Editors' Note

We write this in early February 2019, as the parties in the upcoming Israeli elections (due to take place on 9 April) are still sorting themselves out before the deadline for submission of party lists. Social media and ordinary conversations are full of speculations, such as “will Benny and Bogie run with Yair, and will Gabi join them?” and “will Orly, Tami, Yvet, or even Avi fail to make the threshold?” Of course, the ultimate question is, “will Benny topple Bibi?”

You who are reading this already know the answers to these and many other such titillating queries, so please treat this portion of our note as something of a letter from the recent past. However, asking these questions in this way brings up a more serious and far-reaching concern that is not so easily answered: what has happened to Israel’s political system, when now almost all of the parties are built around a single person and his (or her) ambition? The fact that this phenomenon is by no means unique to Israel (think France, Hungary, Russia, and even the US) brings little comfort. Perhaps we should even be grateful to Avigdor (Yvet) Lieberman who, before the last election, pushed through a bill that raised the threshold for entering the Knesset from 2 percent of the vote to 3.25 percent in a misbegotten effort to eliminate some or all of the ‘Arab’ parties. Without the magic 3.25 percent, we might be looking at a half-dozen more leaders with ‘parties’ trailing after them.

Israel’s party system began with a hegemonic Labor Party, but within two decades it had evolved into a relatively stable system featuring a large center-right party competing with a large center-left party, along with a constellation of six to eight smaller (and frequently shifting) parties seeking to reap the benefits of forming a coalition with one of them. (See Yechiam Weitz’s and Amir Goldstein’s articles in ISR’s Winter 2018 issue for more details on this process.)

Although this system included parties organized by and for one person (notoriously, Shmuel Flatto-Sharon got himself elected to the Knesset as a ploy to avoid extradition), most of the parties, and certainly the larger ones, were institutionalized. They had distinct ideological bases represented by

platforms and serious policy debates. They were not primarily about personalities. However, even the legacy parties that still retain the trappings of those institutions have become ensnared in cults of personality. They have trouble maintaining their own identities among the proliferation of small and medium-sized parties, almost all of which are dependent on a single person's charisma.

This fragmentation, along with the current fixation on personalities that we are seeing, represents a clear and present danger to Israeli democracy. Sudden swings of policy based on the popularity of individual leaders (most ephemeral, others seemingly perpetual) are particularly dangerous in a country engaged in an intermittent but apparently endless war that many see as existential. The risk of political miscalculations disguised as policy are heightened, and a resulting war could have the potential of being far more destructive than any that Israel has yet experienced.

We hope that you, the comparatively omniscient reader, who knows at least what has happened in the elections, will forgive our pessimism. Perhaps, as Israelis always assure each other, *yihye b'seder*.

We note, in preparing this issue for publication, that although it has no particular theme, a number of its articles, with no planning whatsoever, seem to reflect a certain pessimism. We begin with Galia Golan's painstakingly researched piece charging deception on the part of successive Israeli governments in hiding or misstating real opportunities for peace with Israel's Arab neighbors. She spares few Israeli leaders in her analysis.

It is followed by an article that also critiques Israeli security policy, albeit from a feminist perspective. Noa Balf argues that much of that policy has reflected hyper-masculinity and an unnecessarily aggressive approach to security that has emphasized conflict and has purposely avoided other, more cooperative policies.

Guy Lurie examines the paucity of Arab judges in Israeli courts from 1948 to 1969 and focuses on some of the mechanisms that perpetuated that situation, as well as organizations and individuals who sought to remedy it. On a related topic, Nohad 'Ali and Rima'a Da'as explore the history of the quest for an Arab university in Israel, arguing that it is needed.

The two articles that follow describe two utterly different means of coping with today's Israeli society. In her ethnographic study, "The Israeli Diaspora in Berlin," Larissa Remennick looks at the many Israelis who choose to live in Berlin and the varied reasons they move to the city and stay there, including some who feel that their Judaism has been renewed and refreshed. In "Staying and Critiquing," Valeria Seigelsheifer and Tova Hartman focus on Israeli Orthodox women filmmakers who accept the strictures of Orthodoxy but also examine them and Orthodox life in Israel in general, often quite critically, through the medium of film.

Then, as a special treat to empirical social scientists, we present Noga Keidar's study of the residential segregation of immigrants to Israel between 1961 and 2008. Employing statistical methodology, Keidar demonstrates how the spatial assimilation of Mizrahim and Ashkenazim proceeded during that period, while distancing both from Arab citizens of Israel.

We end with reviews of the usual variety of books relating to Israel Studies, although unfortunately we can only scratch the surface of the amazing number of new works in the field. Scott Lasensky highly recommends Michael Brenner's *In Search of Israel*, while Ilan Peleg is almost equally enthusiastic about the collection *Israel/Palestine: Scholarly Tributes to the Legacy of Baruch Kimmerling* (in Hebrew). Ned Lazarus reviews Omer Zanany's *From Managing Conflict to Managing a Political Settlement* (in Hebrew) and its cogent argument for a two-state solution, but he concludes, unsurprisingly, that it does not address today's reality. Don Seeman terms David Ohana's *Nationalizing Judaism* a "rich and worthwhile read," but critiques the book for not engaging with many of the differing interpretations of scholars and issues that are cited. And we conclude with Assaf Zimring's laudatory review of Arie Krampf's *The Israeli Path to Neoliberalism*, which, he tells us, rewrites our understanding of Israel's economic history.

As our readers certainly already know, the annual conference of the Association for Israel Studies will be held this summer at beautiful Kinneret College, right on the 'sea' shore. We look forward to seeing you there, and, as always, we welcome your comments, whether positive, negative, or analytical.

— Yoram Peri and Paul L. Scham