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# The Jewish State & Its Arabs

*Hillel Halkin*

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LAST OCTOBER 9, the evening of Yom Kippur, Jewish-Arab riots broke out in the Israeli coastal city of Acre. They began with the stoning by Jewish youths of an Arab who drove his car through a Jewish neighborhood after the onset of the fast, the solemnity of which even secular Jews in Israel (but not Arabs in their own localities) respect by stilling their car engines. Although the driver escaped with minor injuries, rumors that he had been killed spread quickly through Acre's old, walled quarter, in which most of its Arab population lives. An Arab mob surged out of it, crying *Allah akbar*, "God is great," smashing shop windows, looting, and burning cars in the Jewish downtown.

On the following night, after the fast had ended, rioting broke out again, this time with Jews, shouting "Death to the Arabs," taking part too. An Arab apartment was torched and several Arab families living in Jewish neighborhoods were forced to flee their homes. There were similar incidents on the third night. Then Acre quieted down. Luckily, no one had been hurt badly.

As always on such occasions, there were different versions of what had happened and who was to blame. Did the Arab driver blunder innocently into a Jewish neighborhood or was he being deliberate-

ly provocative and playing his radio at full blast? Did the first night's Arab mob form spontaneously, or was it organized and incited by a loudspeaker broadcasting from a mosque? Were the police quick enough to respond, or did their hesitancy make things worse?

Even in the immediate aftermath of the events, however, let alone weeks later, it was clear that the details hardly mattered. Whatever they were, they touched off something that Israel had not seen before. A minor brawl between Arabs and Jews would have been nothing new; nor would have been Israeli Arab demonstrators clashing with police in Arab townships, or Jewish settlers and Palestinians attacking each other's persons and property in the occupied territories. But large-scale Arab-Jewish violence in a mixed Israeli city, including some committed by Arabs invading Jewish sections of town, was a first. Like all firsts, it made one wonder whether one was looking at an isolated incident or at the future.

THOUGH HARDLY neglected, the problem of Israel's Arab citizens has been overshadowed by Israel's prolonged conflict with the Palestinians living in the territories occupied in the 1967 war. And yet just as the problem existed before 1967, so it will continue to exist, only in a more acute form, if and when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is settled. Or rather, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be settled as long as Israeli Arabs remain an

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angry, alienated, and growing minority, for they will simply become its new focus.

Some numbers are in order. On the eve of Israel's 1948 war of independence, roughly a million Palestinian Arabs lived within what were to become the borders of the Jewish state. Most were turned into refugees by the fighting. The 150,000 who remained were concentrated in the Galilee, the Wadi Ara area in central Israel, and the Negev. Some 70 percent were Muslim, 20 percent were Christian, and 10 percent were Druze. At the war's end, they comprised about a fifth of Israel's population.

Today, six decades later, Arabs still make up a fifth of Israel's population, which has grown tenfold to 7.3 million. (They are now, however, 82-percent Muslim, 9-percent Druze, and only 9-percent Christian.) In the face of massive Jewish immigration, this ratio has been maintained by an extremely high Muslim and Druze birthrate, nearly twice that of Israeli Jews throughout much of the period in question. In addition, Israel's current Arab population of 1.4 million has been swelled by its own "immigrants," the 250,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem whose families were given Israeli citizenship when their neighborhoods were annexed in 1967.

In recent years, the Israeli Arab birthrate has declined sharply. Yet it is still higher by a third than the Jewish rate (which itself far exceeds that of any Western country), averaging 3.9 children per family versus 2.9 for Israeli Jews. Since the low Jewish-immigration figures of recent years, following the heavy influx from the ex-Soviet Union in the early 1990's, are now balanced by Jewish emigration, and there is no likely source of large numbers of Jewish immigrants in the future, Israel's Arab minority begins to increase proportionally. Even were its birthrate to drop to Jewish levels tomorrow, it would continue to grow due to generational lag. Today, 25 percent of all school-age children in Israel are Arab. If, upon reaching adulthood, they have families the size of Jewish ones, their own children will still comprise a quarter of all newborn Israelis.

