked their own union leaders as puppets of the
regime . . . At this stage it was abundantly clear that the intellectual
Marxists . . . calling for multipartyism, were overruled by the workers
themselves, who remained loyal to the ASU.40

But given its need for an economic ‘opening’, Egyptian capital as a
whole was not able to take advantage of this. By the late sixties the days
of the incorporation strategy were over as far as the bourgeoisie as a
whole was concerned. This cemented left-Nasserism as an oppositional
ideology within the Egyptian labour movement. The deepening crisis of
the 1970s, however, shook even this hegemony. As class struggle
sharpened, the inability of the tame Nasserist old-guard left to propose
even partial solutions to the aggravated misery of the workers and
urban and rural poor paved the way for the shattering of the ‘social
contract’ between them and the labour movement. The rise of mass
strikes began the process; the riots of January 1977 signalled the
ignominious demise of social contract. The late seventies were conse-
quently marked by a crisis in hegemony: no section of capital, no
political off-shoot of bourgeois nationalism, could maintain its
domination of the workers movement. Open repression became the
only option.

The Transition from State Capitalism

It is a common, though false, view, which Clawson evidently shares,
that Sadat’s post-1974 infitah policy represented a radical break with
the ‘state’ capitalist past. This view is false at a number of levels: most
particularly because Egypt remains heavily statist even now, and
because the changes that came about in 1974 have their origins in the
capitalist crisis of the mid-sixties. There is a fundamental continuity
between Nasserism and post-Nasserism, reflecting the fact that infitah represents not a transfer of power from the state bourgeoisie to private capital, but a different political-economic strategy of the same ruling class. It is particularly important to recognise this because the view is widespread that there is something progressive about state capitalism. Clawson obviously does not hold this view; but the notion of a 'break with state capitalism' under Sadat is easily lent to it. The first murmurs of Egyptian capital’s search for a way out of the crisis began in 1965. After the June War, political crisis made a new strategy requisite. Announced in Nasser’s March 30 Programme of 1968, it involved a reorientation at two levels: economically, an attempt to rebuild foreign exchange; at the level of the labour process, an organisational and ideological shift. This went hand in hand with a recomposition of the regime’s power-base, and ultimately a drive for peace with Israel (in the form of the Rogers Plan), which prefigured Sadat’s initiatives.

The keystone of Nasser’s programme was the emphasis on ‘scientific management’, ‘...the placing of the right man [sic] in the right position’. The aim was to place the technocracy in control of production, to de-politicise Egypt’s political economy: to move away from the incorporationist strategy of the past to a more ‘efficient’ method of valorisation. Thus began the attacks on worker representation and all the populist values of the pre-1967 period. As Cooper puts it, there was a ‘...shift from the aggressive, ideological affirmation of the worker input, to the administrative scheme to remove it.’ Reactivating the private sector was vital to this strategy, not because of a conflict between the state and private capital, but because of the need to shed the incorporationist legacy in a sphere in which economic efficiency had to be primary. The policy of redistribution of ‘national wealth’ was reversed in an effort to extract a higher rate of surplus-value by means of ‘scientific’ managerial techniques. “Infitah” was the logical corollary: boost the valorisation capacity of the ‘Egyptian economy’ by means of foreign investment.

Inevitably, the working class began to resist, but almost equally inevitably, resistance was defensive: incorporation seemed preferable to suppression. The consequences have been noted above.

A final factor of crucial importance is the attempt to find a new integration of Egyptian capital into the network of Arab capitalism. Beginning in 1967, Egypt began to rely on Arab oil money in the form of capital loans and aid. From 1975-77 this reliance increased. As Said Marei put it, ‘Western technology and Arab capital and Egyptian labour = economic growth’. Since the oil producers demanded both skilled and unskilled labour, this has meant an internationalisation of labour.

Since 1975 the number of Egyptian migrants may have grown to as many as two million. Abroad, these workers are exploited heavily. The effects of migrant labour on the Egyptian capitalist economy,
### Egyptian Migrant Workers to Capital-Rich States, 1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries of employment</th>
<th>% of Arab migrant workforce</th>
<th>No. of Egyptian workers</th>
<th>% of Egyptian migrant workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>95,000</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>229,500</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>37,558</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>2,850</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>1,237</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAR</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>397,545</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Birks and Sinclair, *Labour Migration in the Arab Middle East*

However, are complex. In some cases new groups have to fill the places of migrants, particularly women, who can be paid less. The subsidisation of the subsistence of workers in Egypt by remittances can also lower the value of labour-power. It completes a picture of the Egyptian bourgeoisie’s attempts to restore its rate of profit by raising the rate of exploitation.

### The Theory of Imperialism

Clawson’s analysis of the periodisation of the internationalisation of capital ultimately begs the crucial question. The internationalisation of money (finance) capital is clearly meant to be identified with Lenin’s theory of imperialism. The different historical internationalisation of different circuits of capital is thus presented as a theory of the development of imperialism. But serious questions are posed by such a theorisation, and Clawson does not broach them.

The first and most obvious problem has already been indicated. If ‘Egyptian capitalism developed largely due to foreign capital’ (p88), and if it has always needed foreign capital (‘The internationalisation of capital is not a policy option that a government can choose to accept or reject’, (p197), then why did the Egyptian bourgeoisie, with encouragement by the state in the post-1919 period, develop a nationalist ideology that opposed foreign capitalist domination? Clawson notes that ‘Bank Misr, which was founded out of the nationalist outpouring of the 1919
revolution, was initially opposed to any co-operation with foreign capital. [But it] was forced...to take foreign partners who threatened [competition] with Bank Misr firms’ (p90). But the question of why the Misr group opposed foreign capital, initially or otherwise, is left open. Had Clawson tried to understand the significance of the bourgeois nation-state for capital accumulation, he could have gone some way towards seeing that capitalist development is not a unilateral internationalisation, but a contradictory, dialectical process in which classes are locked in conflict. The internationalisation of capital cannot transcend limitations imposed by nation-states, which are essential for the guarantee of the reproduction of capitalist social relations at the economic, political, and ideological levels. Other historical factors influence the formation of classes as well, of course. But Clawson appears not to see the problem.

The second problem is more complex, and relates to a broader theoretical question. The ‘radical’ theories of underdevelopment that Clawson rightly rejects provided fairly straightforward, albeit populist, political guidelines. Many of the recent, more vigorous Marxist attempts to explain relations between advanced and Third World countries are frustratingly apolitical. Where they have provided political direction is in breaking through the petty-bourgeois nationalism that has dominated working-class movements in the Third World. But the question of imperialism itself has in the process remained unexplored. If the effect of capitalist penetration is ‘underdevelopment’, it is obvious that socialists must oppose it. If, as Clawson argues, capitalist penetration does not underdevelop Third World countries, then the attitude socialists should take to it is less clear. Bill Warren, whose position is similar to Clawson’s although infinitely less sophisticated, has taken the view of imperialism as a good thing to the extent of actively supporting such ventures as the Lomé convention. Clawson clearly intends to point not in such a direction, but back to Lenin’s position. Yet the changing face of the post-colonial world perhaps renders many of Lenin’s central themes (national independence, etc.) irrelevant. At the most basic level, socialists obviously oppose capital, whatever its national origin. But the issue of imperialism is separate to some extent: there is, after all, a difference in power between US and Egyptian capital. A theory of crisis goes some of the way towards resolving this problem, since as we have seen, ‘infitah’ can be situated in the context of a world capitalist crisis, and imperialism’s efforts to resolve it. But the role of imperialism in Egypt is quite clearly related to its regional interests and cannot be reduced to the protection of capital investments. Camp David, the RDF, and so on are part of an imperialist political strategy arising from the global needs of imperialist capital, rather than simply the internationalisation of capital. The theory of the internationalisation of capital is intended as counterposition to the radical sociology of underdevelopment. In some respects, Clawson does not break completely with these radical conceptions, however.
The use of expressions like ‘dependence on the advanced economies’ (p104) is an example of an approach that remains to some extent fixated by inter-*nation* relations, with the difference that in Clawson’s framework ‘nations’ are rendered anomalous. What is more serious is the consequent focus on the development of local and international oppressor classes rather than on the oppressed. Political questions to do with strategy and ideology (for instance, an assessment of the potential of a nationalist movement) remain elusive in this perspective. Clawson’s most serious weakness in this respect is that he presents but the outline of a theory of imperialism that is never actually developed into such a theory; it never fulfils its promise. As a result, no clear conception of the underlying faults of the existing Marxist literature on Egypt emerges. The tendency to pose issues related to Egypt in nationalist terms – to see Egyptian history first and foremost as an unfolding national liberation struggle – and to judge the Nasserist state by nationalist criteria is not challenged. It is not enough to counterpose a different theory: for Marxism theory has a political purpose. Clawson’s framework leans toward an alternative ‘world systems’ theory, which is potentially dangerous. Thus: ‘This pattern is much the same as that to be seen in Latin America, Africa, or Asia . . . The wide applicability of this overall pattern lends strength to my basic thesis’ (p109).

But is the pattern so uniform? Clawson’s argument that it is can rest only on a model of capitalist development that is monocausal and devoid of the notion of class *struggle*. The movement of capital is always historically specific, and it is doubtful that a theory of ‘the world’ is possible. The classical Marxist conception of imperialism, unlike its post-war imitators, conceived of relations between imperialist capital and the Third World as the *result*, not the definition, of imperialism; Clawson’s search for a world theory points back to the conflation of *imperialism* with the world economy, and this is a route we should not take.

