

The
Palestinian
People



A HISTORY

Baruch Kimmerling

Joel S. Migdal

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ODD MAN OUT: ARABS IN ISRAEL

For the Palestinians as a people, Israeli modernism caused the failure of their own modernism, begun even prior to 1948. After 1948, the Palestinian minority [in Israel] was blocked off from the path to modernism, when it lost its economic, political, and cultural elite. More importantly, it lost the Palestinian city and was left [principally] as a rural society, to make its living from employment in Jewish cities that would not assimilate them. In the next phase, it lost the village by losing agriculture, thus remaining neither urban nor rural. That is the "Israeli Arab." The only modernism he knows is Jewish modernism, and he is annexed onto it as an imitator, a marginal factor, and in the best case—as carrying demands.

AZMI BISHARA, *The Arabs in Israel: An Internal Look*, 2000: 38.

ARAB CITIZENS OF ISRAEL (also known variously as Palestinian-Israelis and Israeli Arabs) emerged from *al-Nakba* as dispirited and traumatized as the refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and surrounding countries.¹ Living in the new Jewish state, though, quickly set them apart from other Palestinians. They became citizens of Israel and, until 1967, at least, were often shunned by other Arabs, even when traveling outside the country. And, within Israel, they found themselves on the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder and treated by the majority Jews as a potentially dangerous population. They became citizens of a state that celebrated its independence around the event that they considered their biggest catastrophe.

Palestinian-Israeli efforts at reconstituting Arab society and organizing themselves as a national minority in Israel ran into all sorts of obstacles. For one, they emerged from the 1948 war leaderless, dispossessed, and disorganized. Additionally, the Israeli government put tremendous barriers on association among them, at least beyond the family and village levels, from restricting travel to banning emerging national organizations. Finally, Palestinian-Israelis were remarkably heterogeneous in terms of religion, ethnicity, and ideology, making the creation of social ties all the more difficult. Disregarded in the Arab world and suppressed in Israel, they became the true odd man out in the region.

Still, taking advantage of cracks in the façade, which allowed them to organize through the Communist party and to piggyback on Israel's burgeoning economy, they overcame some of the barriers that had confined them. Groups of intellectuals, professionals, and entrepreneurs emerged to give new voice and cohesion to Arab society in Israel. While they could never escape their status as odd man out, suffering from the indifference of the state toward them and their own continuing factionalism, the Arab citizens of Israel, nonetheless, became much more formidable political actors after the mid-1970s. And they entered more fully into everyday life in Israel. Their political emergence was framed by three violent, momentous events: Land Day in 1976, the outbreak of the Intifada in the occupied territories in 1987, and the deadly clash with Israeli security forces in October 2000 after the start of the al-Aqsa Intifada in the newly constituted Palestine Authority (PA). Their place in Israel and among the Palestinian people as a whole is still uncertain, but little doubt remains that, one way or another, they will play an important role in the future of both.

The Present-Absentees

At the start of the twenty-first century, Palestinian Israelis numbered about 1.2 million of the 6.5 million citizens of the state. About 79 percent were Muslim; about 13 percent, Christian; and about 9

percent, Druze.² This population was concentrated within 120 municipal authorities. Eighty of these communities are in the north, where the approximately 920,000 residents who live in them comprise about half of the entire population of the Galilee. Another 170,000 live in the district of Haifa, and about 100,000 Bedouin live in the southern district. Half of the Bedouin have now been settled in seven permanent settlements, and the rest continue a seminomadic lifestyle in the area around the city of Beersheba. These statistics, as we will argue in this chapter, are not only quantitative but also point to essential qualitative changes in Arab life in Israel. No longer a marginal minority of the Jewish state as it was in 1948 and the years immediately after *al-Nakba*, the Arab population has become an active agent in the shaping of Israeli state and society.

In the last month of 1947 and the first four and half months of 1948, the Arab community in British Palestine ceased to exist as a coherent social and political entity. In the period leading up to British withdrawal from Palestine and its immediate aftermath, more than 350 villages and urban neighborhoods disappeared, some as if they had never existed. Urban life and institutions in the coastal cities were almost completely annihilated. War and flight shrunk the population of the lively city of Jaffa from 70,000–80,000 Arabs to only 3,000–4000.³ Of the approximately 1.3–1.4 million Arab subjects of the British mandate, almost half were displaced from their homes and communities.

The vast majority became refugees living outside the Jewish state. Others were uprooted from their original homes but remained in Israel, forbidden to return to their homes after the battles had come to an end.⁴ These internal refugees made up about 15 percent of the Palestinian Arabs remaining within the boundaries of the Jewish state (what later came to be called "the green line") after the signing of cease-fire agreements with the neighboring Arab states. All in all, about 150,000 Arabs stayed in Israel and became citizens of the state, comprising about 10 percent of all Palestinian Arabs and approximately 15 percent of the total population of the Israeli state.⁵ This last percentage dropped over the next few years as Jewish immigration from the displaced persons camps in Europe and from Arab

countries skyrocketed.⁶ But, by the beginning of the 1960s, the relative number of Arab citizens began to increase and today is close to 20 percent of Israel's population.

In the 1950s, three quarters of Arabs in Israel lived in the villages of the western Galilee and the "Little Triangle," the area contiguous to the coastal plane, which Israel annexed as part of its cease-fire agreement with Jordan. These villages had not witnessed mass exodus or the same type of radical thinning out that had destroyed the local populations of Haifa, Jaffa, Safed, and other cities and villages. What remained under Israeli control after the 1948 war was a remnant—a crumbling part of Palestinian Arab society, similar in many ways to the socially devastated remnants in the refugee camps surrounding Israel.

