Israel and its Arab Minority

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(May 2009)

Introduction

Of all ethnic and national minorities in the world, the case of the Arab minority in Israel seems to be unique. It is the only minority that is part of its state's regional majority, namely part of the Arab-Muslim dominated Middle East. At the same time the Jewish majority in Israel is a tiny minority in the Middle East and the state is surrounded by Arab peoples who have mostly hostile relations with Jewish and Zionist Israel (Reiter, 2009).

What makes this case so unique is that the Arab minority usually identifies with active enemies of its state such as the terror organizations Hamas and Hezbollah, while the state combats its flesh and blood brethren, the Palestinians, in the territories occupied since 1967. In practice however, Israeli Arabs are torn between their national Palestinian and their civic Israeli identities and they are undergoing a simultaneous process of Palestinization on the one hand and Israelization on the other (Smooha, 2005, 2007).

Another aspect of the uniqueness of the Israeli case of the minority-majority encounter emanates from the majority's decision to establish Israel in 1948 as a Jewish nation-state in which its Jewish heritage, values and symbols are the major attributes of its national identity. Hence, as a Jewish state, Israel deliberately gives legal and institutional preference to its religiously, ethnically and nationally Jewish majority, particularly in the realms of immigration laws and the State symbols.

These two aspects create tensions and conflict between the Palestinian-Arab minority and the Jewish majority. This friction finds expression in almost every aspect of the relationship between the two communities. Yet Israel is also a democracy and a modern nation-state amidst a region of authoritarian Arab regimes, and its Arab citizens, in spite of their systemic prejudice, are significantly better off than their ethnic brethren in surrounding Arab countries. In Israel, the Palestinians' distinct identity and collective cultural rights are respected, they enjoy political freedom and they benefit from Israel's social welfare system, economic progress and democratic norms. This may explain why, in spite of the salience of conflict and tensions on the national level, the majority of Arabs and Jews in Israel by and large cohabitate peacefully.

The Birth of Israel and its Arab Minority

In the aftermath of the 1948 War, most Palestinian Arabs who resided in the territory that became Israel fled the country, becoming refugees in other Arab lands.[1] Only 156,000 Arabs remained under Israel's control (including 30,000 in the "Little Triangle" or Wadi `Ara in the center of the State, along Israel's border with Jordan, which was annexed to Israel in an agreement with Jordan). Due to high birth rates, the Arab minority in Israel increased seven-fold during the six decades of Israel's existence and numbers 1.1 million people as of 2009. The Arabs' percentage of the total population of Israel - 20% - did not change dramatically since 1948 due to mass Jewish immigration along with a drop in Israeli Arabs' fertility rates in recent years (Haidar, 2006).[2]

The Arab citizens of Israel live mostly in self-segregated towns, villages or neighborhoods in three major areas: North in the Galilee, south in the northeast Negev and in the Little Triangle in the center of Israel. Additionally they reside in small communities in large Jewish populated cities such as Acre, Haifa, Karmiel, Jaffa (Yaffo), Lidda (Lod) and Ramla. The "Israeli Arabs" as they are commonly called even though many view themselves as Palestinian Arabs, are mainly Muslim (82%). In addition there are two smaller Arab groups of Druze and Christians each making up approximately 9% of the minority population. After the 1948 War, the Arabs who remained in Israel were economically and politically weak, socially split and lacking leadership.

From this feeble minority, the Arabs in Israel grew rapidly and empowered themselves as a national minority with a political agenda different from that of the Jewish majority and with a distinct vision of its own future.

Security as a Political Factor

The political circumstances involving the birth of Israel in 1948, and particularly the fact that this significant minority in newborn Israel joined the Arab fight against the creation of the Jewish state caused serious doubts regarding the loyalty of Israeli Arabs. (Benziman and Mansour, 1992). It was assumed that Israeli Arabs might collaborate with hostile parties outside Israel in times of war. Moreover, since most Arabs in Israel resided in segregated (not legally imposed, but of their own choice) areas (of near the State's unstable borders, areas which were mostly included in the Arab part of the UN partition plan, Israel feared the development of a separatist

trend among its Arab inhabitants. Furthermore, after Israel's victory in the 1948 War, the widespread infiltration of Palestinian refugees from bordering countries brought challenges to Israel's sovereignty and security. Some Arabs returned to resettle in their previous villages or to harvest the crops they had left behind during the war; others penetrated the border to rob and even murder, often targeting Israeli Jews. The result was the implementation of military rule in the major areas of Arab residence, a government practice that lasted almost two decades. The Israeli government facilitated the supervision and control over the Arab population, including the separation between the Arab citizens of Israel and the bordering Palestinian population (Bäuml, 2007).