**Conclusion**

It has not been my intention to suggest that Clawson’s analysis is hopelessly wrong, merely that it is somewhat two-dimensional, and needs further development. Nor have I tried to answer all the questions that have been raised.

My objective has been to show that since 1965 a crisis in the accumulation of capital has developed in Egypt that can be resolved only by reducing the living standards of the Egyptian masses, in an effort to raise the rate of surplus-value. January 1977 showed that if it is to succeed in this, the Egyptian state will have to employ wholesale repression on a scale of which it is not presently capable. A crucial element in the strategy is to establish an alliance with US capital, which if achieved would help enormously in alleviating many of the problems of Egyptian capitalism.
State Capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

The continuing instability of the Egyptian state militates against fructification of this alliance. The crisis of capitalism is thus also a political crisis, and the question mark hanging over Egypt is whether the bourgeoisie can impose its solution, or whether the working class can smash the bourgeois state and reorganise production. If those of us outside Egypt can contribute something by way of analysis for and solidarity with the workers in Egypt, all the ink that has flowed will have been worthwhile.

References

2 Page references to Clawson's article will be included in the text.
6 Foster-Carter, Bradby.
7 Prior to Muhammed 'Ali, the state was receiving only 20% of total tax farmed. See F.R.J. Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy*, OUP 1969.
8 The extraordinary belief that there was something 'bourgeois' about the Muhammad 'Ali period is common. See, for example, Joseph Hansen, 'Nasser's Egypt', *Education for Socialists*, April 1974, and Lafif Lakhdar, 'The Development of Class Struggle in Egypt', *Khamsin*, no 6.
10 Marx, *Capital* vol 2, Penguin/NLR. 1978, p185. This is quoted in Clawson.
11 Since he never refers to 'value', it is possible that Clawson accepts the neo-Ricardian position that it is a useless concept. In my opinion, rejection of Marx's value theory means throwing overboard any understanding of social, as opposed to technical, relations.
12 This, of course, was Trotsky's position. See *The Revolution Betrayed*, New Park 1973. See also the articles by Ernest Mandel in *Readings in State Capitalism*, IMG Publications.
13 The 'new petty bourgeoisie' has been theorised most elaborately by Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, NLB 1974.
14 It is difficult to tell whether this is Clawson's term or a parody of Hussein et al. If the latter, I apologise.
State capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

15 See Ruth First, 'Libya: Class and State in an Oil Economy', in Nore and Turner, eds.
16 For a discussion of Marx's theory of unequal exchange, as distinct from that of Emmanuel, see Geoffrey Kay, Development and Underdevelopment: A Marxist Analysis, Macmillan 1975.
17 An unanswered question that arises from Clawson's position is that of the relationship between a socialist state and the outside world. He suggests (p107) the possibility of socialism in one country. For an interesting discussion, see Gavin Kitching, 'The Theory of Imperialism and its Consequences', MERIP, no 100/101, 1982.
18 Robert Mabro, The Egyptian Economy, OUP 1974, p145
20 Mabro.
21 Ibid.
22 For this kind of terminology, see in particular Hussein.
24 Ibid.
25 International Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1969. Similar patterns are revealed in the length of the working day.
26 Abdel-Fadil.
27 Ibid.
28 See the account in Unni Wikan, Life Among the Poor in Cairo, Tavistock 1980.
29 Mona Hammam, 'Labor Migration and the Sexual Division of Labor', MERIP, no 95, p6.
30 Ibid.
31 Judith Tucker, 'Egyptian Women in the Work Force', MERIP, no 50. This actually conflicts with the evidence in Abdel-Fadil, p19.
32 Marx, Capital Volume 1, Penguin/NLR 1976, appendix. In this brief exposition of the basic issues related to the labour process, no attempt will be made to elaborate beyond the 'formal' 'real' distinction in subsumption to capital. This is, of course, inadequate, and a fuller analysis is required.
33 Evidence is disputed, but there is much to indicate that agricultural wages have been consistently lower than urban wages. See Abdel-Fadil, Development, Income Distribution and Social Change in Rural Egypt 1952–1970, CUP 1975.
35 See Jane Mayfield, Rural Politics in Nasser's Egypt, University of Texas 1971.
36 Middle East Record, 1967, p541.
39 Middle East Record, 1967.
40 Waterbury, p254.
41 For a particularly crass exposition of the view that Sadat's policies marked a fundamental shift, see Dave Frankel 'Sadat Dies – US Military Build-up Lives', Intercontinental Press, 19 October 1981. Sadat is portrayed as having been 'forced by imperialism' to carry out a rightist turn.
State Capitalism in Egypt: a critique of Patrick Clawson

43 Ibid.
44 Quoted in Waterbury.
46 It is not clear that the later acceptance of foreign partnership was a smooth transition. Nor is it clear that the struggles of the labour movement in this period played no role in forcing Egyptian foreign capital together.
47 This is not intended as an expression of Poulantzas’s position, though he does make some useful points.
49 He is quite clear about this in Nore and Turner.
50 Ibid. Clawson recognises the incomplete nature of his theory.

---

ISRAEL IN LEBANON

The authoritative and devastating report of an International Commission of lawyers who, on the basis of international law, examined the motives, conduct and weapons of Israel in an invasion which is estimated to have cost the lives of over 20,000 people and made 100,000 homeless.

paperback only £4.50 903729 96 2

Ithaca Press

13 Southwark Street London SE1 01-407 0393
Israel Shahak’s essay ‘The Jewish religion and its attitude to non-Jews’ (*Khamsin* 8 and 9) correctly identifies and denounces chauvinistic elements in the ideology of medieval Judaism. This task has a special contemporary significance, since medieval Judaism continues to provide one of the major ideological justifications for the oppressive and clericalist policies of successive Israeli governments (particularly that of the Likud coalition). Unfortunately, the effectiveness of Shahak’s essay suffers from a deficient methodology, which is unable to integrate a confused and disjointed text full of interesting, but ill-considered, evidence. Additionally, Shahak’s obsessive moral fundamentalism appears concerned more with condemnation than explanation. As a consequence, Shahak’s essay as a whole lacks focus and clarity, especially in Part I. (Parts II and III are better structured.) Thus, the reader is led to view many parts of the essay as pieces of Shahak’s own Voltairean demonology of the Jews, their religion and their history. To illustrate this point, let us read one passage written by Voltaire about the Jews:

‘But what shall I say to my brother the Jew? Shall I give him dinner? Yes, provided that during the meal Balaam’s ass doesn’t take it into its head to bray; that Ezekiel doesn’t come to swallow one of the guests and keep him in his belly for three days; that a serpent doesn’t mix into the conversation to seduce my wife; that a prophet doesn’t take it into his head to sleep with her after dinner, as that good fellow Hosea did for fifteen francs and a bushel of barley; above all that no Jew make a tour round my house sounding a trumpet, making the walls come down, killing me, my father, my mother, my wife, my children, my cat and my dog, according to the former usage of the Jews.’

Comparing the style and spirit of this and other passages written by Voltaire with many passages in Shahak’s essay (especially in Part I), it is clear that the essay was not only written within the theoretical framework of the Enlightenment, but also has all the literary flavour of Voltaire, with his lengthy encyclopedic moralistic remarks, and a profusion of acid sarcasms. It is a thorough impersonation of Voltaire, not excluding even his well-known call ‘Écrasez l’infâme!’ and, obviously, Voltaire’s own prejudices concerning the Jews of his time.

The editorial in *Khamsin* 8 which introduces Shahak’s essay points out its two main objectives:
Reply to Shahak

1 Analysis and critique of medieval ('classical' in Shahak's terminology) Judaism as a whole.

2 Exposition of the fact that modern 'secular' Zionism has inherited many oppressive, and specifically racist tendencies, from medieval Judaism.

The reader is warned about the non-Marxist nature of the essay, whose importance is further justified by stating that 'if Jews have been the principal victims of racism in this century, this must not be a restraint to expose racist tendencies within Zionism'. Leaving aside for a while a methodological critique of the essay (whether the theoretical framework of nineteenth century Enlightenment is an effective tool for analysing the medieval Jewish influence in modern Zionism), it must be said that Shahak does succeed in his second objective; that is, he verifies empirically that many everyday practical and legal matters in modern Israel are settled using ideological elements borrowed from medieval Judaism. Such an empirical verification is valuable in itself and, together with his systematic exhibition of racist, classist and sexist passages from medieval Jewish liturgy, forms the best of his essay. All this empirical evidence could lead to a well-structured materialist analysis, which would not only incorporate these empirical facts, but could use them for explaining to what degree the clericalism of the State of Israel is an organic component of it, and not just an incidental feature (electoral blackmail of religious parties). Shahak also points out, correctly, how 'deceptive' interpretations of medieval Judaism (and Jewish history in general) are being propagated by a whole army of journalists, intellectuals and middlemen ('patriotic liars' in Shahak's terminology). Worse, these 'deceptions' are still believed by the majority of Jews today.