Of course, the Israeli Arab birthrate will not drop to Jewish levels tomorrow. Suppose, though, that it eventually does: at what percentage of Israel's population, barring unforeseeable Jewish immigration or Arab emigration, might its Arab minority stabilize? Although any figure is guesswork, somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 percent might be a reasonable minimum. Israel, then, even if it withdraws completely or nearly to its 1967 borders, has to prepare for the day on which three

out of ten, and possibly more, of its citizens are Arabs. And while ceding Arab Jerusalem to a Palestinian state would lower the ratio, it would not do so by more than a few percentage points.

IN DEBATES within Israel over the future of the occupied territories, the Israeli Left has rightly hammered away at the point that, quite apart from the feasibility or morality of holding onto the West Bank in the face of international pressure and Palestinian resistance, it would be demographically suicidal to do so: incorporating the Arab population of the West Bank into Israel proper would turn Jews between the Jordan and the Mediterranean into a minority, or the barest of majorities, within a generation. Yet when it comes to thinking about the future of an Israel that has quit the territories, the same Left does an about-face. Now, any talk of an Arab demographic problem is forbidden. Political correctness compels the Jewish Left to side with Israel's Arab politicians and intellectuals, who have insisted that Jewish concern about the matter is illegitimate.

Thus, when, in a public address in 2003, former prime minister and then minister of finance Benjamin Netanyahu stated that Israel needed a sizable Jewish majority to remain both Jewish and democratic, and that "if [Arab numbers] reach 35-40 percent . . . the Jewish state will be annulled," Arab Knesset member Ahmed Tibi declared that, "Netanyahu's demographic bomb is a stink bomb and racism." The day was coming, Tibi said, his imagery inspired by his previous career as a gynecologist, when Netanyahu and his followers would "set up roadblocks at the entrance to Arab villages in order to tie Arab women's tubes and spray them with spermicide." Reacting to the exchange, Yossi Sarid, head of Meretz, the preferred party of Left-liberal Israelis, called not Tibi but Netanyahu "giddy-headed" for having "poured a fuel tanker on the bonfire of relations between Jewish and Arab citizens in Israel."

Yet Netanyahu was simply stating the obvious. An Israel with a 40-percent Arab minority would no longer be Jewish in its national identity in the same sense that Spain, with its nearly 10-percent Catalanian minority and less than 2-percent Basque minority, is Spanish, or that Romania, with its 6.6-percent Hungarian minority and 2.5-percent Gypsy minority, is Romanian. It would rather be a bi-national state like Belgium (60-percent Flemish and 30-percent Walloon), pre-1993 Czechoslovakia (54-percent Czech and 31-percent Slovak), or post-1992 Bosnia (44-percent Bosnian

Muslim and 31-percent Serb)—three countries whose different fates spell out the alternatives when demographic margins narrow past a certain point: genuine power-sharing between the two sides, peaceful separation, or severe civil discord leading to war and ethnic cleansing.

Given the nature of Arab-Jewish tensions, a binational Israel like Belgium (which is itself not guaranteed to hold together) is inconceivable. Nor could an Israel returned to its 1967 borders, themselves the result of the partition of British Mandate Palestine, be partitioned again like Czechoslovakia, for it would be too small and its Arab and Jewish populations too interspersed. That leaves the example of Bosnia.

And yet Bosnia, too, is not the best parallel, since relations between its Muslim majority and Serbian minority were good until shortly before the outbreak of hostilities between them. In cities like Sarajevo, the two communities spoke the same language, shared the same culture, lived in the same neighborhoods, studied in the same schools, mixed socially, intermarried freely, held no deep historical grievances against each other, and were too secularized to let religious differences come between them. They were as shocked as was the outside world by the hatred that engulfed them once events spiraled out of control.

**T**HIS CAN hardly be said of Jews and Arabs in Israel. The two groups speak different languages, have different customs and values, live in separate towns, villages, and urban neighborhoods, study in different elementary schools and high schools, rarely socialize with each other, almost never intermarry, belong to societies in which religion and religious zealotry play major roles, and are heirs to a hundred years of bitter conflict. When rioting broke out in Acre last Yom Kippur, there was dismay but little surprise. If anything, Israelis wondered why it had not happened sooner.