The fear of Arab disloyalty to the State led to a government decision to exempt the Arab population from Israel's compulsory military service (with the exception of the Druze and some of the Bedouins). In addition to obvious physical threats, since the 1980s', Israel interpreted national security to also include threats undermining the Jewish nature of the state. This was a reaction to the tendency of many Israeli Arab leaders and academics to challenge the Jewishness of the State of Israel, thus intensifying the tensions between Arabs and Jews in Israel in the last two decades.

Tensions Between Jewish Character, Democratic Fabric and its Projection onto Minority Rights

In Israel's Declaration of Independence, the founders determined that their nation be a Jewish state that offers equal rights to its Arab citizens. Israel also declared itself a democracy, and most Israelis view their political system as being a democracy following a western model. Indeed, Israel has many features of western democracies such as:

- The supremacy of law and equality before law
- A system of checks and balances between the three branches of government
- Safeguard of general liberties
- Protection of civil rights
- Political pluralism
- Rotation of governments via elections with a comparatively high turnout of voters
- A relatively high level of institutionalized civil society (NGOs') activity

Tensions exist, however, between the two fundamental values of the state's system - Jewish and democratic. Whereas a "Jewish" state would entail (endow?) certain privileges for Jews, a "democratic" state would give equal rights to all its citizens. The question of whether or not Israel can reconcile these two basic values is debatable, in particular with regard to minority rights (Dowty, 1999; Gavison, 1999; Sa`di, 2002; Smooha, 2002). What are the essential realms in which a democratic nation-state is entitled to favor its majority's culture given that this partiality will be at the expense of the minority ethnic groups? The Jewish majority in Israel believes it is also entitled to keep its hegemony in the state's unique culture and national symbols as well as in immigration laws, just as many European democracies give preference to the culture of the majority of their populations. Are there other domains of life in which prioritizing the ethnic/cultural majority could be accepted as universal norms of democracy? For more than five decades Israel never methodically addressed this dilemma in its ideological discourse. Moreover, the Israeli government's policy towards the Arab minority was in fact ambivalent – benevolent in some respects (e.g. cultural rights) and highly discriminatory (e.g. representation in government service) in others (Yuchtman-Yaar & Shavit, 2004).

A pioneering attempt to list the minimum traits of what a "Jewish" character of the state entails within the universal norms of a democracy was made by Chief Justice Aharon Barak, former president of the Supreme Court. He listed the following five parameters for the Jewishness of the state: "…the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel in which Jews would consist a majority; Hebrew is the State's central official language; the State's main holidays and symbols reflect the national revival of the Jewish people; and the Jewish heritage is a leading component of its religious and cultural heritage (SCJ (Bagatz) 11280/02, *Piskey Din* 57 (4), 1: 101)." Yet, whereas principles such as these are accepted by minorities in other democratic states, the Israeli Arab leadership has not accepted these norms because Arabs view themselves as the indigenous people of Palestine and believe they should dominate the Jewish migrant-settlers.

Barak's narrow interpretation differs from government policies of discrimination against the Arab minority in a broad spectrum of issues. A gradual improvement in promoting equal public funding for Arab localities has occurred in the last two decades. The Arab minority in Israel also enjoys cultural rights more than many other ethnic and national minorities. For example, in reference to the 1966 UN International Convention of Civil and Political Rights of Minority Peoples, and the 1995 European Convention of Protecting National Minorities, Alexander Yakobson and Justice Yitzhak Zamir argued that Israel's Arab minority enjoy the same rights and possibly even more than ethnic minorities in Western European countries (in Rekhess & Ozacky-Lazar, 2005: 19-26 and 59-83, respectively).