Regarding the first objective, the best that can be said is that Shahak does show the incompatibility of medieval Judaism with the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Such a finding is not a surprise in itself, since medieval Judaism is a feudal, corporative institution and, as such, is anathema to the individualistic conceptions of the Enlightenment. However, Shahak deals with medieval Judaism in an ahistorical and non-material manner; he uses isolated empirical facts to present it as a 'closed' and 'totalitarian' institution, taking Karl Popper's 'Open Society' as a reference for what an ideally non-closed and non-totalitarian society should look like. I wonder whether it is legitimate to analyse a medieval institution, contrasting it with a later post-medieval social model, and therefore conclude that the medieval institution was 'totalitarian'; even in the case when such an ahistorical comparison could be justified, if it is made without specifying the nature of the broad social environment in which such a medieval institution operated, this comparison becomes absurd. In the first part of his essay, Shahak concludes that medieval Judaism was 'one of the most totalitarian institutions of human history', but there is no mention
at all that this institution was immersed in a broader society (medieval Europe) which would also be 'totalitarian' by Shahak's standards. It would be foolish to expect medieval Jewish communities to be islands of Popperian 'Open Societies' in the ocean of medieval corporative Europe; these islands would have never survived.

Shahak's commentaries regarding some of the supposed characteristics of modern Jews, like the 'Jewish' sense of humour, are also absurd. The fact that medieval Judaism has no comedies does not imply a humourless condition of medieval Jews, not to mention modern Jews. There were also no comedies in medieval Christianity, and the allusion to totalitarianism in this context is ridiculous. Modern Jews and medieval Jews lived in very different environments, and therefore they must have different characteristics: whether or not there is a historical continuity between them cannot be categorically determined just by an empirical examination of medieval Judaism.

In the third part of the essay Shahak argues at length that medieval Judaism was contemptuous of peasants and of agriculture as an occupation. However he does not use these facts as material for constructing a satisfactory analysis nor does he connect them with the discussion in Part I; consequently the text, as a whole, becomes extremely confused. Shahak presents an encyclopedic and static view of medieval Jewish history, that is, full of ill-connected details and lacking a consistent development and systematisation. His view has the typical methodological structure of liberal historical analysis, in which the set of moral considerations and decisions of a few powerful and (usually) 'evil' men constitute the engine of history, all against a static background of suffering peasants. In the case of medieval Jews, these 'evil' men were the rabbinical caste, and the endurance of medieval Judaism as an 'oppressive' institution is only a consequence of the coercive power of this caste, either in collusion with or subordinated to the equally 'evil' but more powerful Gentile king or feudal lord.

A much more coherent view of medieval Jewish history is that of Abram Leon,3 in which the medieval Jewish communities are depicted as a 'people-class' performing a specific socio-economic role: the exchange of products in a natural economy. Therefore, their relation to the rest of medieval society depended on how far their socio-economic role was 'necessary' for the functioning of that society. When this role was 'necessary', (the 'Radanite' period before the Crusades), they were granted privileges, and were protected by the kings, the nobility and the Church, having little contact with the serfs. This situation deteriorated when native merchant classes emerged in western Europe, displacing the Jews from the former privileged position of 'bankers of the oligarchy', towards a more 'popular' petty trade and commerce, which often took the form of usury. It is precisely in this new role that the Jews came increasingly in contact with the dispossessed layers of peasants and unskilled artisans, and became the objects of 'popular
hatred.\(^5\) In the third part of the essay, Shahak does outline these developments, but omits them completely when he deals with anti-Jewish persecutions, presenting the Jews as having the privileges of the Radanite period, combined with their antagonistic relation to the peasantry, as simultaneous features throughout the Middle Ages.\(^6\)

Although Abram Leon’s thesis has its own limitations, at least it provides a much better structured account of Jewish history than all previous and later idealistic historiographies. Even accepting an idealistic point of view, it is impossible to conclude categorically that in every case the massacres of Jews in the Middle Ages or in Khmelnicki’s revolt were legitimate acts of exploited serfs against ‘privileged and corrupt’ Jews. It is impossible to know in each particular event the moral considerations which different individuals followed, or whether antagonistic group interests forced the Jews to take sides independently of their individual moral considerations. The fact that many of the precepts and regulations of medieval Judaism seem to be ‘immoral’ by the standards of the Enlightenment is not a categorical proof that medieval Jews had a free choice to behave ‘morally’, and instead chose an ‘immoral’ behaviour, becoming usurers or slave-traders. Even if the Jews belonged to the privileged strata of medieval society, this does not mean that their position was very secure; usually it was not, but depended on the protection of kings, noblemen, the clergy, etc. There were no Jewish armies in the Middle Ages, and if the Jews were the usual target of popular fury, it may have been because they were the weakest and most unprotected sector of these privileged strata; and after the Crusades, perhaps the only one of these sectors which was in everyday contact with the peasants and urban poor.

According to Abram Leon’s theory, the decadence of western European Jewries (except for the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish communities) was in a very advanced stage just before the French Revolution; therefore the Jews whom enlightened gentlemen like Voltaire came across were mainly archaic remnants of a long-gone medieval world. However, the enlighteners also shared some prejudices which belong to the European Christian tradition, even if they themselves were fierce anti-clericalists.\(^7\) These prejudices form the ‘money-grabbing, parasitic, obscurantist’ stereotype, which was reinforced by their occasional acquaintances with such real Jews.

This myth about the ‘wandering evil Jew’ is nothing more than one of the ideological elements common to most political movements in agrarian societies, consisting in ‘idealising the native peasant so as to oppose him as a prototype to the corrupt urban dweller and to the foreigner, especially to the Jew’.\(^8\) These myths originated in the antagonism felt by agrarian societies towards any occupation (merchants, bureaucrats, skilled artisans) which was not directly related to agriculture. Such antagonism has always been expressed through moral condemnations. It is by no means a recent phenomenon, and can be
traced as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman societies. Obviously, this attitude forms a strong component of the ancient and medieval hatred towards non-peasant ethnic groups (Jews, Gypsies, Armenians, etc). Since the Christian middle ages were a period of fundamentally agrarian societies, these ideological elements survived that period and were incorporated in European Christian thought, all the way until the Enlightenment, when the Jews were the most identifiable group of non-peasant origin in Europe.

During the Enlightenment, when large sectors of western European society became urbanised, the above-mentioned ideological elements took different forms depending on the degree of rupture that different sectors of this society had with respect to the values of the former agrarian society. Among the most urbanised sector (including many radical liberals, anti-clericalists and socialists) these ideological elements were purged of their religious presentation; keeping only the attribution of moral virtues per se to the peasantry and working class, on account of the ‘morally positive’ nature of their occupations. As a contrast, the Jews were offered emancipation and civil rights as individuals, but not as a distinct cultural-religious group, since Jewish culture and religion were associated automatically with ‘morally degrading’ activities such as commerce, usury, speculation.

The fact that this image of the Jews and their religion is a mystification becomes evident when one examines the way these enlighteners describe Judaism, Jewish history, and their own attitudes towards contemporary Jews. For the western European enlightened bourgeoisie, the whole Jewish question was reduced to one simple idea: the Jews have been despised and persecuted because they fanatically adhered to their obscurantist faith, and consequently they could only be accepted in an enlightened society if they would renounce their ‘Jewish characteristics’. Western European Jews who were assimilating culturally to this bourgeoisie did accept this point of view, and believing this image of themselves, they acquired in their assimilation process these prejudices when dealing with eastern European non-enlightened Jews. Other ethnic groups, such as non-European ‘natives’ were also mystified by the enlighteners, and even by early Marxists, as ‘noble savages’ who would deserve enlightenment when they renounced their ‘uncivilised characteristics’. All these commonly held prejudices can always be reinforced by manipulating empirical findings when analysing the history and behaviour of a particular group. For example, a scholar wishing to exhibit the ‘criminal character’ of American Blacks could produce evidence showing over-representation of Blacks in American jails. However, it is not the amount of empirical evidence which makes a social analysis worthy of consideration; it is how this evidence is consistently incorporated into a methodologically sound analysis.

In the case of Voltaire or Marx, when they wrote about the Jews in general, they were ignorant of their diversity as a product of their dispersion, which faced these Jewish minorities with different socio-
economic environments: from medieval Yemen to industrial England. Thus, their prejudices became self-evident insomuch as they ignored any evidence that would have contradicted their beliefs, and they did not even develop a complete analysis accounting for their known evidence. In the case of a twentieth century Israeli enlightener like Shahak, both situations arise: as an anti-Zionist within Israel, he is confronted with an oppressive, clericalist state which is officially a ‘Jewish’ state; therefore he tries to demonstrate that every single group, throughout history, which identified itself as Jewish must have shared to a lesser or greater degree the same type of ‘totalitarian’ behaviour towards the Gentile society (especially peasants) as the State of Israel practises towards the Palestinians and other Arabs. Thus, according to Shahak, pre-1795 Polish Jewry provides the best ‘historical model’ explaining the current political position of Israel in a world-wide context, with the imperialist powers, Israel, and the Third World’s peasants replacing the roles of the feudal lords, their Jewish servants and bailiffs, and the serfs, respectively. Without denying some limited validity to such an analogy, it must be said that it is a flawed second-rate substitute for an understanding of the role of Israel as a sub-imperialist power in the Middle East, and as one of the major providers of weapons to military dictatorships.

The revolt of the Cossack leader Khmelnicki in 1648 provides another example of how Shahak manipulates historical facts to fit them into his theories. Independently of historical considerations (whether or not Shahak’s account of this revolt is accurate) and even accepting the claim that this event was significant in shaping Jewish-Gentile relations in eastern Europe, it is doubtful that twentieth-century eastern European Jewish settlers in Palestine ideologically identified the Palestinians with the Ukrainian peasants participating in Khmelnicki’s revolt. The relation between Jewish settlers and Palestinians was completely different from that between Jews and peasants in seventeenth-century Ukraine, and of all the factors accounting for the attitudes and prejudices of the Zionist establishment towards the Palestinians, the specific conditions under which the Zionist settling process took place are far more important than a historically distant event. In any case, the Cossack leader who was in the minds of eastern European Jews during the Zionist colonisation was not Khmelnicki, but rather Petlura; I doubt very much whether one could associate any ‘positive’ attribute to the latter just by virtue of being a leader of peasants.