That does not mean that everyday Jewish-Arab encounters in Israel are non-existent or unfriendly. Arabs and Jews meet in many spheres and usually do so amicably. They ride the same trains and buses, frequent the same malls, buy in each other's shops, work in the same factories, attend the same universities, are treated in the same hospitals, and are occasionally invited to one another's weddings and celebrations. An Arab may be the plumber who fixes a Jew's faucet, the contractor who builds a Jew's house, the bank teller who cashes a Jew's check, the doctor who treats a Jew's illness, the judge who rules on a Jew's dispute with another Jew. Many Israeli Jews

fear and distrust Arabs, but they are polite and respectful in their presence. Many Israeli Arabs feel anger at Jewish society, but they seldom express it in their contacts with individual Jews.

The anger is to a great extent justified, or at least understandable. The overall experience of Arabs in Israel, despite the equal rights granted them upon the state's establishment, has not been a happy one. Many come from families of refugees who fled one village in Israel, subsequently razed by the authorities, for another. Many others lost their property in the 1950's and 60's, when Israeli governments expropriated large tracts of Arab land for Jewish townships and agriculture. Those who are old enough still remember the military rule of 1948-66, when they needed special permits to travel and were kept under close security surveillance. All know that today, too, they are profiled by Israel's police and security forces, so that their chances of being pulled over at a police checkpoint, or having their baggage minutely examined at Ben-Gurion airport, are far higher than those of an Israeli Jew. The average Israeli Arab earns less than his Jewish counterpart, lives in more crowded conditions, and is more often beneath the poverty line.\*

Not surprisingly, most Israeli Arabs feel discriminated against. Asked in a 2006 study whether Israel was a democracy, 81 percent said that it was a democracy for Jews but not for Arabs. Sixty-eight percent thought they were denied full civil rights. Eighty-four percent believed Israel's government deliberately disadvantaged them in at least some areas. Over 90 percent thought Jews were given better educational services, more job opportunities, larger government budgets, and better treatment by official institutions. Only 5.7 percent were satisfied with the state of Jewish-Arab relations. Eighty-three percent thought the creation of Israel was unjust.

To be sure, these are the typical complaints of many minorities. Had one asked the same questions of blacks or Mexicans in the United States 50 years ago or less, one would have gotten similar responses. But in 1959, Mexico had not fought several recent wars with the United States; northern Mexico was not under American military occupation; and

\* Any discussion of Israeli Arab poverty, however, needs to take certain things into account. One is the larger number of children in Arab families, which reduces per-capita income. Another is the smaller percentage of mothers in the work force, which lowers per-family income. A third is that, while underreporting of income is widespread throughout Israel, it is particularly high in the Arab sector. In all three of these respects, there is a strong resemblance between Israeli Arabs and Israeli ultra-Orthodox Jews, on whom the economic data are similar.

Mexicans did not, backed by their fellow Spanish speakers in Central and South America, deny the political legitimacy of the United States and look forward to its dismemberment because the American southwest and California had been stolen from them. The comparison, then, is inexact.

The fact that Israel's Arab citizens also belong to a Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim world with which Israel has fought bloody wars and remains embroiled in conflict has complicated their situation enormously. On the one hand, although only a tiny number of them have been involved in espionage or terror, the greater conflict has caused Israeli Jews to regard them as an actual or potential fifth column and increased prejudice against them. On the other hand, it has not only led them in many cases to identify more with Israel's enemies than with Israel, it has encouraged them to think that, although a minority in Israel, being part of an overwhelming majority in the Middle East precludes their accepting minority status. Increasingly, therefore, their demand has been, not to be a more fairly treated minority, which is something a Jewish state indeed owes them, but not to be treated as a minority at all.