Many extended *hamulas* and even nuclear families were separated, with their members living on both sides of the armistice lines. With very few exceptions, family union was permitted by Israeli officials only in one direction—out of Israel. Israeli authorities even continued expelling concentrations of Arabs after the fighting had ended. Residents of the town of Majdal (today, Ashkelon), for instance, were deported to the Gaza Strip in September 1950. Residents of thirteen villages in Wadi Ara were deported to the other side of the armistice line in February 1951. Deportation of Bedouin tribes from within the state's borders continued until 1959.⁷

Some Palestinian Arabs tried to take advantage of their new citizen rights, turning to the Israeli courts in an effort to return to their home villages. For example, residents of the two Christian Maronite villages, Bir'm and Ikrit, have been struggling in the courts for two generations and, to date, still have not succeeded in winning their case.⁸ At the end of 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that the state should financially compensate the villagers uprooted from the two villages for the lands and other possessions taken from them. The villagers rejected this proposal and are still fighting for their right to return to their original villages.

The Israeli state gave an official oxymoronic designation to its Arab citizens prohibited from returning to their lands and houses, although remaining in the territory of the state during the battles:

present-absentees. Using that new legal category, the government appropriated the present-absentees' lands through the Law of Absentee Properties 1950. One estimate is that as much as 40 percent of Arab lands (about two million dunums) was confiscated through this law.

These internal refugees were resettled into existing, crowded villages and towns, in which they have been considered strangers to this day. Other villages were amalgamated into a single village. The state offered arbitrary compensation payments for Arab lands (many for less than their actual value), most of which the Arabs refused to accept. State agencies then settled Jewish immigrants on the newly appropriated lands. Thus a double aim was achieved: Jews, many of whom themselves were uprooted refugees, were settled on lands and populated the houses of abandoned neighborhoods and villages. At the same time, Arab citizens remaining within the state's borders, who were considered a fifth column, were thinned out and consolidated.⁹ The new Jewish immigrants, especially in "frontier areas," helped prevent the return or infiltration of Arab refugees, among other purposes, to their places of residence from before the war.

Even when lands remained in Arab hands, Arabs had difficulty continuing to cultivate them. The state severely limited water and electricity allocations, especially in comparison to the more productive Jewish communal settlements (the *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*) in the vicinity. Arabs were also forbidden from joining cooperative bodies, such as the trade unions under the umbrella of the powerful Histadrut (the General Jewish Workers' Organization) as well as becoming members in state-sponsored marketing, credit, and purchasing co-ops.¹⁰ Arab citrus orchards almost completely disappeared, and, by the 1950s, the peasantry (*fellaheen*) returned to production largely for household use, augmented by limited olive oil and vegetable production for the Jewish market. Thus, it is not surprising that many Israeli Arabs abandoned agriculture all together. At least in this regard they were similar to the Palestinians spread through neighboring Arab states. Land was at the service of those who held the political clout and resources needed to develop it and

who had access to the agencies for subsidizing production and marketing—the state, the Histadrut (with its marketing and purchasing cooperatives), and the Jewish Agency, the operational arm of the World Zionist Organization in Israel that subsidized all Jewish settlements and other developmental projects.

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, what was left of Arab agriculture in Israel underwent substantial changes. Intensive agriculture techniques and cash crops replaced traditional peasant cultivation. The main change, however, was from peasantry to day labor. Many Palestinian citizens of Israel had been cut off from their peasant roots around 1950, as their lands were appropriated.¹¹ That process now picked up steam again as agriculture went from labor-intensive to capital-intensive. The drastically reduced Arab land base and the move to commercial agriculture quickened a process already begun in the British Mandate period—the transition of the fellaheen to unskilled or partially skilled, nonagricultural day labor.¹² One study revealed that about three-quarters of all urban Arab laborers had no training at all.¹³ When Israel went from an excess of labor to a shortage, many Arabs finally integrated into the national economy, finding work in Jewish industry and construction companies, usually on the lower rungs of the employment ladder. During this period, the military government also loosened its hold, as one of its tasks had been to protect the labor market from an influx of cheap Arab labor that would compete with Jewish immigrant labor, primarily recent arrivals from Asia and North Africa.¹⁴

The change was rapid and fundamental. In 1963, the percentage of Arab agricultural laborers in Israel was slightly more than one-third of the total Arab population (in comparison to about 10 percent for Jews). After a decade, agriculture claimed only a fifth of Arab laborers. Arabs became the lower echelon of an ethnographically split labor market. Jews held the more skilled and high-paying jobs, whereas Arabs took lower-paying, sometimes only seasonal, jobs.¹⁵ Even during the colonial rule of the British, the percentage of Palestinian Arabs in high-paying jobs was low relative to that of Jews.¹⁶ The power of Jews over Israeli society's main agencies after 1948 only increased this inequality. Nonetheless, while Israel's

rapid economic growth created additional discrimination and increased inequality between Jews and Arabs, it also raised Israeli Arabs' standard of living, albeit to a lesser degree than that of the Jews. Eventually, their increased standard of living, as well as their growing numbers in the overall population, translated into rising political and social strength, as well.

By opening its employment office to Arabs, the Histadrut provided fellaheen with easier access to the labor market and a degree of wage protection. At the same time, they fell under yet another means of supervision in the form of the Jewish-controlled Workers' Organization.¹⁷ And they continued to face discrimination; the employment office still gave preference for jobs in Jewish areas to Jewish applicants. What had been touted as the universal obligation of military service became another source of discrimination against Arabs. Even without requesting it, they were granted exemption from the draft.¹⁸ And this exemption became the basis for other sorts of institutionalized and official discrimination. Certain rights—access to certain government jobs, social security benefits, housing, even drivers' licenses—were available only to army veterans and their families. It reached the point that from 1950 to 1967, the Israeli Communist party, the principal advocate for Arab civil rights in Israel, demanded the drafting of Arabs, although this demand was not greeted with tremendous enthusiasm by the party's Arab constituency.