I will not deny Shahak’s claim that medieval Judaism had a strong anti-peasant ideological content, and that this fact must have somehow reflected the socio-economic role and prejudices of those who created and practised the norms and precepts of such a liturgy. As pointed out before, medieval Christianity, being the religion of a largely agrarian society, incorporated into its ideology a set of prejudices directed against those groups who had a non-agricultural occupation. Therefore,
the Middle Ages witnessed dialectical relations between groups whose socio-economic nature is in some cases reflected in the ideological content of their religions, each one understanding the other through a set of prejudices. Both groups disliked and attributed moral defects to each other; but they also needed each other and there was mutual tolerance whenever the whole of medieval society was reasonably stable. Considering the relatively different regional conditions in each country and each particular historical period, Jewish-Gentile relations in medieval Europe fit quite well the urban-rural dialectical relation just described. Throughout the Middle Ages, either when privileged and protected or when despised and persecuted, medieval Jews had a distinctive general feature: they were an easily identifiable town-dwelling group not related to agricultural activities. Medieval Judaism, as the religion of a town-dwelling group immersed in an agrarian society, reflects the anti-peasant prejudices of such a group. Shahak’s approach to this fact is to stress extensively the anti-peasant prejudices of medieval Judaism (which become demonical attributes), and to ignore the dialectical relation with the religion of the surrounding society: medieval Christianity. That is, he examines medieval Judaism (and also, post-medieval Jewish history) from the ideological system of reference of the agrarian Christian tradition, using the language and methodology of its post-medieval continuation: the Enlightenment.

Not only did the Enlightenment fail to produce a convincing account for the survival of the ethno-religious Jewish minorities, it also provided the theoretical framework in which the vulgar Jewish historiographies are written. These historiographies, sanctioned by the full official apparatus of the State of Israel, have the same methodological structure as Shahak’s essay, with a reverse mystification: the ‘suffering’ Jews are sanctified and the ‘evil’ peasants become antisemitic demons. Needless to say, all these mystifying approaches to medieval Judaism, treating it in isolation from its social environment, without an understanding of the material conditions and evolution of medieval society as a whole, are empty and misleading, even if they incorporate large amounts of empirical evidence.

It is worth mentioning that Jewish history is a topic which still needs further research. There are many non-materialist interpretations which tend to reinforce in the general public the myths alluded to above. Even the Marxist interpretation of Abram Leon, being a product of Orthodox Marxism, has an excessively deterministic view; and in spite of having been already re-examined, requires further critique and incorporation of recent developments.12

So far, my critique of Shahak’s essay has been confined to enquiring whether he meets the objectives mentioned in the editorial introduction to his essay. However, Shahak claims to achieve in his essay a far more ambitious objective: the demystification of all post-medieval Jewish history. This objective, together with a clue to Shahak’s methodology,
are contained in the following statement of principles at the end of the third part of the essay:

'We must confront the Jewish past and those aspects of the present which are based simultaneously on lying about the past and worshipping it. The prerequisites of this are, first, total honesty about the facts, and, secondly the belief (leading to action, whenever possible) in universalist human principles of ethics and politics.'

It seems that the belief in 'universal human principles of ethics and politics' means to Shahak that, for all historical circumstances, the behaviour of all post-medieval Jews (as individuals or as a group) is to be gauged in terms of these vague principles, independently of the material conditions in which these Jews lived. Having 'demonstrated' the incompatibility of medieval Judaism with these principles, Shahak concludes that every 'inhuman' or 'negative' aspect of the behaviour of all post-medieval Jews is just a consequence of their adherence (possibly unconscious, possibly secret or conspiratorial, possibly enforced by the rabbi's coercion) to medieval Judaism with all its 'racist' and 'totalitarian' content. Thus, no further analysis is necessary, and the lack of explanation of the behaviour of a wide and disconnected variety of Jews is substituted by the vaguely defined concept of 'Jewish interest' which as a sinister group interest is the motivation underlying the acts of the Israeli politician, the Zionist journalist, the Marxist and Bundist intellectuals, the Hassidic mystic, the American rabbi, Moses Hess, Martin Buber, etc. All of them, in spite of the obviously different conditions in which they live or lived, are or were in danger of being overcome by the obscure forces of medieval Judaism, and thus finally becoming 'Jewish racists' guided by 'Jewish interest'. The text in the first part of the essay is full of hysterical and distasteful remarks that, taken out of context, could be read as if quoted from an antisemitic publication. A typical passage of this Judeophobic demonology is when Shahak deals with the 'fact' that many Jewish militants in radical left-wing parties still bear the ideology of the old totalitarian Jewish society:

'An examination of radical, socialist and communist parties can provide many examples of disguised Jewish chauvinists and racists, who joined these parties merely for reasons of "Jewish interest" and are, in this region, in favour of anti-gentile discrimination. One need only to check how many Jewish "Socialists" have managed to write about the kibbutz without taking the trouble to mention that it is a racist institution from which non-Jewish citizens of Israel are rigorously excluded, to see that the phenomenon we are alluding to is by no means uncommon.'

The implication that left-wing political parties are or have been infiltra-
ted by 'Jewish racists' who pursue some 'Jewish interest', without providing detailed documentation specifying which parties and which Jewish members are being alluded to, is a remark smacking of a scandalous 'conspiracy theory'. Besides being offensive, this remark is absolutely mistaken, because what an examination of Jewish militants in radical left-wing parties shows, in most cases, is extremely assimilated Jews who are indifferent (if not contemptuous) towards any specifically Jewish identity. As different sources show regarding the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, its Jewish members, such as Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Martov, were the most implacable opponents of the Jewish national-cultural demands that the Bund was fighting for. Possibly, Shahak is condemning the Bund for campaigning for the 'Jewish interest', but then, what was wrong with campaigning for a particular group interest (the Jewish working masses in Tsarist Russia) when they were being oppressed as a group, and the fulfilment of this group interest — unlike Zionism — did not imply the oppression of another group? It is possible that Shahak has in mind the identification of the so-called 'Jewish interest' with Zionism, in which case his reference to the apology for the kibbutz by the 'disguised' Jewish racists could at least make sense. If it was Shahak's intention to condemn pro-Zionist inclinations among Jewish members of left-wing parties, then why does he not say so explicitly? Is it a responsible attitude to write confused Judeophobic remarks, and to expect well-intentioned readers to interpret them correctly as anti-Zionist?

Even in the case of individual Jewish members of left-wing organisations, who either campaign openly for Zionism or fail to denounce it, it is very simplistic to assume that these individuals are disguised Jewish racists. It is not possible to conclude categorically that if a given individual claims to subscribe to a certain ideology, he/she is responsible for every single aspect of that ideology. Individuals may adhere to a given oppressive ideology because of a variety of reasons: ignorance, opportunism, temporary and personal circumstances, or because the oppressive nature of that ideology is not evident in the social context in which the individual lives. In the case of individual Jews outside Israel, all these reasons hold, and must be understood when confronting their support for Zionism.

I am not claiming that Jews are free of racism just by virtue of being Jews, or that they have no responsibility whatsoever for subscribing to an ideology which necessarily deprives the Palestinian people of its political rights; but it is also not possible to dismiss all these circumstances as 'Jewish interest' somehow originating from the 'racist' nature of medieval Judaism.

All politically active individuals are guilty of political contradictions, at least temporarily, without necessarily being hypocrites or disguised racists. To confront this fact with a hysterical, maximalist, moral-crusading rhetoric leads nowhere. An example of how Shahak deals with these facts is his sarcastic account of the rabbis who campaigned
with Martin Luther King without having made a thorough self-criticism about anti-Black racism in important passages of medieval Jewish liturgy. Shahak dismisses these rabbis either as disguised Jewish racists who supported the Civil Rights movement for tactical reasons dictated by ‘Jewish interest’, or as schizophrenics. Later on, in the third part of the essay, he draws a humanising view of nineteenth-century European antisemites as ‘bewildered men who deeply hated modern society in all its aspects . . . were ardent believers in the conspiracy theory . . . cast [the Jews] in the role of scapegoat . . . .’ It is interesting to see how it is perfectly natural for Shahak to excuse political and moral contradictions in certain individuals and groups as long as they are not Jewish; why couldn’t the American rabbinical scholars have been (at least some of them) simply confused, contradictory (and perhaps in many cases conservative) individuals whose participation in the Civil Rights movement was honest? Why does Shahak only demand 100 per cent contradiction-free moral integrity from the Jewish characters of his demonology? Perhaps he secretly believes in ‘Jewish moral superiority’ and castigates the Jew in his imagination for not living up to such superiority.

Another phenomenon which underlies the behaviour of Jewish individuals and communities is antisemitism, and therefore Shahak is not justified in playing it down as a mere excuse used by these individuals and communities to justify their attitudes. The fact that antisemitism has also been mystified and abused by Zionist rhetoric does not mean that it is non-existent and should be overlooked; it is a social phenomenon which has been excessively manipulated by moralists of all sorts, who have never been able to explain its complexities and perseverance. The following passage in the first part of the essay shows how Shahak correctly criticises (in his own style) the manipulation of antisemitism by some non-Jewish apologists of Judaism, Zionism and the ‘approved version’ of Jewish history:

‘. . . One way to “atone” for the persecution of Jews is to speak out against evil perpetrated by Jews but to participate in “white lies” about them.’