THIS DEMAND is expressed programmatically in four different statements that emerged from the Israeli Arab community in the years 2006-2007: *A Future Vision for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, issued by the National Committee of Arab Mayors; *A Democratic Constitution*, released by the Adallah Legal Center for the Rights of the Arab Minority in Israel; *The Haifa Declaration*, the work of the Mada al-Karmel Center for Applied Social Research; and *An Egalitarian Constitution for All*, written by the Arab Israeli jurist Yusef Jabarin. As the four documents are remarkably alike in their contents, and the first three were composed by joint teams of Israeli Arab politicians, academics, and intellectuals, they can be justifiably viewed as representing the thinking of the Arab elite in Israel today.

This thinking can only be chilling to most Jews, for—although calling for Arab-Jewish dialogue and reconciliation—it insists on the dismantlement of Israel as a Jewish state. As put by *A Future Vision for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, “Israel [as envisioned by the document's authors] will cease to carry out all policies and programs that are tainted by favoring the majority, and will act to remove all privileging of one national group over another, especially on the practical, structural, legal, and symbolic levels.”

In effect, as *A Future Vision* and its companion

documents make clear, this would mean revising practically every aspect of Israeli existence, starting, on the “symbolic” level, with the name “Israel” itself, the Israeli national anthem *Hatikvah*, and the Israeli flag with its star of David, and ending, on the “practical” level, with the return of Arabs to villages deserted by their families in 1948 and the restitution of lands expropriated for Jewish use. Israel's Jews would also have to apologize for their “responsibility for the Palestinian *nakba* [catastrophe] of 1948 and its horrendous consequences for the Palestinians in general and those living in the [to-be-renamed] state in particular.”

Among the “structural” and “legal” changes demanded by *A Future Vision*, *A Democratic Constitution*, *The Haifa Declaration*, and *An Egalitarian Constitution* are:

- The abolition of all government and government-supported institutions, such as the Jewish Agency and the Israel Lands Authority, which have been used in the past to channel budgets, activities, programs, and property to specifically Jewish causes, organizations, or individuals.
- The repeal of the Law of Return, which grants all Diaspora Jews the right to immigrate to Israel.
- The demotion of Hebrew from *the* official language of Israel to *an* official one alongside Arabic, so that Arab schoolchildren would study no more Hebrew than Jewish schoolchildren study Arabic and Arabic-language universities would be established for Arab students who do not wish to continue their higher educations in Hebrew.
- Self-rule for Israeli Arabs in such areas as religion, culture, and education, in which they would have autonomous control over their own institutions and the budgets allotted them.
- Arab veto power over all legislation pertaining to the internal affairs of the Arab community or affecting Arab-Jewish relations. *A Democratic Constitution* suggests two possible ways of doing this. One would be a special Knesset committee, half its members belonging to political parties “defined and characterized as Arab or [mixed] Arab-Jewish,” whose approval of new laws would be necessary. The other would allow Arab parties in the Knesset to block measures opposed by 75 percent of their members.

Thus, despite the frequently voiced insistence of Israel's Arab leadership on Israel's becoming a “state of all its citizens,” this state would not be, like France or the United States, a unitary one in which everyone is equal before the law within the framework of a single dominant national culture and majority-rule political system. Rather, it would

be a formally bi-national polity or “consensual democracy” in which all citizens would be assigned to either its Jewish or Arab sector, each of which would administer its own internal affairs and promote its own identity. How the two would be collaborate in formulating and implementing policies in such supra-sectoral realms as economic affairs, foreign relations, national defense, and so forth, is left deliberately vague in all four documents.

THE CAMPAIGN of Israeli Arabs for full equality has often been compared to the civil-rights movement of the 1950’s and 60’s in the United States. And yet the demands of *A Future Vision*, *A Democratic Constitution*, *The Haifa Declaration*, and *An Egalitarian Constitution* are the very opposite of that movement’s. They seek not the integration of Israeli Arabs into Israel’s life but their isolation from it. “Separate but equal,” the principle struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in its landmark 1954 desegregation decision, could be their motto. The possible “Israelification” of Israel’s Arabs, far from being desirable, is viewed by them as a threat. Rather, they are for the de-Israelification of Israel’s Jews.