The essence of the *Nakba* experience for the Arabs remaining in the Jewish state was the sudden change from the status of national majority to that of a small, politically powerless minority. This traumatic transition was exacerbated by the absence of any effective national leadership with the skills and will to stand up to the institutions of the Jewish state. As one government appointee presiding over the Arab sector put it, those who remained in the state "were like a headless body . . . the social, commercial, and religious leadership had disappeared."¹⁹ Even the Christian Arabs, who were the most educated and, in 1949, a relatively large percentage of the remaining population (21 percent, which was considerably bigger than the percentage of Christians in the worldwide Palestinian popula-

tion), were left with only a few representatives from the middle and upper classes of the British colonial period.²⁰

As occurred among the refugees, Palestinian citizens of Israel ended up relying heavily on local leaders. Most of these were heads of *hamulas*, and their importance grew as they took on mediation roles between their relatives and Israeli authorities and political parties. In fact, the *hamula* heads filled an even more central role than did local leaders in the refugee camps. One result was that, as these leadership positions gained in importance, inter-*hamula* rivalries intensified, becoming much sharper than they had been during the British period. Older *hamula* heads stayed in power, even while those in the refugee camps of Gaza, the West Bank of Jordan, and Lebanon slowly relinquished their place to a younger, more educated national leadership over the two decades following 1948.

The survival of the old *hamula* leaders and the intensified rivalries helped foreclose the very possibility that Arab citizens would create a general, cross-*hamula* or interregional leadership during these first two decades of the state. Even when limited urbanization and increasing levels of education led to new challenges to the veteran local *hamula* leadership in the mid-1970s, the state prevented the Arabs in Israel from creating a representative regional leadership. The Israeli state took a series of administrative and political steps to thwart the development of a new leadership, reflecting the continuing Jewish fear that the Palestinian citizens of the state could be a bridgehead to its sworn enemies. All in all, the traumatized Arab population, lacking a broad leadership, could take few steps toward constructing a national community or a renewed Palestinian identity. The two decades after the creation of Israel were very difficult ones for the Arabs in the new state. They were years marked by what sociologist Michael Hechter called internal colonialism, that is, the creation and expansion of Jewish settlements within the 1948 cease-fire borders, many on the former lands and villages of Palestinian citizens of the state.²¹

Perhaps the most painful edict was the prohibition on movement from place to place, which the military government imposed on most Arab residential areas. The journalist-poet Fawzi Al-Asmar de-

scribes the pain of confinement of the Arabs remaining in Lydda after the 1948 war:

The Arabs were not allowed to leave their ghetto and almost all the Arab villages or concentrations of villages were declared [military] areas. And the most humiliating thing for us was that our quarter and the other quarters in Lydda that were populated by Arabs were under military government, while in the rest of the city where the Jews lived [in abandoned Arab houses], there were no limitations on movement. Until the early 1950s we could not go out without a special permit, while the Jews, of course, were free to go anywhere except for into our ghetto.²²

While somewhat loosened over time, for the most part the prohibition on movement in the 1950s and early 1960s succeeded in greatly curtailing Arab mobility. This regulation was based on British laws issued for the emergencies of 1936 and 1945 (directed at the Arab Revolt and the Jewish rebellion, respectively). In the fall of 1948, while the fighting was still raging, the government declared military rule in Arab-populated areas. In 1950, the government created a military government for these areas, which remained in force until 1966. Military government resembled emergency regulations in other states, limiting freedom of expression, movement, and organization. Its effect was to restrict the Arab minority within a territorial enclave, excluding Arabs from the broader labor market so they could not compete with the Jewish immigrants who were flooding into the state and preventing them from resisting appropriation of their lands.

In the 1950s, Israel faced continuing, increasingly violent attempts at infiltration, mostly by refugee camp residents from the other side of the cease-fire line trying to return to their homes, attempting to take back what they claimed were their belongings, or simply seeking vengeance. Israel's retaliations led to a sort of non-stop, low-density war, which further justified the need to maintain harsh military governance of the Palestinian citizens of Israel (and paved the way, too, for the 1956 war).²³

Besides the military government, another institution controlling and reshaping the Arabs in Israel was the school—the elementary and high schools under state control. The curriculum of public schools for Arabs in Israel was written with the aim of creating a new ethnic identity for them (much as the Hashemite educational policy tried to Jordanize the Palestinians).²⁴ General Arab history was taught and was presented as complementary to the history of the Israeli state and Zionism. While the Koran was taught (in the 1950s and 60s, religion was thought to be a factor that could moderate ethnicity and nationalism), so too was the Hebrew Bible and Hebrew literature.

The aim was to thwart the flowering of a Palestinian Arab national identity.²⁵ Y. L. Benor, one of the planners of Arab education, set forth the Israeli considerations in devising the curriculum: “How can we encourage loyalty to Israel among Israeli Arabs without demanding a negation of Arab yearning on the one hand, and without permitting the development of hostile Arab nationalism on the other?”²⁶ In addition, the level of Arab schools remained far inferior to that of Jewish schools (even those in distant development towns). In 1997, 38 percent of all Arab twelfth graders passed their matriculation exams, in comparison to 51 percent of Jews. Among those who did pass, only 69.4 percent of Arabs met standards for university acceptance, compared to 88 percent of Jews.²⁷

While portrayed by Israeli authorities as a dangerous population, tied to their brethren in hostile neighboring states, the Arabs who stayed in Israel actually were cut off from other concentrations of Palestinians.²⁸ After the 1967 war, when the three fragments of historical Palestine—Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank—were re-joined under Israeli control, many of the Arab citizens of Israel could again begin to define themselves as part of the larger Palestinian community. Many became supporters of the idea of Palestinian nationalism.²⁹ Even then, though, their contradictory experience as Israeli citizens and Arabs separated them emotionally, socially, and politically from other Palestinians. Palestinians who had experi-

enced dispersal, exile (*ghurba*), and longing for their original homeland carried a very different set of baggage, emotions, and cultural codes coming out of the partial roots they had sunk in the far-flung places in which they had ended up.