Unfortunately, the excessively moralistic condemnatory tone of the essay leads one to believe that Shahak wishes to challenge the former manipulation of antisemitism (whose effects he might have suffered as an anti-Zionist citizen of Israel) by indulging in an approximately reverse moralistic manipulation, which could be described as follows:

‘One way to “explain” the persecution of Jews is to generalise (ahistorically) to all Jews the evil (nature) of Zionism and to participate in “white lies” about some of their persecutors.’

It is clear from reading these moralistic manipulations, that antisemitism (and racism in general) is a far too serious social problem to be
approached only through moral considerations. Unfortunately, and in this respect I agree with Shahak, Marxist research (especially the excessively economistic variety) has not yet produced a satisfactory account of racism in its most virulent forms.

Not surprisingly, even today the ethnico-religious Jewish minorities still feel vulnerable to discrimination to a lesser or greater degree, depending on the socio-economic position they occupy in the country where they live. This insecurity must be a relevant factor in the political awareness of individuals within these minorities. There is still no coherent account of how and why the large majority of these Jews still subscribe to Zionism. This important task has not yet been achieved by anti-Zionist scholars, who have concentrated exclusively on the role of Zionism in the political scenario of the Middle East, leaving aside the fact that Zionism, as an ideology and as a political movement, plays a very different role outside Israel, since the conditions in which the Jewish minorities live are very different from those of the Israeli Jews, who are a relatively new national group.

What must be investigated is how Zionism affects the way in which Jewish minorities have related to their surrounding societies, and how the outcome of this interrelation has determined their acceptance of Zionism with the inherent mythologic-catastrophic view of their history. It must be said that before the Second World War Zionism was never the dominant political movement among the Jews; this can be verified for example by checking the results of municipal elections in pre-1939 Poland. To what degree and by what mechanisms did the Holocaust put Zionism into its present preponderant role? Whose group interests within the Jewish minorities benefit, in the long run, from the parasitic relation which developed thereafter between these minorities and the Israeli ruling class?

These questions may run parallel to Shahak's idea of 'the return to a closed Jewish society'; however his treatment of this interesting idea makes it devoid of all merit, since he presents the Jews as passively awaiting their liberation by 'external forces' (possibly the forces of the Enlightenment). Thus, he barely mentions what could be called 'assertive reactions' that Jews, by their own initiative, have attempted. These reactions implied challenging the blackmail according to which the price of emancipation would be a complete loss of Jewish cultural and religious specificity; instead the majority, whenever the conditions were favourable, tried to adapt their backward religion and culture to the conditions provided by the Enlightenment. The best examples of these assertive reactions were: Reform Judaism within religion, and the secular Yiddish and Hebrew cultures together with the Bund as modern expressions of a Jewish identity. Unfortunately Reform Judaism does not even merit a word from Shahak; and the Bund, in spite of its achievements as a genuinely revolutionary party opposing the reactionary Jewish orthodoxy and Zionism, is played down by arguing that its leaders promoted the racist idea of 'the superiority of Jewish moral
and intellect’, and therefore despised the eastern European peasants without making any self criticism regarding this attitude.

I do not claim that the Bund, as a political organisation, is beyond criticism, nor do I believe that its leadership and rank-and-file members were completely free of the anti-peasant prejudices inherited from medieval Jewish religious tradition. But the same could be said of the Polish, Russian, Ukrainian or Lithuanian political organisations with respect to the anti-Jewish prejudices of medieval Christian religious origin. Any account of the relation between eastern European Jews and the surrounding population (mainly peasants) cannot ignore the attitude of this population towards the Jews.

Shahak’s account of this relation is basically the simplistic unilateral view of ‘Jewish anti-peasant chauvinism’ against a static background of idealised peasants;17 and is based on the mistaken assumption that, as late as the twentieth century, eastern European Jews still related to the peasantry strictly according to the pattern which he previously described for medieval western Europe. By the time of the Bund, the Yiddish-speaking masses had undergone a process of proletarianisation parallel to the gradual but steady loss of their ‘people-class’ nature. This evolution meant that the Jewish workers, pedlars and artisans, as an exploited sector within an oppressed non-territorial national minority, were not better off than the surrounding peasantry. This peasantry was usually the cannon-fodder for the most reactionary and chauvinist movements in eastern Europe, and was often mobilised in order to perpetrate all sorts of anti-Jewish riots, including the infamous pogroms. Hence, the seeds of later tragic developments in eastern Europe can be traced to the fact that these oppressed groups, the Jewish workers and the non-Jewish peasantry and working class, had a mutual distrust and prejudice which practically prevented any cooperation between them.

In these circumstances, it is not acceptable by any standard to demand of the Jewish parties and factions a self-critique of chauvinistic attitudes, without demanding the same of those political organisations which represented the non-Jewish eastern European peasants, workers and middle classes. It is certainly regrettable that, even today, Jews of eastern European descent hold prejudices against eastern European ethnic groups. One must not forget however that the anti-Jewish prejudices of these (mainly peasant) ethnic groups had far more tragic consequences for the Jews, in terms of human lives and suffering, than Jewish chauvinism against them could have ever had. During the Second World War, the majority of Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian peasants (with honourable exceptions) were indifferent to the fate of the Jews; in spite of their own suffering under Nazi occupation, many of these peasants participated in the infamous Einsatzgruppen18 which murdered nearly a million Jews. As a survivor of the Holocaust, Shahak must be aware of these facts. It is then no surprise at all that the descendants and relatives of these Jews, now living in America, the Soviet Union or Israel, are very reluctant to re-examine their prejudices.
against those ethnic groups. Hopefully, there will come the day when Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and eastern-European Jewish intellectuals will re-examine their common history with mutual respect and understanding. There is not only a lack of Jewish initiative for this; so far, not a single Polish, Ukrainian or Lithuanian national organisation has ever carried out a self-criticism of the fact that many of their leaders and members (including many peasants) were prominent in collaborating with the Nazis to 'settle' the Jewish question.

If there is a turn towards a closed, inward-looking, catastrophically oriented political view within the Jewish communities, a great deal of it might be because of the recent historical experience that every form of assertion attempted by the Jews themselves proved to be too feeble against the prejudices that large sectors of European society has had against them for centuries. If the preponderance of Zionism is the ugly consequence of this defeat, then it is doubtful whether it can be challenged by invoking these same prejudices, presented in a 'scholarly' way. All those anti-Zionists who pretend that the development of Zionism in the European context can be explained mainly as a consequence of Jewish racism, do not only misunderstand its relation with the historical experience of the European Jews, but they also launch a political boomerang: a Judeophobic anti-Zionism is the best weapon in the hands of Zionists. Rather, it is the task of progressive anti-Zionists (Jews and non-Jews alike) to challenge Zionism as a false liberation, or better, as a total surrender to antisemitism and an actual negation of liberation. Hopefully, when the centrality of Zionism in the political thinking within the Jewish minorities fades away, the fetishistic attachment to the Israeli State will be replaced by a genuine concern for the development and well-being of Israeli Jews and their Hebrew culture, together with (and not against) the other nations and cultures of the Middle East. Perhaps then, under those conditions, there will be a stimulating renaissance of Jewish culture far beyond the miserable choices offered by most Jewish communities today: Religion, Zionism or Assimilation.

Finally, in perfect agreement with Shahak, I think the Jew must confront his/her past and this will necessarily involve a thorough and open critique of the Jewish religion as an important ideological source in Jewish history. Under the present political conditions in the Middle East, this important task can no longer be postponed as could have been the case under different circumstances. However, I doubt the effectiveness of following a moralistic approach, based on invoking a background of loosely defined 'universalist' principles. Rather, we must confront our past with the conviction that no aspect of it is free from explanation and criticism, and therefore our behaviour and characteristics cannot be understood in isolation from the development of general society, nor traced to obscure mythological forces, but to material conditions which could have affected any other human group.
Reply to Shahak

In the understanding of these conditions lies also the understanding of our present.

London, February 1983

References


2 Voltaire himself had no personal Judeophobic feelings towards individual Jews who embraced the philosophy of the Enlightenment. An account of his correspondence with contemporary Jews is given in Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *op cit*, pp252 – 256.

3 Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question, a Marxist interpretation*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1970. It is remarkable that this important work on Jewish history is not even mentioned by Shahak throughout his essay.

4 The Radaanites were Jewish traders in the early Middle Ages, who operated through a network of Jewish communities extending from western Europe to China.


6 The only source on medieval history mentioned explicitly by Shahak is Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*, Thames and Hudson, 1965 p173 – 4. Shahak attributes to this author the merit of being one of the few, among recent general historians, who ‘remarks upon’ the popular nature of medieval anti-Jewish persecutions, and the prominence of the Jews in the early medieval slave trade. I wonder not only why Shahak does not mention other sources, but also why only so few modern general historians have emphasised these facts. Perhaps these facts, being true, were not so clear and widespread as Shahak claims.

7 Shahak’s claim that medieval Christian tradition is relatively free of anti-Jewish racism is ridiculous. Many examples show the contrary: The *Juden Sauf*, Jews sucking milk from a pig, is a very common motive in the decoration of German medieval churches. The charge of ‘deicide’ thrown up against all Jewry was not reexamined by the Vatican until recently. (See Maxime Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs*, Penguin, p152).