It is true that Israel first Judaized its public space by renaming areas and expropriating vacant lands for development purposes. However, this policy was conducted in such a way as to not inflame the Arab citizens and it attempted to take their basic needs into consideration. Indeed Arabic names and heritage dominate the public sphere in Arab populated towns and villages. Some important fundamentals of Arabic culture, such as religious holidays, were preserved both on the national level as well as the local. Israel did not attempt to assimilate the Arabs within the Jewish-Hebrew culture, most significantly in the field of public education.

Although education is sponsored by the State, Arabs choose to enroll in separate schools where Arab educators teach in Arabic. This policy recognizes the Arab citizens as a cultural minority entitled to an education in their own language, while still enabling the State to regulate formal education in the Arab sector. The Arabic language—an official vernacular during the British Mandate—continues to enjoy its formal legal status as the second official language in Israel - though partially and ineffectually enforced.

In the realm of religious law, Israel established special personal status tribunals for the various religious groups, and Israeli law intervened only in a select number of universal social areas, such as the minimum age for marriage (seventeen), the prevention of polygamy, and the prevention of forced divorce on women. The religious holidays of Christians, Muslims, and Druze have been legally recognized, as have the various weekly days of rest. The national commemoration days, however, reflect only the Jewish-Zionist ethos, and there is not one national Arab day of remembrance or national Arab public holiday. Israeli Arabs, however, have created their own nationalistic commemoration days: Land Day (see below) and, since the mid-1990s, as an alternative and challenge to Israel's (Jewish dominated) Independence Day, Nakba Day (May 15), symbolizing the Palestinian view that the 1948 War and its aftermath was a "catastrophe."

Land Settlement and Immigration

The pre-1948 struggle between two national movements - the Arab-Palestinian movement and the Zionist movement - over property in Palestine shaped Israel's government policy regarding the land. In addition to enacting laws aimed at safeguarding the Jewish objective of the State, after the war Israel took over some one million acres of mostly (825,000 acres) "abandoned" lands owned by Palestinians who had fled the country. The lands were defined as "absentees" and the remainder of the area was expropriated from Arab owners for general development programs of the State (Yiftachel & Kedar, 2000). A recent study points

out that most of the land for which Arabs claim ownership was designated by the Ottomans and the British Mandate authorities as "public land." The study goes further to claim that most of the land that was privately owned by Arabs before 1948 (about 175,000 acres comprising 3.5% of the total land of Israel) remained in their possession and that the expropriation of land was minor (Sandberg, 2007). The Arab minority, however, claims that most of its land was confiscated by the state through a series of ingenious laws (Halabi, 1992).

The demographic factor also influenced Israel's land policy. Fearing irredentist development among Arab dominated areas along the state's borders in the Galilee, the Little Triangle and the northern Negev, the state built Jewish settlements in these areas, expropriating some of the lands previously owned by Arabs. The Arabs resented this policy and, in 1976, rioted against a specific plan to expropriate land. Those riots were subsequently commemorated by Arabs every March 30 on what they call Land Day.

There are other points of friction between the state institutions and Arab citizens involving land and settlement issues, such as restricting Arab towns and villages' land and space jurisdiction, demolishing houses built with no official permits, and dozens of hamlets of houses known as "non-recognized villages." Another demographic aspect involves Israel's immigration laws that secure its Jewish majority as an expression of the self-determination of the Jewish people. Hence, the laws of immigration and citizenship grant Jews privileges and prevent the repatriation of Palestinian Arabs who fled from the state's territory (Benziman & Mansour, 1992). The Law of Return, enacted in 1950, states the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel and to obtain citizenship. Arab critics view the law as unreasonable legal-structural discrimination against Arabs (Halabi, 1992; Sa`di, 2002). Yet, Jewish scholars defend the law of return and justify it according to universal principles. Additionally, thousands of Palestinian Arabs were allowed to obtain Israeli citizenship under humanitarian policy or family reunification (Gavison, 1999).

