

Introduction: Historical Background and Analytical Framework

While the international community and regional powers in the Middle East are concentrated on finding a solution to Israel's "external" problem, the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, occupied since 1967, another political conflict is emerging internally: the future status of the Palestinian minority living in pre-1967 Israel. There were around 1.5 million Palestinians in Israel in 2015,¹ or 18% of the population.² Their birth rate was 4.3, down from nine in the 1960s and five in the early 1980s (the average birth rate among Jews is 2.6 [Haider, 2005: 30]). Thus despite the decrease in the Palestinian birth rate it remains higher than that of the Jewish sector.

The demographic changes among the Palestinian minority have bolstered their self-confidence since the 1970s. This has served as the basis for new developments in cultural life and politics. But despite the increased desire to develop a separate economy in Palestinian towns and cities, the efforts have yet to bear significant fruit.

With regard to age distribution, the Palestinians in Israel are younger than the Jews. In 2003, for example, 41% of Palestinians were below the age of 15; the corresponding figure in the Jewish sector was 25.5%. Similarly, only 3.2% of Palestinians in Israel are 65 years or older, compared to 11.8% of the Jews (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2009a).

The Palestinians in Israel are concentrated in three districts. A majority (56.6%) live in the Galilee, which stretches from Haifa in the west to Beisan (Beit She'an) in the east and north to the Lebanese border. The Triangle, which runs adjacent to the border with the West Bank and along the Mediterranean coastline and extends from southeast of Haifa to east of Tel Aviv, is home to 23% of them. Another 12% of

¹ The literature refers to them in many ways: "Palestinians in Israel," "Arabs in Israel," "Arab citizens of Israel," "the Palestinian minority," and "1948 Palestinians."

² These data are more reliable as they do not include the Palestinians in East Jerusalem or the residents of the Golan Heights. See Ghanem *et al.*, 2015.

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Palestinians live in the Naqab (Negev), specifically in the area of Be'er al-Sabe' (Beersheva). The balance (about 8.5%) live in the mixed cities – Akka (Acre), Haifa, Lydd (Lod), Ramla, and Jaffa (Haider, 2005: 28).

The Palestinians in Israel are affiliated with three religions. The majority, around 80%, are Muslims. They live in most of the Palestinian villages and cities and in all the areas. Christians account for 10%, with the vast majority in the Galilee, and belong to several denominations, mainly Catholic, Orthodox, Maronite, Armenian and several Protestant groups. Druze constitute another 10%, all of them in the Galilee and the Carmel (see Ghanem *et al.*, 2015).

The Palestinians in Israel are absent or excluded from the attention and perception of most of their reference groups (including Jews in Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and Palestinian diaspora). This situation is a product of their unique situation as residents of a state that was forced on them and that has never represented them.

The Palestinians in Israel: Historical Background

On the eve of the *Nakba* in 1948, nearly two million people lived in Palestine, two-thirds Arab and one-third Jews. Most of the former (about 940,000) and the vast majority of Jews lived in the areas that later became the State of Israel. As a result of mass expulsions, ethnic cleansing, and flight from the Jewish forces, only 160,000 Palestinians remained within Israel's borders when the fighting ended. They comprised only 10% of all Palestinians at the time. The subsequent deterioration in the Palestinians' status was a direct result of the war (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2009a: 25). The main difference between the Palestinians in Israel and those elsewhere is that the former remained on their land and became Israeli citizens. This was not of great benefit to them, however, because the Israeli authorities and security agencies viewed them as an enemy that posed a security threat and strategic threat. Israel took harsh measures to deter, subdue, and control them.

Bäumel writes that the Zionist leaders saw “transfer” as an ideal and practical solution for dealing with the Palestinian minority that remained in the Jewish state. It was the dominant solution they toyed with in the late 1950s. It lost momentum after residents of Kufr Qassem stayed put despite the massacre of 1956 (Bäumel, 2007: 35), and gave way to alternative ideas in the late 1960s.

Bäumel notes that in the 1950s and 1960s Israeli policies towards the Palestinians centered on the following principles: treating the Palestinians as a security threat and fifth column; confiscating land and preventing geographic continuity between Palestinian population centers; not drafting Palestinians into the armed forces; discriminating against them in all aspects of life; amplifying their internal regional and sectarian tensions; preventing the formation of a Palestinian leadership; rejecting their identification as a national group; and stymieing the emergence of a local Palestinian economy.

Three events played a decisive role in the development of the Palestinians in Israel and affected them culturally, socially, and economically. The first regional event was the war of 1948. It is often referred to as the *Nakba* [Catastrophe] in Palestinian literature, political discourse, and historical memory. The second event was the war of June 1967. The third was the Oslo Accords, after which the politics and discourse of Palestinians in Israel emerged on a new track.