10 The image of Jews and Judaism held by enlighteners and nineteenth-century Marxists is thoroughly discussed in the introduction of Robert Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews, From Marx to Trotsky*, Harrop, London, 1976. This mystification can also be traced in Lenin’s view of the Jewish question: Lenin, *The Jewish Question*.

11 The fact that I sharply criticise the methodology of Shahak’s essay does not imply that I fail to recognise his courage and integrity in exposing the violation
of human rights, which Palestinians suffer every day in Israel and the Occupied Territories.


14 This behaviour of left-wing radical Jews is even more pronounced today, since a ‘Jewish identity’ has become for the extreme left synonomous with Zionism. Therefore, many left-wing anti-Zionist Jews are more radical in this respect than non-Jewish militants.

15 This type of Judeophbic manipulation of anti-Zionism is common in Stalinist antisemitism. See two essays in Robert Wistrich’s Anti-Zionism in the USSR: From Lenin to the Soviet Black Hundreds: Adam Diolkose, ‘“Anti-Zionism” in Polish Communist Party Politics and W. Oschlies, ‘Neo-Stalinist Anti-Semitism in Czechoslovakia’. See also Nathan Weinstock’s introduction to Abram Leon, op cit, pp48-54.


17 Shahak’s mystification of the peasantry is similar to that found in most populisms in agrarian societies (as for example, eastern Europe). It is also a characteristic of the Russian ‘narodniki’. See Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, op cit.

18 The Einsatzgruppen were units especially used by the Nazis to murder the Jews left behind the frontlines of the German military advance in the USSR. They were formed largely by Polish, Ukrainian and Lithuanian peasants who collaborated with the Nazis.

Since 1979, books on Iran have been coming out thick and fast. As the course of events in that country seemed to show a consistent tendency to contradict and baffle even expert commentators, an increasing body of literature on Iran has flooded the market, ranging from hastily put together journalistic accounts to very valuable historical works. Nikki Keddie's recent book *Roots of Revolution*, is a singularly useful and welcome addition.

As a historian of modern Iran, with her particular interest in the role of the 'ulama' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she was in a unique position to bring her historical insights to bear in understanding the present. The book offers a concise, rather brief and largely descriptive history of Iran over the past two centuries. Although some of the material in the early chapters is covered by a number of existing books and articles on Iran, it is still very valuable to have a source book that covers this whole period in its historical continuity. More significantly, the book is unique, amongst similar histories of Iran, in its systematic treatment of two topics. One concerns the situation of women in Iran, a topic absent from most other accounts and covered for each period in this book. The second concerns the Babi/Baha'i movement. Iranian historians, under the ideological pressure (as well as potential physical threat) of the Islamic clergy who consider the Babis and Baha'is as heretics, often make the most pejorative references to this movement, or ignore it altogether. This is particularly true of works printed in Persian in Iran. To this day a comprehensive account of this movement and its place in the nineteenth-century history of Iran is missing. Nikki Keddie's account offers an initial assessment. That a disproportionately large number of orators and political thinkers of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution came from Azali and Babi backgrounds should provide the Iranian historians of that period with a phenomenon to be explained rather than avoided or denied.

The various chapters in this book are somewhat uneven in presentation. The earlier ones are much richer in analytical and interpretive insights. The chapters covering the Pahlavi period become more narrative. This is not surprising, considering Keddie's previous works on late-nineteenth century Iran and the Constitutional Revolution.
The most novel and currently topical chapter is Chapter 8, 'Modern Iranian Political Thought'. It covers the history of political thought in Iran in its tortuous evolution from what Keddie refers to as 'the concern of many Iranian leaders and thinkers . . . [about] catching up with the West' (p186) to the current preoccupation with rejection of the West. Simplistic though it may seem, I would argue that the contrast is a useful one in placing various 'historical controversies' in context and for an overall evaluation of the contributions of a number of contemporary literary and political thinkers of Iran.

One such controversy concerns the respective role of the 'ulama' and secular intellectuals in the Constitutional Revolution. This question is raised and discussed in another work by Nikkie Keddie. However, the problem is too often posed by one side in terms of the importance of the clergy in backing the Constitutional Movement, and on the other side much effort is put into demonstrating that there were also significant anti-constitutionalist currents amongst the clergy. This is not very fruitful. Clearly both tendencies existed. It is also undeniable that the clergy had vast influence both on the mass of the population as well as on the political atmosphere of the time. The extent of such influence is partially reflected in the fact that even secular intellectuals and political thinkers often felt obliged to present their politics in Islamicised language. Despite this, what is striking in the constitutional period is the ideological predominance of secular political ideas. Even the 'ulama' were giving their backing not to an Islamic political order but to a constitutional regime whose ideas had clearly and admittedly originated from Europe.

This predominance of secularism in politics is symbolically reflected in the rejection of the original farman of the shah, declaring a constitutional regime in which the parliament was referred to as an 'Islamic Assembly'. The Constitutionalists returned the farman, asking for this to be changed to a 'National Assembly, as we do not see ourselves involved in a matter of religion'. Seventy odd years later, the exact opposite took place. Although the new Iranian constitution referred to the parliament as the 'National Consultative Assembly', in the first session of the Assembly this was changed by an overwhelming vote to 'Islamic Consultative Assembly'.

More significantly, the constitution of 1906 was modelled after European (in particular the Belgian) constitutions. The whole direction of administrative and political reforms was towards setting up a largely secular state; although Islamic law was retained, it was integrated into the civil and criminal codes. Again, today the direction of change has been reversed. State institutions such as the judiciary are being dismantled to be replaced by religious courts, the criminal code is replaced by the Bill of Retribution etc.

This contrast is brought out clearly in Chapter 8 of the book. Even the pan-Islamic currents of the nineteenth century shared the same goal; that is, they saw return to Islam not as a means of rejecting the
West but of catching up with it. As Keddie notes, ‘With Jamal ad-Din [al-Afghani] and his followers . . . this reinterpretation had a modernist and reformist bent: Western-style law and science, sometimes constitutions, and other reforms were found in the Quran. Today, however, the movement in Iran is only in part reformist; it is carried out more by ulama than by independent intellectuals and stresses the literal following of many Quranic rules. This greater conservatism after a century may most briefly be explained by saying that Jamal ad-Din and his Iranian followers were reacting against a traditional, scarcely reformed governmental and religious structure and naturally thought that Iran’s problems might be solved by interpreting Islam in ways to bring it closer to the more successful, stronger, and better functioning West. Khomeini and his followers, however, reacted to a situation where Iran was felt to be a junior partner or puppet of the West, particularly of the United States, and in which cultural and economic Westernisation of a certain type was occurring at breakneck speed with little regard for human consequences. When no traditional or Islamic government had existed for a long time and the formal power of the ulama had been curbed, it was easy to imagine that a return to an idealised Islam, so far past that no one remembered it, could solve Iran’s problems . . . ’ (pp188-89).

During the Constitutional period, there were even important anti-religious anti-Islamic (partially anti-Arab) currents amongst the nationalists and constitutionalists. For those political leaders and thinkers who paid lip-service to religion, the reference to Islam was purely utilitarian: they saw it as a necessary concession to avoid the obvious clash between their ideas of a secular state with the Islamic institutions.

In this context, it is possible, and politically necessary, to characterise the intellectual and political evolution of the post-1960s, represented by such figures as Jalal Al-e Ahmad, ‘Ali Shari‘ati and Khomeini, as wholly regressive. It is not clear why Nikki Keddie, who more than anyone else had been drawing our attention to the role of the clergy and Islam in Iranian history and in the recent anti-Shah movement, is reluctant to draw this conclusion. She says, ‘As on many questions in many periods, it is wrong to characterise the outlook of the ulama leadership at this time either as purely “reactionary”, as did the regime and most of the foreign press, or as “progressive”, as did some Iranian students abroad.’ (p157) Further on in the same paragraph she seems to imply that Khomeini’s opposition ‘to dictatorship and to Iranian dependence on the US’, in itself was necessarily progressive. Others would also put his opposition to Israel on the credit side. But as the experience of Iran has shown, not any opposition to something bad is necessarily good. To oppose a military dictatorship in order to put in its place a clerical dictatorship, to oppose dependence on the US in order to replace it with retrogressive national isolation that destroys the existing socio-economic fabric of the country, to oppose Israel from an
anti-semitic standpoint – how could any of these stands be construed as somehow 'progressive'?

Similarly, an evaluation of the intellectual contribution of Al-e Ahmad can only be done in a historical perspective. As is noted in the book, ‘Al-e Ahmad was, in the 1960s, the intellectual leader of a new generation of Iranian thinkers.’ (p203). In fact from a secular intellectual direction he represented what Shar’ati represented from a religious direction. His essay on rejection of the West, Westoxication, became the intellectual bible of a generation. In this rejection, Al-e Ahmad turned against the revolutionaries and reformers of the Constitutional period and defended the most reactionary currents, as noted in the book, when summarising Al-e Ahmad views: ‘Islam, weakened by divisions between Sunnis and Shi‘is, by mystical groups, and by Babism-Bahaism, was vulnerable to imperialism. Iranians succumbed to the images of “progress” and played the game of the West. Al-e Ahmad attacks nineteenth-century Westernisers like Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Malkom Khan, and Talebzadeh, and defends the anti-constitutional Shaikh Fazollah Nuri for upholding the integrity of Iran and Islam in the face of the invading West.’ (p204).