Indeed, one of the most striking things about these four documents is their demonstrative lack of sympathy for Jewish national experience and feeling. While repeatedly calling on Israeli Jews to make room for the “Palestinian narrative,” they have no room of their own for the Jewish narrative. Zionism is for them, in the words of *The Haifa Declaration*, no more than “a colonialist settlement movement in Palestine,” which, “with the collaboration of world colonialism and reactionary Arab powers,” successfully achieved “its goal of conquering our homeland.” Although this conquest is now a fact to be acknowledged, and the right of Israel’s Jews to self-determination cannot be denied, that right does not entitle them to anything beyond a “separate but equal” existence of their own. They may be 80 percent of Israel’s population, but they must learn to think like 50 percent—all the more so because, if current demographic trends continue, they may end up being close to that.

One needs to be blunt. If Israel is in danger of one day becoming a second Bosnia, any implementation of the hopes expressed in *A Future Vision*, *A Democratic Constitution*, *The Haifa Declaration*, and *An Egalitarian Constitution* would only hasten that day considerably. A country in which Jewish hegemony was replaced by a comprehensive and symmetrical bi-nationalism would not be one in which Jewish-Arab frictions would be eased or Jewish-

Arab conflict defused. On the contrary: friction would be driven to new heights and conflict exacerbated to new extremes, since every decision at every level, from local zoning laws to Israel’s place among the nations, would be part of a power struggle between two hostile and inward-turned communities, each of which sought only its own advantage.

It would be a return to the days of the British Mandate—except that back then there were the British to adjudicate. Who would do so now? Who would enforce the judgment? The bi-national state’s army or police? But these, too, would be bi-national in their composition. (Today, apart from Druze, Israel’s Arabs are not required to serve in the military and only a handful volunteer for it.) How long would it take for Jewish soldiers to fire on Arab ones, or vice versa, and the flames of civil war to ignite? Less time, one imagines, than it took to compose *A Future Vision for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*.

Nor did Zionism create a Jewish state for it to become half of a tension-ridden Jewish-Arab condominium. The small measure of support for a bi-national solution in Palestine that existed in the Zionist movement in the 1930’s and early 40’s ended with Israel’s establishment. For the most part, Zionist leaders, counting on the immigration to Palestine of Europe’s millions of still unmurdered Jews, had never doubted a Jewish state’s capacity to absorb a large Arab minority while giving it full political equality. Even Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the head of the sometimes stridently nationalist Revisionist party, was adamant on this point. Any Jewish state that came into being, he insisted, would be a democracy for its Arab citizens as well. No other arrangement would be acceptable.

BUT *can* a state be both Jewish and democratic? Israel’s Arab leadership says it cannot be, and many Western intellectuals and political commentators now agree. How, they ask, can a country, even if it operates on a one-man, one-vote basis, be democratic for its minority when its official symbols, holidays, heroes, and religion are those of the majority that this minority feels dispossessed by; when the minority must learn the majority’s language to get along but not the other way around; when the majority is linked to a diaspora any member of which can join it for the asking, while the diaspora to which the minority is linked is denied this privilege; when there are state-supported institutions that work for the benefit of the majority only; and when the majority has the political power to

pass whatever laws, and conduct whatever policies, it deems to be in its own interest without taking the interests of the minority into account? A Jewish democracy, it is argued, is a contradiction in terms. A country can be by contemporary international standards either Jewish or democratic, but not both.

Not so, argue Alexander Yakobson, a historian at the Hebrew University, and Amnon Rubinstein, a professor of constitutional law and former Israeli minister of education, in a new book entitled *Israel and the Family of Nations*.<sup>\*</sup> Not only, the two maintain, is the supposed contradiction between Israel's Jewishness and its democratic nature a false one, it is also not true that Israel is an anomaly in today's world, the only purportedly democratic country in which the religious and ethnic identity of a majority is given preferred status. The same is true of many other democracies, too, and while one can debate its desirability, it is clearly not incompatible with democracy itself. And yet, although the constitutions and political systems of numerous countries in Europe and elsewhere have ethnocratic features, these are never criticized in the same terms as they are when found in Israel.