If the experiences of the Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel differed markedly from those who were scattered in various countries of the Middle East or migrated later to Europe, Latin America, and North America, the relationship of these Arab citizens to the Israeli state set them apart, too, from the country's Jewish citizens. In the 1950s, the Israeli regime's main concern was absorption of the waves of Jewish immigrants into the new society and culture. They were to pass through an awesome melting pot from which “the new Israeli/Jewish man” would emerge. There was, of course, no room for the Arab in this process.³⁰ Defined and constructed as religious or ethnic minorities (Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Circassians) in a Jewish national state, the Arab citizens were (and still are) considered as marginal, if not external, to Israeli society.³¹

The Jews, including those who had themselves just arrived in their new land, were citizens of a nation-state created by them and for them. They developed feelings of belonging, partnership, civic responsibility, pride, and emotional identification with the state and its symbols. Jews felt themselves to be sole proprietors of state resources and institutions. The army, the flag, the national anthem, and official holidays were not only Jewish but, for the Arabs, signified painful past experiences. At least some of the official holidays were actually days of collective mourning, conjuring up dark memories for its Arab citizens. Moreover, Arab citizens were forbidden from publicly expressing their collective feelings, which mostly remained hidden and suppressed. Only in 1998 did the Arabs and some Jews begin an open discussion of including the *Nakba* in the state's fiftieth Independence Day celebrations.³²

The Palestinian citizens of Israel thus have stood inside and outside Israeli state and society. They became bilingual, bicultural citizens, raised to obey Israeli law. At the same time, much of their land was systematically taken from them. They had limited access, beyond voting, to “Israeli democracy” and to many social benefits

available to Jews in the areas of welfare, jobs, housing, and other subsidized goods and services. State symbols and rituals did not conjure up the same positive emotions that they did for Jews. Their place in Israel, in short, has been shot through with ambiguity, ambivalence, and equivocalness. But their relationship to Palestinianism has been no more certain. A unifying Palestinian national identity has been slow to emerge, partly due to sectarian and cultural differences among them. Arabs in Israel have tried not to emphasize their interreligious and interethnic tensions, blaming them (rightfully, to some degree) on Zionist tactics to divide and conquer. Still, these differences have affected Arabs' ability to construct a unified community and constituency in the Jewish state.

The Druze, Bedouin, and Christians

One group, the Druze, established a much closer relationship with Jews and the Jewish state than did other Arabs, but it has experienced the same sort of ambivalent status.³³ While Druze have been included in mandatory military service, they still have found it difficult to acquire full equality of rights and opportunities in the Jewish state. In terms of educational and income levels, the Druze are positioned even lower than Muslim Arabs within Israel.

Already in the 1930s, Druze leaders and the Jewish leadership in British Palestine forged important connections.³⁴ During the 1948 war, some Druze participated in the fighting on the Jewish side, and, after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, the first Druze were recruited as volunteers into the Israeli army. Since 1957, their identity card registration has been changed from "Arab" to "Druze," and they have been subject to the draft. Military service has had a major effect on the occupational structure of the community. After completing army service, as many as 40 percent have continued as army employees or served in the police force, the border police, or prisons. An additional 10 percent have been employed in petrochemical factories in jobs that also require a "security profile." Their participation in the military/security sector has offset their

weakness as a small minority by bestowing them with a positive "security profile," but it also has diverted talented young Druze from other careers. It has diverted them, too, from seeking higher education, a necessary condition for social mobility in Israel. Paradoxically, in this respect, their situation has been worse than that of young Muslim and Christian Arabs.

Loyalty to the state has thus won them important benefits—security clearances, jobs in the military and other security agencies, and full-citizen obligations to serve the state. But that loyalty has not translated into full social and economic equality. Mobility has been limited. Like other Arabs, some of their lands were appropriated by the state in the wake of the 1948 war. Recently, their ambivalent status has translated into internal struggles over Druze identity. In fact, one researcher has found three identities existing simultaneously among them: exclusively Druze, Israeli-Druze, and Palestinian-Druze.³⁵ Beyond that, beginning in 1973, young Druze began to organize and join public protests, vote for non-Zionist parties, and renew family connections with Druze from the Golan Heights, who saw themselves as Syrians.

Christians, too, have maintained an equivocal relationship with the state and have had ongoing tensions with the much more numerous Muslims. The Christians were harmed less than the Muslims in the *Nakba*.³⁶ After the 1948 war, they comprised about a fifth of the total Arab population remaining in the state, but their relative numbers have decreased as a result of low birthrates and slow, constant emigration. They have been mostly an urban population, more well to do and educated than the Muslims. While the various denominations have been linked through their common Christianity, the Arab Christians have actually made up the core of secular Arab and Palestinian nationalism in Israel. Traditionally, they have been less interested in emphasizing their religion than their ethnicity, culture, and the Arab language, which are common to all.

Nonetheless, relations with the Muslim majority have not always been comfortable, as we have already seen in previous chapters. Mosque sermons, from the period of British rule until today, have

aggressively targeted Christian Arabs. On the one side, Muslims have accused Christian Arabs of collaborating with colonialism and Zionism, and, on the other, Jews have considered them to be Arab nationalists and radical Palestinians.³⁷ The rise of the Islamic movement in Israel in the 1980s and 1990s also aggravated relations between Christians and Muslims. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, hostility has focused around control of the city of Nazareth, especially the issue of the construction of a mosque next to a Christian monastery and church.³⁸

In contrast, relations between the Christians and the Druze have been much better. Their ties go back to the massacre of both communities in 1869 in Lebanon, which led to the creation of mixed Christian-Druze villages in the Galilee.³⁹ Druze service in the Israeli army, however, has brought about a noticeable rift between them and other Arab citizens in Israel.

Another minority within the heterogeneous Arab society in Israel is the Bedouin. At the end of the 1990s, the Bedouin population stood at 150,000. The Bedouin have been dispersed among twenty-five officially recognized villages (seven of which are towns built for them in the Negev desert) and scores of unrecognized villages. More than 100,000 Bedouin live in the northern Negev and the rest, in the Galilee. The latter have closely emulated the surrounding Arabs in terms of lifestyle, while those in the Negev have preserved many of their earlier cultural traits and sometimes even sharpened them. Since the retreat of Israeli military power from the Sinai Desert and the transfer of large military bases to the Negev at the beginning of the 1980s, relations between the state and the Bedouin concerning issues of land and government have worsened. The Bedouin demanded that 800,000 dunums of land be registered in their name, which from their perspective has been in their possession since before the Ottoman period. The government counteroffered only 30,000 dunums.⁴⁰ It seems that the disagreement has been not so much about the actual size of the territory as it has been about the differing cultural and political meanings that each side attaches to the land and its ownership.