The author (Yann Richard), quite accurately in my opinion, characterises the evolution of Al-e Ahmad as an evolution from socialism (he was in the Tudeh Party for a time) to a political Islam (p205); yet he insists that, ‘this does not mean that Al-e Ahmad was reactionary’. Provided that one is not throwing around the word ‘reactionary’ as an insult but as a historical characterisation, I fail to see how else such an evolution could be characterised. Significantly, this was not just Al-e Ahmad’s individual evolution, but that of a whole generation. It was this layer of the intellectuals who paved the path for the ideological hegemony of Khomeini’s Islamic government. In this, they played the reverse of the role that the proconstitutionalist clergy (like Na‘ini) had played seventy years earlier. The whole book, particularly Chapter 8, stands as a testimony to and history of this reversal. Nikki Keddie has provided us with a valuable book tracing this political trajectory in modern Iranian history – even though she seems unwilling to draw such conclusions openly.

**References**

3. Quoted in Adamiyat, op cit, p171.
4. This section is by Yann Richards, but it seems to represent an integral part of the book. Nowhere does Keddie contradict these evaluations.

Azar Tabari

118

*Covering Islam* is a particularly topical book. It deals with the role of some Western news media, experts and intellectuals (especially in the USA) in shaping public perceptions of what is happening in the Middle East.

Said's book is linked both in its themes and in its theoretical conception to his earlier studies *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine*. 'Orientalism' is for him the flaw which disfigures Western perceptions of 'Islamic' societies. 'Islam' is placed in quotation marks for it does not really exist, out there, ready to be discovered. Rather, according to Said, the very notion of 'Islam' is 'in part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal description of a religion called Islam' (p64). 'Islam' he argues has in the West a wholly negative image of 'punishment, autocracy, mediaeval modes of logic, theocracy' (p64).

Said follows Maxime Rodinson in suggesting what a more responsible view of 'Islam' might look like. Briefly, this would distinguish between Muslim religious teachings embodied in the Koran, the conflicting interpretations of those teachings, and the complex shifting relations between orthodoxy and heresy (pp53-55). As a general position, this insistence upon the specifics of history as against the timeless essences Said attributes to Orientalism is unexceptionable.

Why is the present image of Islam so negative? In part, as readers of Said's other studies will know, this is held to have its roots in a fundamental attitude underpinning Western culture. However, as Sadik Jalal al'Azem pointed out in *Khamsin* 8, because Said's concept of 'Orientalism' is so imprecisely dated it does itself function as a kind of essence, a permanent disabling feature of the Western mind.

But there is a more precise and delimited target too. For Said, the contemporary villain of the piece is the organisation of the intellectual field of Middle East studies and reportage. This field is basically constructed, he argues, in terms of an opposition between Orient and Occident, and the Orient emerges as a 'malevolent and unthinking essence' (p8).

During the 1970s a number of crucial changes have propelled 'Islam' to increased prominence. The oil crisis of the mid-1970s fuelled a particular kind of interventionist strategic thinking in the West. The crisis in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the unresolved question of the Palestinians' future all combined to place the Middle East in the centre of the 'arc of crisis'. Reportage flourished, and so did scholarship -- of a kind which Said finds seriously misleading. Its limits lie in the fact that 'discourse on Islam is, if not absolutely vitiates, then certainly coloured by the political, economic and intellectual situation in which it arises' (pxvii). But then, as Said himself recognises, albeit in
passing, exactly this point could be made about the dominant interpretations of Communism in the West. And what would a discourse free of such determinations look like? How is it to be achieved? There is an — unsatisfactory — answer to these questions, as we shall see.

At root, what Said calls ‘orthodox’ knowledge about Islam stems, he argues, less from intellectual curiosity than from the needs of Western power. Hence, he is highly dismissive of a great deal of US scholarly research which he sees as either an instrument of government policy or as suspect because of its sources of finance (such as the Pahlavi Foundation). The lack of a widespread popular knowledge about Islamic societies, the absence of outstanding interpreters able to popularise against the conventional wisdom and the ignorance of media personnel puts the intellectuals and geo-political strategists into a commanding position. They provide for the mass media, and therefore for the widest audiences, ‘what is most easily compressed into images’ (p32). Thus, in this deterministic picture, the cultural apparatuses intermesh to produce a homogenised, consensual view. The mass media, as creatures ‘serving and promoting a corporate identity’, cannot escape a ‘corporate’ (i.e., capitalistic?) logic. Said supports his argument with case studies of, for example, the media coverage of the Iran crisis and of the *Death of a Princess* controversy.

However, counterposed to this picture of inevitability, there is another. Some of us, Said included, must be allowed to escape ‘the intellectual regulation of discourse about distant and alien cultures’ which ‘positively and affirmatively encourages more of itself’ (p148). How so?

Here the thrust toward explaining intellectual production in a cultural materialist perspective gives way to a much less satisfactory argument. Said argues that an ‘anti-theoretical knowledge’ is possible which is ‘produced by people who consider themselves to be writing in opposition to the prevailing orthodoxy’ (p149). This opposition includes some younger scholars, some older US scholars (Algar, Keddie), some writers based in Europe (Hourani, Rodinson), and anti-war and anti-imperialist militants (e.g., I.F. Stone). Said also commends the work of Eric Rouleau of *Le Monde* as a model for US journalism to follow, but he does not classify it as ‘anti-theoretical’.

Those who are exempt from the distortions of Orientalism seem to achieve their glimpse of the truth because special conditions apply. In France, for instance, the burdens of imperialist interventionism are past (so it’s argued) and a more enlightened outlook permits the space for *Le Monde* to be dispassionate. (What about the rest of the French press?) At another level entirely, we seem to be talking about the moral and intellectual qualities of individuals. And, in actuality, Said’s ultimate refuge is an individualist and subjectivist justification for the truth. He is a man with a mission who believes that the reform of distorted thinking may be changed by acts of will and consciousness.

What is needed, argues Said, is ‘respect for the concrete details of
human experience, understanding that arises from viewing the other compassionately; we should follow the ideal of 'uncoercive contact with an alien culture through real exchange, and self-consciousness about the interpretative project itself' (p142). This argument recalls strongly the position taken by the German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, who argues that 'non-distorted communication' is possible where those engaged in discourse operate without the threat of violence or the constraint of power relations in which some dominate others. It is hard to envisage such a world, and even antithetical knowledge may be harnessed to the uses of some power. Moral integrity is no safeguard against the abuses of a propaganda war; nor is self-consciousness a guarantee of truth as it can obviously be mistaken about the springs of action. We are all damned to wander around the perimeters of the hermeneutic circle: the interpreters shall be interpreted, unto the nth generation.

Despite these reservations, Said has written a useful book which has stimulated a lot of interest. Perhaps the construction of 'Islam' is less enduring than he thinks. He says, early on in his text, 'For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left medieval theocracy; for the centre a kind of distasteful exoticism' (pxv). At the time of writing, as the events at the Chatilla and Sabra refugee camps are beginning to be assessed, it would seem that the label of 'barbarism' has now been affixed to Israel.

Philip Schlesinger


Paula Rayman has written an interesting book which, with some reservations, can be added to the growing list of books and articles that are gradually helping to shape an acceptable perspective and analysis regarding Israeli history and social structure. This relatively new corpus of publications challenges the view that used to dominate the social-sciences literature, especially that part of it inspired by the Israeli school led by S.N. Eisenstadt. Her particular contribution is important, since it relates to the heart of the Zionist myth – the kibbutz.

Paula Rayman was led to study the kibbutz in her search for a 'constructive utopian vision' which would aid the struggle for socialist change. In this she is no different from other Westerners who went to Israeli kibbutzim, motivated by such a quest. However, unlike many others, she did not limit her perspective to the internal dynamics of the kibbutz, but studied it in its national and (in the post-1948 period)
regional context. As a result, there emerges a picture very different from the popular myth of the kibbutz, even in the latter’s early ‘utopian’ beginnings. The kibbutz can be seen as a commune not so much of utopian socialists as of militants of a colonialis...
The immediate armed confrontation with the local inhabitants that took place in Hanita may have been more dramatic than in many other kibbutzim, and may be more characteristic of the later period in the establishment of kibbutzim. However, this use of kibbutzim as a military front position has been universal. The level of confrontation with local Palestinian peasants depended on the extent to which the absentee landlords or the Ottoman or British police had already accomplished the task of removing the peasants from the locality before the Zionist colonisation itself took place, as well as on the degree of organisation of the Palestinian resistance.

What is important to emphasise is that the confrontation between the kibbutz and the local Palestinians was not only national but had also a class dimension. Hanita lands were bought from absentee landlords through a secret agent. The secrecy however, was only preserved vis-à-vis the local fallahin; information of the sale was given not only to the British but also to Amir ‘Abdalla of Transjordan and the Lebanese government, who ‘kept the secret’ and thus gave their silent consent to the deal.

The national and private capital which bought the kibbutz lands also enabled the kibbutz to continue to survive during all the following years, on a subsidised level, until profits from the kibbutz industries — which used hired labour, Jewish (Oriental) and Palestinian — made the kibbutz economically ‘autonomous’ (but still getting preferential taxation treatment from the state).

In view of all this, it is difficult to see how the kibbutz can be described as either autonomous or a socialist unit ...

Paula Rayman shows how the various components of early kibbutz ‘socialist’ ideology — collective ownership, the ‘religion’ of labour and self-labour — were functional for the pragmatic needs of the settlers, on the level of the individual kibbutz, and of the Zionist movement as a whole. (Even the component which she claims did not represent a strictly pragmatic concern, the ‘religion’ of labour which encouraged a spiritual direct contact with the land, can be said to be functional to the extent that this direct relation hid the other people who existed on this land.)