Contesting Narratives

Among the major factors that influence the political behavior of the Arab minority and its relationship with the Jewish majority is the divergent historical outlook of the two ethnic and national communities. Recent texts composed and publicized by Arab elite groups in Israel manifest these contesting historical outlooks as well as the opposed political visions of Arabs and Jews. In 2005, when the Ministry of Education introduced a new educational program according to which all Israeli high school

students should learn 100 terms in Zionism, cultural heritage and democracy, two leading Arab academics reacted by composing alternative texts to the state's official one (Ghanem, 2005; Jamal, 2005). Their adverse interpretation of the history of Palestine and Israel also underpinned a political manifesto of the Arab National Committee of Heads of Local Authorities published in December 2006 called "The Future Vision."[3]

What are the contested issues of history as related to current political ideologies and future visions? While Jews in Israel view their attachment and their right to the land through the underlying biblical promise from God to Abraham, and the Israelites' longstanding rule in the Holy Land and a continued presence there, the Arabs see themselves as ancestors of ancient pre-Israelite peoples such as the Canaanites and Jebusites who "owned" the land before the ancient Hebrews. They deny the 2000 years of Jewish longing to return to Zion. They argue that the longstanding sufferings of Jews and even the Holocaust do not justify the establishment of Israel at the expense of their own national homeland (Ghanem, 2005; Manna`, 2005: 5). Israeli Jews view the Arabs in Israel as those who denied the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their historical land and rejected the 1947 UN partition resolution, launching a war to prevent the emergence of Israel as a Jewish state in the Arab and Muslim dominated Middle East (Yakobson & Rubinstein, 2008). Since 1948, the Arabs in Israel have presented their political claims in a discourse of restorative justice rather than in pragmatic terms.

The current Israeli Arab narrative, however, contends that Israel is a "colonial product" imposed upon the Arabs and that the Arabs could not accept the unfair proposal to partition their land. (Jamal, 2005). They blame the Jewish Israelis for atrocities during the 1948 War, including the expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinian Arabs who became refugees. In contrast, Jewish Israelis maintain that many of those who became refugees fled the country of their own volition, and that there were more Jewish refugees who were forced to leave Arab countries (about a million people) than there were Palestinian refugees. The disjointed Jewish and Arab historical perspectives reflect the groups' diverse views regarding the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish nation-state. These differing views have consistently influenced the political behavior of the two groups (Reiter, 2005).

Between Israelization and Palestinization

During the first two decades of military rule between 1948 and 1966, the Arab minority was a marginal and vulnerable community lacking strong leadership. Perhaps this insecure feeling was one of the drives for reaching a world record of high

birth rates in the 1960s'. The most notable event during that period was the "Kafar Qasem Massacre" when, on the eve of the 1956 Sinai War, Israeli border police shot and killed 48 Arabs of the Kafar Qasem village who were returning home from work after an army-imposed curfew. This tragic event strongly effected Arab-Jewish relations for years to come. Another important event of this period was the outlawing of an Arab political movement called Al-Ard (the land) which attempted to form a nationalistic Arab party that identified with Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arab ideology, which negated Israel's right to exist (Landau, 1969).

The first turning point in the Arabs' political behavior occurred following the Six-Day War in June 1967. When Israel conquered the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it in fact reunited two Palestinian communities that had been physically separated since 1948. This led to a gradual process of Palestiniazation of the Arab minority in Israel (Rekhess, 2003). From an isolated minority group, Israeli Arabs became part of the Palestinian "inside" – those Palestinians who live in the western part of Palestine. It enhanced their affinity to and solidarity with the Palestinian people, and it simultaneously increased consciousness of their own predicament as a deprived national minority in a Jewish state (Neuberger, 1998; Yuchtman-Yaar & Shavit, 2004). At the same time, polarization grew as the Israeli Arabs observed the messianic process that part of Jewish society underwent after the 1967 war, specifically the movement to permanently retain the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Israel's policies and actions in the territories reinforced the alienation of many Arab citizens from the state. The renewed strife between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza placed the two ethno-national communities in Israel in a national rivalry. When violent events took place in this broader context, they came again to view each other as an enemy.