The Bedouin, as a group, have been on the bottom rung of Is-

rael's social and economic ladder. Their traditional occupations in agriculture and animal husbandry have declined, and most of the workforce has taken up employment in construction and services. With the downturn in the Israeli economy that began in the late 1990s, the Bedouin of the Negev (in contrast to those of the Galilee) have become the most impoverished group in Israel with the highest rate of unemployment. Their diminishing life chances have precipitated a growing alienation from Israeli society and state.

Religious, ethnic, and lifestyle differences made the creation of an Arab public—one marked by multiple ties outside kinship circles—more difficult to construct, especially in the wake of the trauma of 1948 and the subsequent actions of the Israeli state. Already suffering from being considered a dangerous population, Arabs have been hurt, too, by political and ideological differences that placed barriers to constructing Arab solidarity. Nonetheless, it was within the realm of politics that a cultural revival and the creation of groups that cut across religious and ethnic differences began.

Communism, Nationalism, and Cultural Revival

Through the mid-1960s, the Zionist parties would not accept Arabs into their ranks. Instead, they created accompanying electoral lists, which were called "Arab factions" and which included mostly *hamula* heads who had been deemed "loyal" by the security service. The only exception among Israel's parties was a small left-wing Zionist party called the United Workers party, or Mapam, which enrolled Arabs as full members. Yet, as a Zionist party, Mapam never succeeded in gaining acceptance by the Arab public as a trustworthy representative of the Arab community's collective interests. All in all, Jewish parties have not served as a welcome or productive avenue for expressing Arab political concerns.

The Arab-Jewish divide in politics dates all the way back to the British mandate. The only major political organization in which Arabs and Jews worked side by side then was the Palestinian Communist party, or PKP, which was founded in early 1923 and received

official international communist recognition in Moscow one year later.⁴¹ Underground communist organizations had been active in the area of Palestine as early as 1913, but their membership was purely Jewish. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union demanded that expansion of the party include the "masses of laborers"—a code for its Arabization. In 1930, the Comintern disbanded the central committee of the PKP and appointed a new one with an Arab majority. But Arabization of the leadership did not help it take root in Palestinian Arab society at that time, which was at heart traditional and religious. Nevertheless, during British rule, there had been planted some seeds of Jewish-Arab cooperation around professional trade and regional unions (mostly in the Haifa area), especially the Union of Railroad Workers.⁴² Still, it was clear that both communities and their leaders were not interested in encouraging Arab-Jewish cooperation and solidarity, both because of group interests and for national-ideological reasons.

In 1943, most of the Arab members left the PKP and founded the National Liberation League. The League was not incorporated into the Arab Higher Committee, and, in 1947, was the only Arab political body that openly accepted the U.N. Partition Plan.⁴³ This step brought about a split in the League. One faction, including Emile Habibi, Tawfiq Tubi, and Fuad Nasser, accepted the Moscow line and supported the Partition Plan, while the opposition faction of Emile Tuma, Bulus Farah, and Musa al-Dajani stuck to the Palestinian nationalist line, opposing the plan.⁴⁴ In October 1948, after establishment of the State of Israel, the vestiges of the League reintegrated, forming the Israeli Communist party (Maki). Until the establishment of the New Communist List (Rakah) in the summer of 1965, Maki continued to be the only binational Jewish-Arab political body in Israel. In elections in that summer of 1965, Rakah declared Maki its enemy, and pulled away most of Maki's Arab voters on the basis of its pan-Arab platform. By the elections of 1969, Maki had completely disappeared from both the Jewish and the Arab political maps.

Despite significant internal tensions and constant cleavages, the communist parties in Israel played a decisive role in the reconstruc-

tion and crystallization of Arab society in Israel, at least until the 1980s. They provided a home and a greenhouse for the Arab intelligentsia and served as a legitimate outlet for expression of Arab anger and protest.⁴⁵ The communists, even when expressing anti-Zionist, nationalist, pan-Arab, and, later, Palestinian nationalist positions, knew how to do so while remaining within the lines of acceptable political discourse in Israel. With the exception of marginal groups within the various incarnations of the communist party, its members never challenged Israel's right to exist outright but, rather, fought for improvement of the civil rights of Arabs in Israel and the right of all Palestinians to independently define themselves. Arabs in the communist parties also felt that, through their party affiliation, they were not completely giving themselves over to Jewish rule but could benefit, to some degree, from the protection of a powerful patron, the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989–1991, Arab attraction to communism weakened considerably, and remnants of the party began to look to nationalist-Palestinian partners (in the framework of the Democratic Front for Equality) in order to protect what remained of their hold on the Palestinian community in the Israeli political arena.⁴⁶

As mentioned, throughout the first twenty years of the Israeli state, when any hint of an Arab national political organization was suppressed, only Maki succeeded, or at least partially succeeded, in giving legitimate expression to Arab distress and voices of protest. The party's universal, communist rhetoric generally managed to compensate for national demands, packaging them in a way that was acceptable in Israeli political discourse. Nevertheless, the principle in Israeli politics that no "Arab party" could participate in a ruling coalition nor could any Israeli government depend on "Arab votes" in the Knesset to remain in power was formulated during Ben-Gurion's day and still holds true even today. Half of Ben-Gurion's formulation from the early 1950s, "just not Herut and Maki" has continued to apply to Arabs, whereas the other half, "Herut" (the present-day Likud) has long since become a ruling party.⁴⁷ Only during the second term of Yitzhak Rabin in the 1990s did the votes of Arab Knesset members help sustain a government

and, even then, Arabs were not formally brought into the ruling coalition.