The changes in the principles which fashioned kibbutz life in its earlier and later stages do not signify transition from socialist to capitalist ideology as Paula Rayman claims, but rather a shift in its pragmatic needs, including the pragmatic need for ideology itself, deliberations and reluctance to shift the ideological discourse notwithstanding. Since its earliest days the kibbutz, like the whole Zionist movement, was eclectic in the means it applied to achieve its national-colonial goals.

Deviations from socialist-egalitarian principles existed not only in the relations between the kibbutz community and its social environment, but also internally. Paula Rayman analyses the sexual divisions, which placed women in inferior positions in the kibbutz since its
Book Reviews

inception. She also describes how other social differentiations develop in the kibbutz and come to compose its internal stratification.

The most important contribution of the book is the detailed description of the kibbutz in its regional context in the post-1948 period. She shows how the raison d'être of the kibbutz as a Zionist frontier post which promotes national and class exclusivity continued, with changes, also after the establishment of the state, and were applied not only to the local Palestinians but also to the Oriental Jews who came to live in development towns and moshavim in the region. The concept of 'region' itself, like many other concepts in the Zionist terminology is 'doublethink'. Not only the catchment area of the 'regional' high school, but even the local municipal council itself excludes the local Palestinian and Oriental Jewish communities. The 'regional' industries not only exclude them from ownership but have become a class tool for exploiting them as hired labourers.

This form of exclusionary 'doublethink' has not changed much since the time the kibbutz was established. One of the poems (cited at the end of the book) which were composed in honour of the establishment of the kibbutz in a thickly Palestinian populated area declares:

'On the border of the north,
In desolate wilderness
We have fixed a habitation...' 

Nira Yuval-Davis

Unni Wikan, Life among the Poor in Cairo, Tavistock 1980, Price £4.95 (paperback) pp167.

Unni Wikan's book is about the effects of poverty on interpersonal relations among the slumdwellers of Cairo and its specific effects on women. It is based on eight months' fieldwork in one neighbourhood during which the author, an anthropologist, was able to get to know and carefully observe seventeen households linked through ties of community, kinship and reciprocity. The result is a rich fabric of detail about domestic life in a Muslim country which will be of interest to many; but it will disappoint those who argue that a kind of spontaneous feminism characterises the sexually segregated societies of the Middle East, and those who view poverty as a radicalising and equalising force.

The families in Unni Wikan's study are desperately poor although they are not the poorest of Egypt's capital city of eight million, where over a million are homeless. They at least have somewhere to live other than cemeteries and sewers, and they have a wage earner in the family. But they live in cramped and unhygienic conditions, whole families often residing in one room. No family has an income sufficient to meet
its needs; people are so poor they are afraid to accept hospitality because they are unable to repay it. Miserable though they are, their dreams are not of radical social change, but of advance within the existing system. In 1972, when the study was completed, the neighbourhood had little good to say about Nasser, the former nationalist leader, or for his brand of socialism. His government like all others was regarded as corrupt and bureaucratic and the slum dwellers rarely availed themselves of the benefits of his public welfare programme: nobody believed that anything cheap or free could be trusted. They longed instead for what they saw as the stability and relative prosperity of life under British rule.

But the focus of the book is not upon this — it is upon the lives of the women in these families. The slum areas with their narrow streets and decaying buildings are the women’s territory and their flats are their domain. The men keep away, spending their time at work or in the cafes. It is unmanly to sit in the home with the women and children. The women are all, in the conventional sense of the term ‘housewives’, dependent on a male wage earner and with little or no income-generating activity of their own. Their mornings are spent on housework; the rest of the day and much of the evening is taken up with sustaining, forming or breaking the complex web of alliance with other women which is an integral part of the daily struggle to make ends meet. In most cases the only wage earners are husbands and fathers, as children generally leave home when they begin to work. For women to enter wage work represents a loss of family honour and reflects badly on the men in the household. The women’s feelings are ambivalent: they do not want to be seen to be forced into wage work by dilatory husbands, yet many complained of being stopped from earning by family pressure. Yet these families live on the brink; every illness, marriage or religious celebration requires additional expenditure and creates a domestic crisis. While it is the men’s responsibility to provide the income, it is the women’s to make sure that what they are given for the housekeeping goes far enough to meet even unexpected additional expenditures. Survival in these conditions is only possible through borrowing from friends or through finely tuned relations of reciprocity established between friends and relatives. Women’s savings clubs organised by themselves also provide a cushion in situations where the domestic economy is threatened. Most of these arrangements are concealed from the men and the women also try to conceal them from each other; it is shameful to borrow and to have money problems so the women constantly exaggerate the degree to which they are financially secure. But everybody knows, or suspects, the truth because they are all in the same situation.

Yet despite the fact that dire poverty is common to all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and could conceivably draw them together, it produces the opposite effect of petty competition. Degradation and desperation turns every family into a battleground and renders every
friendship precarious through instrumental economic calculation, jealousy and mistrust. The cramped conditions of the living quarters and the absence of privacy exacerbates the situation by creating a paranoid world of door sitters, window peepers and gossips who construct a pervasive system of social control, based on intolerance, suspicion and envy.

If relations between the women are competitive and instrumental, relations between men and women are equally, if not more, fraught. The men are almost guests in their own homes; they often take two jobs to earn enough money for the family’s subsistence and will then work a ten hour day. If they have any leisure time they spend it in the cafes or visiting relatives rather than in their cramped and noisy apartments. Husbands and wives fight continuously over money, the wives trying to secure a larger portion of the wage than that which is given to them. Each suspects the other of cheating, the women with some reason; men rarely disclose their earnings and most men keep a sizeable portion for their own personal use. One man spent a third of his total monthly wage on his own consumption, £15 out of £51, while the family of eleven, including himself, had to eat, dress and live on what remained. Another man, one of the poorest, kept a family of eight on £23 per month, taking a good fifth for his own purposes. The money men spend on themselves goes on tobacco, occasionally drink, gambling, and on the cafes. It is not even indirectly spent on the family’s behalf. Yet, however much the men and women may fight, they rarely divorce unless the marriage is recent and there are no children. Children provide both men and women with a stake in staying married. Women are often deprived of their children on divorce as well as losing their source of material support. The social sanctions against women taking independent initiatives such as working for a wage are considerable even though they are under extreme financial pressure to do so. Divorced women are the responsibility of their natal families, so great efforts are made by relatives to reconcile warring couples. From the man’s point of view, the financial penalties of divorce are considerable if there are children, as he assumes responsibility for them. If he re-marries he not only expects to have more children to support, but he must also find the money to pay for the wedding, and the bridewell, as well as contribute to the costs of setting up a new home. So men and women tend to stay together and to find some kind of modus vivendi, however unsatisfactory.

Although it is not without sympathy and understanding, this is a harsh and unromantic view of the urban poor. It is, of course, unclear as to how far the sample of seventeen families can be seen as representative of the urban poor in Cairo or even of a particular stratum within it. We know that these were not the poorest families in Cairo but we do not know how they compared for example with others, where women were not dependent on a family wage. The extremes of individualism and competitiveness documented in this book contrast with those accounts
of urban slums and shanty towns in parts of Latin America which are characterised by female support groups, communal solidarity, warm interpersonal relations and political radicalism. In most cases communal solidarity of this kind has developed through political struggles, the work of community, religious, or political activists, or through forms of rural solidarity transplanted to the towns. In other words it is not the spontaneous correlate of poverty and deprivation.

The social behaviour described by Unni Wikan is not spontaneously generated either, but why it takes the form it does is not adequately explained in her account. While she sees poverty as the main cause, she acknowledges that 'cultural factors do play a part'; but this observation is not elaborated upon. It would have been interesting to have known more about these cultural and religio-ideological influences as they might help to account for such features as the pronounced gender hierarchy and particular family form characteristic of the households in the study. More intractable, and more worrying for feminists, is the problem of why, in the slums of Cairo, the women are more concerned with defaming each other's morals through the vicious gossip known as 'people's talk' than with how conditions can be improved through greater co-operation and collective action.

Maxine Molyneux
THE INVASION OF LEBANON

Introduction — Eqbal Ahmad
The meaning of Beirut — Ibrahim Abu Lughod
Despatches from the war — Selim Nassib
The defence of Beirut: from the front line — Sami Al-Banna
Invasion of Lebanon: an American’s view — Don Wagner
The medical impact of the siege of Beirut — Ameen Ramzy, M.D.
Occupation and resistance: an Israeli press survey — Khalil Nakhleh

Other documents include:
Interview with Yasser Arafat • Excerpts from the McBride Report: Southern Lebanon; genocide and ethnocide • Report from the Palestine Red Crescent Society • Sabra and Shatila: reports and testimonies • American arms in Israeli hands • Report from an Israeli POW camp • Reviews and bibliography

Editors: Ibrahim Abu Lughod and Eqbal Ahmad

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER
Take a year’s subscription now and receive this special double issue at a reduced price of £2/$4.

☐ I enclose £8/$16 (individuals) for a year’s subscription to Race & Class
☐ I enclose £3/$6 for a copy of the special issue on the Lebanon
(airmail rates on request)

Name

Address

Send to the Institute of Race Relations, 247 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NG, UK. (Please send cash with order, cheques to be made payable to Institute of Race Relations.)