The mid-1970s was a turning point in terms of Arab-Israeli political representation. A new leadership emerged, including Tawfiq Zayyad, a charismatic communist leader (the Rakah/Hadash party), and institutions, such as the National Committee for the Arab Heads of Local Authorities, were established. Thus, a decade after the abolition of military rule, the Arab minority developed its political institutions and was ready to defend and advocate its rights and to struggle for a change in government policy, as happened in the 1976 Land Day. This first violent clash between the Arab minority and the state authorities was triggered by a government policy regarding land and spatial dominance. In searching for a way to minimize the Arab demographic over-representation in the Galilee, and to extend Jewish control over densely populated Arab territories, the government initiated a National Development Plan to expropriate land -- one third of which was owned by Arabs -- for the expansion of the Jewish towns of Karmiel and Upper Nazareth (Rekhess, 1977). Land Day gained a broader context and a deeper meaning in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because of the

simultaneous actions of land expropriation in Israel proper and in the West Bank. Indeed, the PLO declared a parallel general strike in the territories and added this day to its national calendar. The general strike of the entire Arab population on March 30, 1976, became known as "Land Day," a significant event not just for the Arab minority but also for the entire Palestinian people. Land Day is commemorated every year by protests and demonstrations, emphasizing the Arabs' struggle to improve their status and rights as a national minority and as part of the Palestinian people.

The political mobilization of Israeli Arabs in 1976 could not have occurred without the emergence of a relatively large middle class, and a growing number of university graduates resulting in a group of young leaders who were well-versed in politics. Furthermore, the expansion of education and the rising standard of living among Arab citizens coupled with their increasing contacts with the Jewish community intensified their sense of relative deprivation and their demands to have an equal piece of the pie as Jewish citizens. The Arab minority of the mid-1970s' also emerged as a significant demographic mass—a group of half a million people. In the western and lower Galilee, they were a clear majority, a matter that illuminated self-empowerment, characterized by Tawfiq Zayyad: "half a million people means one million hands which are able to combat occupation" (Rekhess, 1977).

The salience of the broader Palestinian-Israeli conflict in influencing Israeli politics in general and Israeli Arab political behavior in particular increased with the rise of the Likud party to power in 1977. While Prime Minister Menachem Begin endorsed Jewish settlement in the West Bank he also signed the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979. This agreement did not positively influence the Arab-Israeli conflict within the state. The Hadash party viewed this agreement as negatively impacting the Palestinian domain and overlooking the Palestinians' claim for an independent state, which they argued was their priority.

Since the 1980s, Jewish society, feeling more secure than before, underwent a process of increased democratization with the intent to remove inequalities and bridge the socio-economic gaps. During this period, the state policy regarding the Arab minority was more attuned to its needs. This was largely because the two major political parties — Labor and Likud — realized the importance of the Arab electorate for winning elections. The government policy, led by Minister Ezer Weitman, who served as Minister for Arab Affairs between 1984 and 1986, was marked by inclusive measures and welcoming discourse so as to be attuned to the Arab population. It was believed that the state had opted to reverse its long policy in the spheres of land, housing and refugees by returning a large amount of land to the Arabs, legalizing thousands of Arab houses built without a permits, and proposing the return of refugees displaced from Ikrit and Bir`em to their villages (Reiter, 2009). This short-lived period of de-escalation was changed overnight when the first Intifada broke out in December 1987.

When the Palestinian uprising began in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Arab intellectual and political leadership expressed unequivocal declarations of solidarity with the Palestinians and actively supported the intifada in different ways: financial assistance, shipment of food and medical supplies, street demonstrations and strikes. However, while most of these activities were kept within the framework of the law, there were a few instances of sporadic violence, such as throwing stones and Molotov cocktails (Rekhess, 1991).

The first Intifada lasted until the Israel-PLO agreement of September 1993. It deepened the ties between the Arabs in mainland Israel and their Palestinian relatives in the territories. For example, Jawdat Kabaha, a resident from Barta`a told the Israeli author David Grossman (1992) that before the Intifada he hesitated to express his Palestinian identity in public, whereas, subsequently, he openly declares that he is proud to be a Palestinian, and this identity does not contradict his Israeli citizenship. The Intifada also increased the abhorrence felt by the Israeli Arabs for the actions taken by the state against the Palestinians. Since the outbreak of the first Intifada, the Jewish public has increasingly viewed the Israeli Arab population as an inseparable and largely hostile part of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories.