The *Nakba* caused the exodus of a majority of the Palestinians, the destruction of their cities, and devastation of their farms, along with the expulsion of the political and social leadership that had emerged in earlier decades. Most of the Palestinians who remained in Israel were rural. The military government that lasted until 1966 destroyed pre-existing social ties and geographic contiguity. A new system of laws was created by military orders and decrees. A new Palestinian leadership coalesced that was quite different from the historical leadership before 1948 (Kimmerling and Migdal, 1993).

Despite being an indigenous people and a minority in their own homeland, the political reality that germinated in the aftermath of the *Nakba* did not permit the Palestinian minority to organize and rebuild itself politically. There was a society in ruins, with few financial and cultural resources and devoid of political and social elites (Lustick, 1980).

The period of the military government (1949–1966) had a strong impact on the political development and organization of the Palestinians in Israel. It clamped tight control on the Palestinian minority in the new state (Bäumel, 2007) in ways that impeded political activity and organization within Palestinian society. The urbanization process that began in the 1930s and 1940s was suspended. Always subject to “security considerations,” the military administration used clan and traditional leaders as the primary channel for granting favors in various fields, including education, employment, and travel permits.

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The Palestinians in Israel lost not only their political and cultural elite, but also their middle class. The transformation of a rural agrarian society into a proletarian one was the most significant socioeconomic change affecting the Palestinian minority during the years of the military government. Zureik would later describe it as “deserting agriculture” (Zureik, 1979). In the absence of a Palestinian national economy and with no Palestinian bourgeoisie, laborers moved from working the land in their villages to the manual-labor market in Jewish cities. The Israeli Palestinians’ isolation from the outside world, and the Arab world in particular, led to their dual marginalization: on the one hand they were marginal in the State of Israel; on the other hand, they became marginal in the Palestinian national movement as well (Al-Haj, 1993).

Two parallel systems emerged during the years of the military government: a democratic system for the Jews and a non-democratic system for the Palestinians. Although the state granted the Palestinians some political rights – citizenship and the franchise – it restricted or suppressed other political rights inherent to democracy. The most flagrant examples are the right of political organization and the right of movement and assembly. Even though citizens, the Palestinians came under the jurisdiction of military courts. Under the segregation practiced in Israel, Jews had collective and national rights, whereas Palestinians enjoyed only individual (and unequal) rights (Boimel, 2007).

The military government established state control of three aspects considered essential to the success of the Zionist project and the building of the state: land expropriation, a system of permits to control Palestinian participation in the Israeli job market, and preventing the Palestinians in Israel from having contact with their compatriots and relatives abroad. Palestinians in Israel were also prohibited from engaging in active and organized political efforts to change their situation and status.

The military administration and the authorities dominated the political development of the Palestinians in Israel. Palestinians were isolated from the political, administrative, and social structure, in pursuit of more effective political monitoring. Israeli historian Tom Segev summed up the political goals of the military administration during its first years as follows:

The policies of the state sought to divide the Palestinian residents into sects and regions, . . . creating municipal authorities in Palestinian villages, coupled with the competitive environment that existed during elections to the local municipality and deepened the division inside villages. These factors acted in unison to prevent unity among Palestinian residents. (Segev, cited by Ghanem and Mustafa, 2009a)

In conclusion, the Palestinian political discourse that took shape during the period of the military government (1949–1966) overlooked the reality of defeat to ensure that people stayed in their homeland after the war. There was an overemphasis on civil discourse, focused on achieving the bare minimum of rights and freedoms to provide a semblance of existential security. The military government isolated the Palestinians in Israel from their Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim surroundings. The main focus of their struggle was the call for the unconditional abolition of the military government. In other words, the bulk of the Palestinian discourse during those years related to the civil domain; it was detached from the political and national discourse that sees the Palestinians in Israel as part of the Palestinian case and one of its consequences. But the Land Movement (al-Ard) of the 1960s emphasized the national affiliation of the Palestinians in Israel and affirmed their place in the Palestinian national movement and its aspirations (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2009a).

The 1967 war was the second regional event with far-reaching consequences for the development of Palestinian society in Israel. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza that followed had both direct and indirect effects on the Palestinians in Israel. The war came shortly after the abolition of the military government. Contemporary publications focused primarily on the effects of the occupation on Palestinian identity in Israel (Al-Haj, 1993). Much of this literature asserts that the war helped ingrain the Palestinian component in the collective identity of Palestinian society in Israel. The Palestinian component began to compete with the Israeli civilian component in the Palestinians' self-definition and identity.