Maki served not only as a political party but also as a nurturing site for a new Arab, mostly Christian, cultural elite. Arab poets, writers, philosophers, journalists, and teachers created a kind of counterculture, posed against the dominant Hebrew culture. But, if this culture was out of step with the dominant intellectual climate in Israel, it was also almost completely disassociated from cultural developments in other Arab states. The party newspaper, periodicals, and Arab publishing house served as a greenhouse for the flowering of the new intelligentsia in Israel. In the Palestinian Arab context, both inside and outside Israel, almost no differentiation was made between politics and art. The only nonpolitical Arab poet of stature among Arabs in Israel in the 1950s was Mishel Hadad. Emile Habibi, the most visible Arab writer in Israel and winner of the Israel Prize for Literature, was a communist activist.⁴⁸ The most important literary magazine for Israeli Arabs in the past and still today, *Al-Jadid* (which merged later with *Al-Sharaq*, edited by Mahmud Abbas and Muhammad Ali Said), as well as more overtly political magazines, such as *Al-Itihad*, *Al-Ad*, and *Mashraf*, were all published by the Communist party. *Al-Itihad* still serves as an organ for both poets and political activists, such as Samih Al-Kasem, Mahmud Darwish, Zaki Darwish, Salim Jubran, and Tawfiq Ziad.⁴⁹ Under the auspices of these journals, a fascinating and original Arab-Israeli culture developed and, later, came to be accepted as an essential part of the larger body of general Palestinian cultural work.⁵⁰

Aziz Haidar, an Arab social scientist in Israel, argues that, until the 1970s, very few Arabs in Israel publicly defined themselves as either Palestinian Arabs or simply as Palestinians, although signs of a new Palestinian identity could already be spotted in the work of some of the artists who flourished under the umbrella of Maki.⁵¹ Some of them ended up leaving Israel and joining the armed resistance movements in Lebanon and elsewhere. Others stayed in Israel, making a living from teaching positions, while using codes, symbols, and allegory in order to write protest poetry and communicate with the reading public, under the watchful eye of the Israeli censor.

Many of these artists were also bitterly opposed to the *hamula* heads for their cooperation with the Israeli authorities, and some of them were even critical of the oppressive, traditionalism of broader Arab society.

Arab society in Israel had entered the 1950s as traumatized and quiescent. Much of it was displaced physically and was in the process of being further uprooted socially, as it moved from agriculture to day labor. Literally and figuratively, Israel's Arabs constituted a fenced-in community—a small minority in a now-Jewish sea. And it was riven with religious and ethnic differences. Even with all that, the odd marriage of communism and nationalism in Maki served as a platform for the first important efforts to break out of those constraints. As a vehicle to express the discontent of Israel's Arab citizens and as an intellectual hothouse, Maki began the process of restoring the voice and solidarity of Arab society in Israel—a process still incomplete.

Emergence of a Bilingual, Bicultural Society

Over time, Jewish-dominated society in Israel became more open, more sure of itself, and less Arab-phobic. Arab graduates of Israeli universities and of universities in the communist countries joined the growing Arab elite and middle class, mostly as a small core of professionals, especially teachers, lawyers, doctors, and pharmacists. Less and less were they in need of the patronage of the communist parties. Furthermore, even though most education was still funded by their *hamulas*, this new Arab class enjoyed a certain autonomy, even within its own society. The Hebrew that flowed from their mouths was frequently fluent and their accent flawless, better than that of much of the Jewish population, a population of immigrants. This new class read the same books and newspapers as the Jewish elite, went to the same plays, and spoke the same niceties as their Jewish middle-class counterparts. So much so that, after 1967, most residents of Gaza and the West Bank were amazed at how "Jewish" the "Arabs of '48," as they called them, seemed. Some of them also

filled an important role for other Arabs, both in Israel and, later, in the occupied territories, by providing a crucial bridge to dominant Jewish culture. Lawyers, especially, gained skills in advancing Arab interests by successfully using the courts and other government institutions.⁵²

Nonetheless, like the cultural and economic leadership that arose in the coastal region during the British period, these intellectuals, free professionals, and party activists had difficulty building a cohesive leadership and establishing political parties or other viable institutions. Political scientist Mark Tessler found that the percentage of the Arab elite in Israel in relation to the size of the Arab population was quite small compared to that in some of the developing countries in the region.⁵³ This elite is not only fairly marginal in numbers but suffers, too, from a contradictory status: held in high esteem in Israeli Arab society but on the margins of the dominant Jewish social, economic, and political system, which has been their reference group in the state. Only infrequently have they held positions that allow them to influence or contribute to the development of, or leave their mark on, Israeli society as a whole.⁵⁴ And, still, the Arab elites have fulfilled an important function in setting the goals, public agenda, and limits of political activity for the Arab population in Israel.

Although the mass deportations of 1948 have almost never been mentioned overtly, they have remained both a traumatic memory and a well-learned lesson that has been assimilated by the first two generations of Arabs in Israel. Arab citizens of Israel have had to walk a fine line: on the one hand, to demand their rights as citizens, to defend what remains of their lands, and to protest; on the other hand, to take caution not to give the Jewish state the opportunity to uproot them from their lands.⁵⁵

The Family

Even in the early years of the twenty-first century, the extended family, or *hamula*, still constituted a central factor in the individual and

public life of Arabs in the state; however, in the years surrounding the 1967 war, the family system failed to answer all the needs of Israel's Arab public.⁵⁶ A large portion of the extended family's power stemmed from its "political" role as a go-between for individual Arabs and rulers. As the number of Arabs working in agriculture decreased and employment opportunities outside the village limits increased, the special status of the extended family in Arab society began to erode, but never completely disappeared.⁵⁷ After 1967, its economic position also cracked, and it declined in influence. The process gained momentum when the Labor party weakened and afterward, in 1977, was ousted from power. Much of the vitality of the *hamula* and the strength of its elders lay in their relationship to this party. The new ruling party, the Likud, did not show any particular interest in politically cultivating the Arab minority, with the exception of the Druze.⁵⁸

With the erosion of political power came corresponding declines in social power. Marriage patterns based on the extended family lost their status, as traditional first-cousin marriages and heavy dowry payments became less and less popular. The expansion of wage labor brought about decreases in family-orchestrated marriage arrangements, as well as the weakening of the old criteria that had set bride prices. For at least some families of the new educated middle class, interfamily marriage arrangements, with their strong political and economic overtones, were overshadowed by individual freedom in choice of spouse.⁵⁹