While identifying with the national aspirations of the Palestinians, Israeli Arabs simultaneously developed an Israeli identity in its civic dimension. Over time Israeli Arabs adopted a realistic approach based on the assumption that their future is ultimately tied with Israel. They became more familiar with the Israeli legal-democratic system and more effective in utilizing to advance their individual and collective goals on the basis of their rights as Israeli citizens. The internalization of the Israeli democratic values led them even to criticize the Palestinian Authority for its lack of democratic procedures and civil rights (Rekhess, 2002).

A serious process of de-escalation of the conflict occurred during the Rabin-Peres government of 1992-1996, particularly after Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords. This peace agreement affected the Israeli Arabs greatly, but in two contradictory directions. On one hand, the Rabin government increased the legitimacy of the quest for civil equality. On the other hand, from the Arab viewpoint, the peace accords failed to deal with issues related to claims for restorative justice, such as the repatriation of the "internal refugees" to their original villages. Hence, the Oslo peace accords created two contradictory trends among the Arabs: A pattern of integration and opportunism among the moderates (including Hadash), and an attitude of alienation among nationalist groups (Rekhess, 2003). Furthermore, a vast majority of Israeli Arabs were unwilling to forego their Israeli citizenship in favor of Palestinian citizenship, even if it would not involve having to change their place of residence (Yuchtman-Yaar, & Shavit, 2004). In this sense they are following the notion of many

East Jerusalem Palestinians who wish to remain a part of Israel, though they do not express it publicly.

Rabin's government contributed to the introduction of affirmative action policies, and to bridging the gap between Jews and Arabs in government budgets. Arab leaders view this as the "golden era" in government-minority relations. However, the progress fell short of addressing the expectations of the Arab populations in what was regarded as an era of peace.

When for a short period of three years (1993-1996) the Israelization process was boosted among many Arab citizens, the failure of the Oslo Accord turned the scale again toward Palestinization. Israeli Arabs linked their demands for minority rights with the Palestinians' struggle for liberation and statehood as Knesset Member Muhammad Barake explained in early 1999:

"We are an inseparable part of the Arab and Palestinian people and we have to express this in actions. That is to participate in the struggle of our people and to assist them by putting all our political weight behind the election campaign… we have to support our people by forming Israeli bridgeheads to recruit them for supporting liberation and the independence of our people… understanding our rights from a civil point of view only, devastates the Palestinians. We have to take into consideration the national interests of our people… we distinguish between the national rights and the civil rights. We are not like the Russian [Jewish immigrants from former USSR] who demand budgets only. We are a Palestinian National minority in a state, which is hostile to our people and hostile to us as its citizens. Is it not absurd to shuffle the cards [to give up national interests] for the sake of sewage programs and funds for municipalities? (*Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, January 11, 1999)."

The failure of the Oslo peace process resulted in the second Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in October 2000. Jews and Arabs have different narratives of what really happened in the October 2000 events: What triggered the use of violence, and who is to blame for the outbreak of violent clashes? Arabs contend that the real drive for using violence was Israeli discriminatory policies, whereas many Jews see the process of Palestinization of the Israeli Arab community as the stimulating factor of rioting against Israel on a Palestinian national agenda that unites Palestinians from the two sides of Israel's 1967 border (the Green Line).

The provocative visit of the former Likud party leader, Ariel Sharon, to the Temple Mount or the al-Aqsa compound on September 28, 2000, resulted in the death of seven Palestinian protestors there on September 30. This tragedy provided the trigger for a violent outbreak on October 1, 2000, in the Arab sector that lasted ten days. The magnitude of these riots resembled that of a rebellion against the State. The protestors,

in their rage, attacked the security forces and Jewish civilians. They threw Molotov cocktails and stones and destroyed every facility or symbol of authority: Road signs, billboards in Hebrew, traffic lights and Jewish-owned businesses. In several cases, Jewish extremist groups reacted violently against innocent Arabs. Thirteen Arab civilians were killed by the police and one Jew was killed after his car was stoned while he was driving on a highway.

Following these events, the government appointed a commission of inquiry headed by Justice Theodore Or which concluded that several major factors contributed to the outbreak of the riots:

(1) Educational, economic and demographic empowerment of the Arab sector.

(2) Continuing discrimination and tensions surrounding the land, including building on these lands.