The occupation also affected the patterns and forms of political organization among Palestinians in Israel. Two new movements appeared, representing the secular national trend and the Islamic trend in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – the “Sons of the Village” and the Islamic Movement, respectively.

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The 1967 war affected the economic status of the Palestinians in Israel. They were no longer on the lowest rung of the Israeli economic ladder, replaced in the job market by the cheaper labor of Palestinians from the occupied territories. The economic betterment of the Palestinians in Israel had extensive social ramifications, including the emergence of a new educated and middle class (Haida, 1990).

The political, economic, and social transformation generated an increase in the national awareness of the Palestinians in Israel and the establishment of national institutions. The early 1970s saw the initial emergence of an educated sector and the expansion of the middle class; this in turn produced national or regional institutions to organize Palestinian society in Israel. They included the National Committee of the Heads of Arab Local Authorities, founded in 1974, and the next year, the Regional Alliance for Palestinian University Students, the Regional Alliance for Palestinian High School Students, and the Committee for Defense of Palestinian Lands. These institutions were a strong force in the reorganization and rebuilding of Palestinian society in Israel (Rekhess, 1993).

Mar'i believes that the new interaction with the Palestinian people created the conditions for politicization of the Palestinian masses in Israel. He explains that,

the Palestinians in Israel did not succeed in merely maintaining their identity while in Israel, but actively worked to infuse Palestinian identity into every spoken and written word, into poems and novels and during the practical exercise of their social and political struggle. It was a process akin to opening the flood gates of Palestinian political awareness and refining it so as to meet the challenges of every stage in the development process of the Palestinian case. (Mar'i, 1988: 35)

A growing class of educated Palestinians emerged in the aftermath of the 1967 war, mainly due to an emphasis in the early 1970s on college prep course for Palestinians who wished to attend university (Al-Haj, 1995).

The 1967 war and the increased contact between Palestinians living on both sides of the Green Line produced a sense of a shared destiny and the feeling that Palestinians in Israel are part of the Palestinian cause. Evidence of this was Israeli Palestinians' increased involvement in paramilitary resistance operations. Between the end of the war in

June 1967 and July 1970, Israeli courts tried 120 Palestinian citizens of Israel on security charges; another 27 were placed in administrative detention. According to other sources, 48 Palestinians were arrested through October 1968, for participation in operations against Israeli security targets; a year later the figure was 115. Between 1967 and 1973, 320 Palestinians were arrested and tried for participating in resistance operations (Rekhess, 1993: 114).

In addition to fostering a stronger sense of national identity in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the process of institution-building culminated in the events of Land Day, on March 30, 1976. For the first time, Palestinians in Israel behaved as an organized and a cohesive national group. The events that day were the crest of a long struggle by social and popular movements, which intensified in the nine months prior to February 29, 1976. That was the day when Israeli authorities confiscated close to 21,000 dunams (about 5,200 acres) of land from several Palestinian villages in central Galilee, including Arrabeh, Sakhnin, Deir-Hannah, and Arab al-Sawa'ed, in order to build Jewish settlements and further the Judaization of the Galilee.

The political and literary transformations that appeared in the aftermath of the 1967 war indicate a fundamental change in the relationship between two aspects, the civil and the national, in the political discourse of the Palestinians in Israel. The Palestinians in Israel thought that solving the problem of the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza would improve their civil status, because, as an integral part of the Palestinian people, that depends on the national issue. This is evident from the approach to citizenship in the Palestinian political discourse. The components of this citizenship do not depend solely on the struggle by the Palestinians in Israel, but also on a solution to the overall Palestinian question.

The signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the State of Israel, and the mutual recognition that followed, constitute the third regional event of significance for the Palestinians in Israel, with regard to their relationship with the state, their political discourse, and their political activity. The signing of the Oslo Accords coincided with major global transformations that affected Palestinian society in Israel, especially globalization and international economic and political changes. These developments have affected political development among the Palestinians in Israel over the last two decades.

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Oslo came in the wake of the first Palestinian Intifada, which began in 1987, and the declaration of a Palestinian state in 1988. Numerous events and developments in these years that affected the evolution of Palestinians were merely the start of dramatic changes. The 1990s brought a new set of changes, including the collapse of the Soviet Union and entire Eastern bloc, the signing of the Oslo Accords, the accelerated pace of globalization and openness produced by the internet and mass media, the Aqsa Intifada of 2000 (commonly referred to as the second Intifada), the Lebanon war in July 2006, and the Gaza war in December 2008. All these events left an imprint on the Palestinian minority in Israel.

For the Palestinians in Israel, this period can be divided into two phases. The first, which lasted from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s, was an extension of a previous phase that began after the end of military rule (1966). But it was also marked by democratization and liberalization on the Israeli national level.