HERE ARE a few of the many examples that Yakobson and Rubinstein give:

- Greece, which has Albanian- and Turkish-speaking Muslim minorities, adopted a constitution in 1975 that designates the "Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ" as the country's "prevailing religion" and Greek Orthodox priests, unlike other clergy, receive state salaries. Moreover, descendants of Greek families that have lived abroad for generations can apply immediately for citizenship upon establishing residence in Greece, whereas other would-be immigrants must wait eight years. (In the 1990's, 200,000 ethnic Greeks received citizenship immediately upon arriving from the ex-Soviet Union.)

Other countries favoring immigrants who are ethnic compatriots of the majority are Germany, Finland, Ireland, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia, and Armenia. The German Federal Republic, for example, has laws extending automatic citizenship to all *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union), even though many of them, as Yakobson and Rubinstein write, "lived in those areas for hundreds of years, without any civic or geographic connection with the modern German state." In contrast to which, one might add, it was only in the year 2000 that the millions of children of foreign workers born in Germany,

mostly from Turkey, were given citizenship, which until then had been denied even to third-generation German Turks.

- The constitution of Spain refers to Castilian as "the official Spanish language of the state," which "all Spaniards have the duty to know." Catalan and Basque, on the other hand, are included among "the other languages of Spain" and are official only in their own regions. Hindi is, alongside English, one of the two official languages of India, even though it is spoken by only a third of the population. Canada has permitted Quebec to declare French its sole official language, although 20 percent of the province's inhabitants are English-speakers. Quebec's laws mandate the use of French but not English for all public and commercial notices and require non-English-speaking immigrants to send their children to French schools. Most other democratic states and nations also relegate minority languages to a secondary status.

- Numerous democratic countries, among them Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, retain the Christian cross on their flags even though they have non-Christian populations, including large numbers of Muslim immigrants. Other countries have national anthems that might be considered offensive to minorities. Italy's, for example, glorifies the Italians' war of independence against Austria, even though northern Italy has a German-speaking population that is ethnically Austrian in origin.

The point that Yakobson and Rubinstein wish to make is not that Israel's situation is the same as that of other democratic countries. This situation is indeed unique, and even in a country like Spain, where tensions between the Spanish majority and the Basque and (to a lesser extent) Catalanian minorities are considerable, they do not begin to approach those of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. This is partly because Basques and Catalanians, though their aspirations for full independence may be thwarted, do not suffer discrimination in Spain and partly because they are not linked to Basque and Catalanian nations on Spain's borders that are hostile to it.

And *that* is Yakobson and Rubinstein's point—namely, that the privileging of a majority and its identity need not be harmful to a country's democratic functioning as long as members of minority groups are dealt with on an equal basis as individuals, even if their corporate or collective rights fall short of the majority's. But can what works fairly well in Spain be made to work in Israel, too? Or

<sup>\*</sup> The subtitle is "The Jewish Nation-State and Human Rights." Routledge, 246 pp., \$140.00.

has Israel, demographically and politically, already missed that train, which can now no longer be boarded?

**P**RECISELY BECAUSE they could have been better, Jewish-Arab relations in Israel proper are more tragic than Jewish-Arab relations in the occupied territories. In the latter, head-on conflict was unavoidable once the Arab states refused to negotiate a peace settlement with Israel following the 1967 war, thus paving the way for Israeli settlements. But the case of the Arabs who remained in Israel in 1948 was a different one. Had they been dealt with more generously, and had Israel taken the same interest in their welfare as it took in that of its Jews, their attitude toward the country they live in might have been different today, too.