(3) The ramifications of the political process with the Palestinians, the crystallization of the Palestinian identity in the territories, the Intifada and the influence of radical Islamic trends.

(4) The increase of Jewish groups holding negative attitudes toward the Arab minority.

(5) The increased centrality of issues of ethnic minorities within the Israeli and the international liberal discourse.

(6) The reversal in the second half of the 1990s' of the government tendency to appease the Arab community.

(7) The distrust of Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who ignored the Arab demands despite the fact that 95% of the Arab electorate voted for him against Netanyahu.

The report also suggested that the plurality of Arab parties and political factions increased the competition between Arab members of Knesset and thus contributed to the radicalization of their expressions and actions.

The Or Commission recommended that the handling of policies regarding the Arab minority be assigned directly to the Prime Minister, to implement equality in the allocation of resources, to give expression to the collective identity of the Arabs in the public culture, and to practice justice in land allocation. It also recommended a reform of the police force, and that appropriate measures are taken against several officers

that were responsible for the death of Arab citizens. Over six years after the events, the state attorney, Menachem Mazuz, decided not to charge any of the policemen involved in the shooting of the demonstrators due to "insufficient evidence." Mazuz claimed that, in addition to many evidentiary problems that stem from the long period of time that has passed since the incident, "We had to take into consideration the fact that the incident involved on-the-spot judgment in an emergency situation, under circumstances that don't justify the casting of criminal blame" (*Haaretz*, September 19, 2005).

The October events reflected a turning point in the relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel, and since then no serious effort has been made by either side to change this situation or to lower the levels of tensions and hostility between the Jewish and Arab communities (Smooha, 2001).

Another event that only raised tensions between Israeli Arabs and Jews was the Lebanon War of July–August 2006. Israel attacked Lebanon after Hezbollah ambushed an Israeli military patrol on the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon. Hezbollah killed three Israeli soldiers and abducted two more. Hezbollah reacted to Israeli large-scale air strikes and subsequent ground invasion by launching approximately four thousands rockets and missiles into northern Israel. Although about half (18 out of 39) of the Israeli civilians killed by rocket strikes were Arab citizens, the Arab population expressed sympathy with Hezbollah and called for an immediate cessation of the Israeli military operation. A survey conducted shortly after the war found that 48.3% of the Arab population justified Hezbollah's rocket firing into Israel (Smooha, 2006). Four weeks after the war, three Arab Knesset Members of the Balad party, together with two former Arab MKs, visited Syria, a move that challenged Israeli law and provoked the Jewish public.

The alienation of Arabs from the state was also shown in the 2006 Annual Herzliya conference. A survey results pointed out that 56% of Israeli Arabs were not proud of their Israeli identity, and 73% were unwilling to fight to defend the State. In addition, only 24% defined themselves as Israeli patriots while 48% identified themselves as Palestinian patriots. Ironically, a relatively high percentage, 77%, said that Israel provides better welfare facilities than most other states (only 66% of the Jews agreed). Similarly, 53% of Arabs are satisfied with Israel's welfare policies compared to only 17% of the Jews (Arad & Alon, 2006). A similar position was taken by Arab leaders and groups when Israel launched a strike against Hamas in Gaza aiming to put an end to seven years of terrorizing hundreds of thousands of people by launching rockets and missiles from Gaza to nearby Israeli towns.

The next significant issue in Jewish-Arab relations relates to actions taken by Arab civil society organizations. Beginning in the 1980s, many Arab NGOs were

established on both local and national levels. These associations took care of many issues concerning the Arab citizens of Israel, including welfare, education, national and cultural rights, land expropriation and allocation of state resources. Between December 2006 and May 2007, three of these leading Arab organizations published four documents presenting their vision regarding the State of Israel and Israeli Arabs' future status in the state. The first and most challenging document from the Jewish perspective was the "Future Vision" drafted by some 40 Arab academics and public figures under the umbrella of the National Committee of Arab Heads of Local Authorities. Shortly thereafter, the Democratic Constitution was published by the Adalah Center as an alternative to the existing drafts of a written constitution for Israel. These proposals were discussed in different forums, including the Knesset. In addition, a position paper, "An Equal Constitution for All," by Dr. Yousef Jabareen was published by the Mossawa Center. In May 2007, another manifesto, the Haifa Declaration, was published by the Mada al-Carmel Institute.