Until the mid-1990s the Palestinians in Israel felt a growing urgency to assert their Israeli citizenship. It became essential for that minority to involve itself in the state on a par with the Jewish majority. This was evident in various ways, including the declaration of Equality Day in June 1987, participation in demonstrations against the suppression of the first Intifada, and monetary support for the Palestinians under occupation. They took a role in the political process and accepted their role as part of the “Blocking Coalition.”³

In the next phase, after Oslo, it became clear that the hope for full and equal citizenship and full integration into Israeli society and politics was misplaced. The Israeli government and people were opposed to such an idea. Later developments saw a major rise in ethnic discrimination against the Palestinians in Israel and an increase in official policies that aimed to isolate and confine the Palestinians.⁴ The discriminatory measures included land confiscation, particularly in the Naqab (southern Israel). The climax came with the carnage of October

³ The Blocking Coalition refers to the Arab political parties in the Knesset in 1992–1995. At a time when Rabin’s coalition did not have the necessary votes to approve agreements, it provided support from the outside to win approval of the Oslo Accords.

⁴ See Sikkuy reports (www.sikkuy.org.il/english/reports.html).

2000, when 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were shot and killed while demonstrating against the government's discriminatory policies.⁵

This led to a new phase and new approach to the Israeli framework and the possibility of realizing their prospects as a group and as individuals through their Israeli citizenship. The Palestinians reassessed and modified the methods of dissent they had employed through the late 1990s. They realized that the Oslo era was over and that solutions based on international resolutions in support of the Palestinian cause were fruitless.

An Islamic stream appeared and called for the establishment of a "separate society." Similarly, the idea of boycotting the Israeli national elections gained traction and was adopted by several political and nationalist movements (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2007). This led to the embrace of the concept of a shared homeland, not established on the basis of a Jewish state, and an exploration of the impact of the *Nakba* on the Palestinian situation in Israel.

In the last two decades, the majority of Palestinian political and scholarly efforts have been dedicated to exposing the incompatibility of the Jewish character of the state with democracy. This became the rallying cry of the Palestinian minority in Israel, to the extent that the head of the General Security Service (GSS), Yuval Diskin, considered this demand a strategic danger to the state. He stated that the GSS would sabotage every attempt, however democratic, to alter the state's Jewish character.⁶

The most significant changes since the mid-1990s, which reveal the relationship between the Palestinian minority, the State of Israel, and the Jewish majority, can be summarized as follows:

From the Perspective of the "Jewish State"

From Assimilation without Equality to Segregation without Autonomy

The majority and the state had held to the "integration narrative" as part of an attempt to absorb the Palestinians into Israel, even though

⁵ See Orr Commission report (http://elyon1.court.gov.il/heb/veadot/or/inside_index.htm).

⁶ *Ha'aretz*, March 16, 2007.

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that narrative does not include equality for the Palestinian collective, but only diminished individual equality. The majority still refuses to recognize the Palestinians as a national minority and prefers to deal with it as fragmented communities. The refusal to recognize the collective national rights of the Palestinians in Israel led to the new calls for separation, without giving the Palestinians any rights as a collective. The state seeks to maintain its Jewish identity and character through segregation, achieved through statutory and political means. In some mixed towns, like Lydd (Lod) and Ramla, walls have been built to isolate some Palestinian neighborhoods from adjacent Jewish neighborhoods.

The Emergence of a Politics of Ethnic Superiority

Globalization did not affect the politics of citizenship in Israel. The Israeli case was cited as a model for how globalization affirmed the state's identity and character. Throughout the last two decades, Israel has intensified the ethnic focus of its politics. Israel defines itself as a democratic Jewish state, but the Jewish sphere has encroached on the democratic sphere and in many instances effectively nullifies the citizenship of the Palestinian minority. The most notable example of this is the legislative moves to enhance the Jewishness of the state, particularly with regard to the citizenship law.

From Individual Rights to Collective Duties

In the Jewish state, rights are not derived from citizenship but from membership of the hegemonic (Jewish) group. Nor are they derived from the public sphere. Despite the dissociation between rights and duties in a democratic system, the Jewish state attempts to link individual rights with certain duties. In this framework, the proposal to require young people to do civilian service was presented as a link between rights and duties. But in fact it makes the rights essential normal daily life conditional on abdicating national identity and dignity and perverting the culture. Civilian service runs counter to the long struggle by the Palestinian minority and its cultural and political elite to achieve the delicate balance between collective identity and civic affairs, in which the demand for civil rights becomes part of the glorification of national identity (Ghanem and Mustafa, 2009a).