Among educated groups in society, even the structure of the family began to change, from the extended to the nuclear family. The individualistic trends that had begun to develop within the Jewish Israeli population partially penetrated some elements of Arab society. Certainly, the old patterns did not disappear completely, even after 1967 when the market for brides and grooms grew considerably and began to cross the "green line." In his study of the town of Shefaram, sociologist Majid al-Haj discovered that traditional marriage patterns were still widespread, even though young Arabs reported that their choices were made according to personal preference and not interfamily matchmaking.⁶⁰ As bride prices and spouse

selection patterns began to change, so too did other areas of family life. Growing individualism, for instance, raised the probability that young couples would establish separate households instead of becoming part of their extended families.⁶¹ But these new patterns have had to coexist alongside the old: the extended family has continued to play important economic, political, and social roles in Arab society in Israel.

Social and Political Change in Post-1967 Israel

As part of these social changes, new organizations with political potential, not based on the *hamula*, began to appear, such as organizations constituted by internal refugees from destroyed or unrecognized villages.⁶² The new, more individualistic, Arab community found, however, that, although the *local* status of the heads of big families had been damaged, the *Israeli* political system still worked through them. In the decades after the 1967 war, Israeli policy continued, as in the past, to stifle any possibility that the local educated elite would form a national leadership, capable of helping Arabs in Israel find their place in the new Israel. These buds of change had already begun to appear in the previous decade. Now, however, as the three fragments of the Palestinian people (those of the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza Strip) were reunited under Israeli rule, these changes gained momentum. One reason for these transformations stemmed from the renewed encounter of Arab citizens of Israel with Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, both through renewed family relations and through efforts to provide political and legal aid to their brothers who did not enjoy even the limited civil rights of the Arabs in Israel.

Two trends were central in the refashioning of Arab society in Israel and its strategies for survival after the 1967 war: the increasingly rapid decline of agrarian life and the development of a new politics. The economic boom after 1967 had a marked effect on the Arabs' standard of living and their entire socioeconomic structure. Many became independent proprietors—owners of small workshops and

businesses and, in some cases, of substantial industries. From their position in the previous two decades as unskilled laborers and service providers, often the lowliest jobs in Israel, they now moved into employment that required greater occupational and entrepreneurial skills.⁶³ The Arabs in Israel began to enter businesses and take jobs that many Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, were now abandoning. They acquired experience and skills in the new labor market in areas such as construction, mechanics, and semi-industrial labor as contractors and subcontractors. Road construction, public works, and a wide variety of manufacturing, often with government contracts, at least partially opened up to Arabs.⁶⁴ Just as Arab Israelis had replaced Jews from Islamic countries by moving into unskilled, low-paying, low-prestige, hard labor in the 1950s and 60s, now Israeli Arabs passed these jobs on to day laborers from the occupied territories.

By the 1980s, a new Arab industrial sector was in place and employed up to 30 percent of the Arab industrial workforce and 6 percent of the total Arab workforce.⁶⁵ Arabs also initiated small businesses serving primarily local Arab, but sometimes Jewish, customers. A 1985 survey of such businesses and industries pointed to solid Arab presence in these sectors.⁶⁶ Agriculture was now just one sector among many. Wage labor outside the village and independent businesses owned by Arabs created a labor shortage in the villages, forcing farmers who remained in the villages to raise productivity and their employees' wages.⁶⁷

All this certainly did not mean economic nirvana for Israel's Arab population. Industrialization in the Arab sector has remained fairly limited. Arab-owned businesses have tended to be small, dedicated to trade and commerce, subcontracting, craftsmanship, and transport.⁶⁸ Most factories have continued to be completely or partially dependent on Jewish industry, contracting, marketing chains, and purchase. For example, the Arab clothing industry developed in the 1980s to supply Jewish-owned large textile factories and fashion houses.

In the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, most of these industries folded as Israel's economic transformation

to high-tech proceeded and, later, a deep recession hit. Their downfall hurt both Jewish and Arab peripheral towns. Arab-owned industry still tended to be concentrated in traditional sectors such as textiles and food production, compared to Jewish-owned enterprises, which included more sophisticated multi- and transnational production, demanding greater technical skills and knowledge. The high-tech industries that made up Israel's so-called new economy were practically entirely Jewish. Friendly regulations and state subsidization, which aided politically preferred groups, applied to Jews and not Arabs. The largest concentrations of poverty, as it happens, have been among the Arab and ultra-Orthodox populations (about half of all Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox were under the poverty line). Of the twenty-three official unemployment centers in the year 2000, nineteen were in Arab municipalities. In some Arab villages and towns, the unemployment rate reached 15 percent and more.⁶⁹ With the growth of a new Arab middle class has come a widening of the gap between the better off and worse off in Israeli Arab society.

Nonetheless, in the 1980s, even without substantial government investments or other advantages, Arabs in Israel often found ways around government policy (through what is called the "gray economy") to make some noteworthy economic gains.⁷⁰ This sector developed alongside, and separately from, the state's economy. One study pointed to approximately 300 Arab families who became large entrepreneurs and another 2000 who were among mid-range entrepreneurs and investors.⁷¹ Together with intellectuals, free professionals, national and local politicians, whose numbers reached more than 4,000 by the beginning of the year 2000, these entrepreneurs have become one of the most influential sectors in Arab society in Israel.

The overall growth in prosperity has even had an effect on less-well-off Arab citizens, including one prime example, women. A growing number of women joined the workforce in response to the increasing demand for non- and semiskilled working hands. During the 1980s, 11 percent of women of labor age were working; but, by mid-2000, about a quarter of women were officially employed (compared to nearly three-quarters of Jewish women), and many, many

more were unofficially serving in unreported jobs, such as domestic labor and unskilled work in agriculture and small textile factories.⁷² The percentage of Christian women working (about 40 percent) was about twice as high as for Muslim and Druze women.⁷³ Women became part of an Arab sector, significantly transformed from what it had been in the 1950s—and substantially more prosperous.