The historical narrative in these documents delegitimized the raison d'être of Israel as a Jewish state. Each manifesto views Israel as a colonial product and claims that Israel has the sole responsibility for the 1948 War and its "injustices" toward the Palestinians. The documents also strongly reject the Jewish nature of the state while suggesting in its place power sharing or a bilingual and multicultural state. Its drafters also present radical demands to reverse the post-1948 political situation by restitution and restoration of nationalized lands and repatriation of Palestinian refugees (Rekhess, 2007; Reiter, 2008).

The political polarization between Jews and Arabs in Israel contrasts with the daily reality of co-existence and the strong effects of the process of Israelitazation. The ongoing reality indicates that Jews and Arabs in Israel share a common interest. A survey in 2007, for example, found that 73% of Jews and 94% of Arabs in Israel believe that Israel should be a society in which Arab and Jewish citizens share mutual respect and equal opportunities (Pittinsky, 2008). Many Arab citizens are integrated into the Israeli civil service or in Jewish dominated enterprises and workplaces. Arab students have been enrolling at an exponential rate in Israel's higher education institutions (a vice-president of Haifa University is an Arab professor), and Jews and Arabs encounter each other peacefully in many realms of day-to-day life. Many Jews also shop and dine in Arab open markets and restaurants and Arab citizens are employed in Jewish-owned hotels, restaurants, car service facilities and stores. A prominent sphere of cooperation is healthcare in which Arab doctors and nurses provide medical service to the general population, and Arab patients receive equal treatment from Jewish doctors. The director of one of Israel's public hospitals is an Arab. A number of Arabs also serve in high-ranking positions in the diplomatic core.

In addition, there is a growing number of Jewish-Arab NGOs who work toward coexistence and equal rights for the Arab minority.

Another domain of co-existence is politics. Between 2005 and 2009, Ehud Olmert's administration included an Arab cabinet minister. Arab members of the Knesset have participated since the 1990s in the important Knesset Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security. In the local government domain, Arab town and village councils and mayors work in full cooperation with the central government and they comprise one-third of Israel's Center of Local Government.

After 1948 the Arabs of Israel chose to live in their original separate towns and villages. However about 10% of the Arab population resides together with Jews in mixed cities, such as Haifa and Acre. Joint municipalities have been established between Jewish Ma`a lot and Arab Tarshiha and the Arab-Jewish community of Neve Shalom. In recent years a number of Jewish-Arab schools and kindergartens were established in which Arabs and Jews choose to send their children to socialize and be educated with children of the other national group.

This contrasting reality of political polarization and pragmatic daily cooperation tends to shift between escalation and deintensification based on the situation in the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the government's attention at any given time to minority rights. Whether the current minority-majority system in Israel will deteriorate to violence or develop into greater cooperation and integration depends not only on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians but also on the government's ability to promote civic equality for the Arab citizens. Arab political leaders also have an important role to play. The identification of the Arab leadership with Palestinian violence since 1987 hinders the ability of the government to publicly support the Jewish community's reforms. Therefore, the Arab leaders' political behavior and discourse will also determine the direction of these fragile relations

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[1](www.adalah.org/newsletter/eng/dec06/tasawor-mostaqbali.pdf)

[2] Of about 700,000 Palestinian refugees, 300,000 are from the territory that became Israel. Not all of them fled, some left before the war, some were expelled, and most of them wanted to get out of the war. Some 15,000 villagers who were evacuated from their homes in the Galilee—while choosing to remain within the state of Israel—were transferred to live in other towns and villages. Whilst some succeeded in personal rehabilitation, most still regarded themselves as "internal refugees").

[3] Israel's Bureau of Statistics (wrongly) gives an inflated number of the minority that includes East Jerusalem Palestinians. These 250,000 people today are residents of the Jerusalem municipality and since they were annexed to Jerusalem following the 1967 war they are not citizens of the state of Israel. They participated in elections for the Palestinian Authority and not for the Israeli Knesset. Thus, the 20% that is common as their percentage of Israel's Arab minority is wrong.

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