But Israel's Arabs cannot be absolved of their share of responsibility, either. As a sizable minority, their potential political power has always been great. Yet this potential has been wasted—in the early years of Israel's history through its successful cooptation by Israel's Jewish parties, and more recently by the radicalization of Arab politics to the point that demagogic Israel-bashing and blind support for the Palestinian cause in the occupied territories has taken precedence over all attempts to work constructively with the Jewish political establishment for the practical improvement of Israeli Arab life. All three of the Arab parties currently represented in the 120-member Knesset—the United Arab List with four seats, the Democratic Front with three, and the National Alliance with three—are considered, with good reason, beyond the pale by the Jewish parties, with whom they are thus unable to form coalitions and alliances. As a result, their political utility is nil.

Is it too late for a new direction? To judge by *A Future Vision*, *A Democratic Constitution*, *The Haifa Declaration*, and *An Egalitarian Constitution*, it is. The positions taken by them would put Israel's Arab minority on a collision course with its Jewish majority that could only lead to catastrophe.

But these are the positions, as I have said, of an elite. A poll has shown that only 30 percent of ordinary Israeli Arabs have even heard of the four documents. Like people everywhere, these Arab citizens of Israel are less interested in collective rights than in the betterment of their own lives. Might it not be still possible to strike a grand bargain with them—one whereby Israel's governments would undertake to carry out a wide range of anti-discrimination and affirmative-action programs to make up for years of indifference, and Israeli Arabs,

for their part, would choose leaders willing to accept minority status and work within its framework rather than seek to overthrow it?

One cannot expect Israeli Arabs, under present circumstances, to be Israeli patriots. But they can be expected to show the same understanding for Jewish experience as they expect Jews to show for theirs, and to realize that life in a Jewish state, even if not all its freedom and openness can be enjoyed by them, has its advantages for them too, and that they would not necessarily be better off in the slums of Cairo or in Arab police states like Syria and Jordan. Indeed, one suspects that they do realize this more than they publicly care to admit. How else explain the fact that every time an Israeli politician has broached the idea of a territorial swap with the Palestinian Authority in which Israeli Arab towns in the Wadi Ara area, on the Israeli side of the 1967 border, would be exchanged for Jewish settlements on the West Bank, these towns' inhabitants have reacted with indignation and alarm?

The sociological and political changes that Israel's Arab community has been undergoing are not simple. Israeli Arabs have indeed been radicalized, but they have also, paradoxically, become more Israeli in the process. Israeli culture has changed who they are. They have begun—at least when not in the grip of Islamist ideologies—to act more like Israelis, think more like Israelis, talk more like Israelis. (Anyone overhearing an Arabic conversation in Israel these days cannot but be struck by the amount of Hebrew words, phrases, and even entire sentences in it.) For all their sense of solidarity with their fellow Palestinians in the territories, and with Arabs and Muslims in other places, they know they are different. This knowledge is troubling and has produced the fear of Israelification reflected in the four documents; but it is also something that can be appealed to.

Israel's Arabs do not need a "separate but equal" corporate existence. They need fair-employment laws, fair-housing laws, better schools, better infrastructure in their towns and cities, more self-owned businesses, larger government budgets, better and more effective political representation, and fuller integration in Israeli society. They need many of the same things that American blacks needed, demanded, and eventually got in the 1960's, 70's, and 80's—things that have turned out to be among the wisest investments America ever made. What African-American today would rather have black autonomy in Mississippi than a black President in the White House?

Whether Israel's Jews and Arabs alike will have the same wisdom is far from certain. If they do not, their future will have been foretold by the Acre riots. Even if they do, it will be grim unless Arab and Jewish birthrates become more equal, so that Jews stop fearing their eventual disappearance as a majority and Arabs stop dreaming of it. Only when both sides see the glimmering of an ultimate stability in their relationship will they be able to develop it without the specter of its collapse.

Fortunately, there is good news in this regard. The evidence from all over the world is that

birthrates come down as economic well-being goes up. The pill is only the material cause of fewer children. The efficient causes are modernization, secularization, higher standards of living and health care, more years of education, a higher percentage of working mothers, greater individualism, an ethos of self-fulfillment and self-advancement. The more Israelified and the better becomes Arab life in Israel, the smaller Israeli Arab families will be. Politically incorrect or not, this is the Jewish-Arab problem's best hope. One would have to be short-sighted not to act on it.