To Build a House, To Plant a Vineyard

Even with the growth of a vocal political and intellectual elite, of a new class of entrepreneurs and professionals, of a transformed occupational structure bringing increased prosperity, Arab society has remained caught between the promise of new possibilities and the containment posed by being enveloped in a Jewish state. Possibly the problem most exemplary of the reality in which the Arab community in Israel has lived is the shortage of land for residential construction. The Arab population grew from the 150,000 people who remained after the 1948 war to over a million in the year 2000. Natural growth peaked at the rate of over 4 percent a year, an almost unheard of rate worldwide. Recently however, this rate has begun to fall.⁷⁴ Over the decade of 1972–1982, the growth was 3.7 percent, meaning the doubling of the Arab population in Israel well within twenty years, although historically emigration of Arabs from Israel has partially offset the high rate of natural increase.

With the mushrooming of the population came increasingly crowded living conditions; almost two of every five Arab households included seven or more people, and, in over a fifth of all households, more than four people lived in a room.⁷⁵ Two other factors further worsened living conditions: (1) the lack of rapid urbanization and restrictions on turning agricultural lands into land for housing, which could have released pressure from the villages, and (2) the economic prosperity of the 1980s and early 1990s, which brought with it a desire and the financial wherewithal to build more and bigger houses.⁷⁶

But authorized construction was almost impossible. Israeli law

demands that all construction be carried out according to master plans for development as well as local municipality plans, themselves dependent on authorization of the district council. All new construction or additions in Israel require a license from the authorities. Arab villages, local councils, and municipalities have lacked the means and skills to develop these elaborate plans, and the state has not bothered to help them, granting priority to Jewish development towns, disadvantaged Jewish neighborhoods, and settlements in the occupied territories.⁷⁷ Thus, legal Arab construction has been frozen in place, but, at the same time, illegal construction has been booming. Much of this construction has remained untouched, but periodic house demolitions have added another layer to the reigning tension between the Israeli state and its Arab citizens.

Beyond this, state refusal of official recognition for so-called unrecognized villages has meant that they have not been provided with basic services.⁷⁸ The high rate of population growth and the restrictions on construction have come on top of severe barriers the state has placed on Arab acquisition of land. The allocation or leasing of land to Arabs involves practices and ideas at odds with Zionist ideology. To block Arab access to land, the Jewish National Fund (the JNF is an agency of the World Zionist Organization) established formal standards officially forbidding the leasing of its lands to non-Jews. Because most lands were actually owned by the JNF, it, in effect, acted as a subcontractor of the state—the Israel Land Authority—for land allocation and leasing.⁷⁹

The result has been a rapid expansion of illegal construction, estimated at about 30 percent of all Arab residences. Some construction was authorized retrospectively; most remained in place by authorities' turning a blind eye. But the rest has become the basis of bitter conflict, which has led to the total destruction of many new houses. House demolitions remain a sword of Damocles, hovering as a constant threat over the Arab community in Israel. It is not surprising, then, that it was the tensions generated by the housing crisis that brought about the single most important event in restoring a strong voice to, and forging a new solidarity among, Israel's Arabs.

Land Day

The home and land crisis turned out to be a key catalyst for political radicalization among Arab citizens in Israel. In the decade after the 1967 war, a wave of political activism swept across the community, which reawakened some of the Jews' deepest fears. The key event occurred on March 30, 1976, when the National Committee for the Defense of Arab Lands—a political organization claiming to represent the Arab population in Israel—declared a general strike, which quickly got out of hand. As in the past, the most immediate issue was impending confiscation of Arab land by the state, which the government had announced in February of that year. Confiscation was to take place in the Galilee as part of a plan (insensitively) labeled "Judaization of the Galilee."⁸⁰ Residents of Arab villages who joined the protest demonstrations clashed with massive deployed police forces, resulting in six Arabs dead and many more wounded and arrested.

For many Arabs, the event echoed the day of bloodshed in Kfar Qassem, which had taken place twenty years before. The Kfar Qassem massacre on the eve of the 1956 Suez war had been the most traumatic event carved into the collective memory of the Arab citizens of Israel until that time. It was a painful and gaping wound, remaining a powerful symbol, even until this day. On October 29 of that year, the military administration imposed a curfew on Arab villages set to begin at five in the evening. In Kfar Qassem, notice of the curfew did not reach the fellaheen working in the fields. The village head, who himself had been informed of the curfew only half an hour before it was set to begin, warned the local army unit commander that there was no way possible to notify the farmers and shepherds in their fields on time.

Similar situations occurred in other villages, but only the local army unit in Kfar Qassem took the return of the fellaheen from the fields as a breach of curfew. Soldiers gathered those returning to the village and shot to death forty-seven men, women, and children.⁸¹ The government made huge efforts to hide the facts of the massacre from the eyes of the Jewish public and from the international press.

RECONSTITUTING THE PALESTINIAN NATION

In the end, though, Israeli officials were forced to admit what had occurred and put those responsible on trial. Only light, symbolic sentences were meted out to the perpetrators of the massacre, and several later even advanced to more senior positions in the army.

Land Day was very different from the Kfar Qassem massacre. Alongside the fury toward the regime and police and the mourning over the dead, Land Day brought about a new national pride. This time around, the Arab community had demonstrated a daring confidence and political awareness totally lacking in 1956; this time Arab citizens were not passive and submissive. Instead, they initiated and coordinated political activity at the national level, responding to police brutality with their own violence. What turned out to be more important is that they used the events as a permanent rallying call. In 1988, they declared Land Day a Palestinian-Israeli civil national day of commemoration and a day of identification with Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, to be marked by yearly demonstrations and general strikes.⁸² Among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, these protests awakened feelings of solidarity and respect for the participants. Land Day was a key event, then, not only in forging political solidarity among Arab citizens of Israel, but in cementing the acceptance of the "1948 Arabs" back into the larger Palestinian world and into the heart of mainstream Palestinian nationalism.

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