

The Ethnic Cleansing of the *Forgotten Palestinians*

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There are two notions that must be acknowledged by any serious student of the Israel-Palestine conflict. These two concepts are essential to any understanding that claims to reflect the historical and current realities of this conflict. The first is the acknowledgment that the struggle for Palestine has always been a struggle over land, both as a space for the fruition of culture, and as a resource for communal development. Even the most liberal Zionist thinkers in the early twentieth century asserted that the colonization of Palestine has to go in two different directions: Jewish settlement in *Eretz Israel* and the resettlement of the Arabs in this to neighboring Arab states.¹

From the onset, Zionist interests in historic Palestine were a palpable blend of ethno-nationalist ideology and colonial exercise. Indeed, through the coercion of Arab landowners to sell their lands, the illegal (and immoral) occupation of the territories of these owners upon their forced transfer or flight, the vicarious refusal to recognize village areas mainly populated by Palestinian-Arabs and, most explicitly, through military means which include such acts as the raiding of towns and villages, uprooting of graves and vital crops, and destruction of holy sites, the Israeli government and its policy-makers clearly indicate the colonialist foundations of Zionism – of which the struggle for land is central.

The second notion crucial to the understanding of this conflict is the realization that this struggle over territory continues today, and is not limited to the formally occupied territories of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Rather, areas with a *significant* Arab population within the pre-1967 borders of Israel (most significantly the Galilee and the Naqab Valley) continue to serve as a site for what Israeli geographers and urban planners have named spatial “policies of Judaization” – which historical revisionists are now correctly starting to label *ethnic cleansing*.²

The victims of these spatial Judaization and ethnic cleansing policies inside Israel proper belong to what this paper refers to as the *forgotten Palestinians*, namely, those Arabs who did not leave their homes and lands since 1948. This paper will focus on this second crucial point, with an overview of Israeli state-led ethnic cleansing initiatives targeting the Palestinian-Arab population within its formally recognized borders in the form of spatial Judaization.

Israeli ‘Demographobia’

The policy of spatial Judaization seeks to accomplish a demographic balance in favor of the Jewish population through what is labeled “regional” or “urban planning.” This is conducted through the dual and simultaneous practice of developing and scattering exclusively Jewish settlements on (and immediately around) areas mainly inhabited by Arabs, while limiting and trumping the demographic, geographic and socio-economic growth of Palestinian villages. While terms such as “spatial Judaization” have disappeared from the discourse of urban planning, the policies remain unchanged and are today replaced by expressions such as “attracting populations.”³

Israeli *demographobia* is evident in its rhetoric. Labeling the local Palestinian population as a “demographic bomb” or a “security threat,” it explicitly alludes to the need to protect the *territorial integrity of the Jewish state*. History has nearly forgotten the 156, 000 Arabs who remained in what became Israel and granted citizenship, and yet today one out of every six

¹ Ilan Pappé quoting Leo Motzkin, in, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006) p.57.

² Ghazi Falah, *Israeli "Judaization" Policy in Galilee*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (Summer, 1991), p. 69.

³ Falah, p. 75.

citizens in Israel is an Arab.⁴ According to the projections of Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, by 2010, Arabs are expected to make up more than 20% of the total population of Israel, living in three main areas: the Galilee in the north, the Triangle in the center of the country, and the Naqab in the south. Having anticipated the geographic concentration of this demographic development, the Israeli government has initiated explicit campaigns seeking to change its geographic realities.

The Galilee: 60 Years of Ethnic Cleansing

Situated in the Northern District, the Galilee is home to approximately 56 percent of Israel's total Arab population. Israeli demographers employ statistics for this district as a *whole* where the Arab population is around 50 percent.⁵ However, given that the Galilee is less than half of the total area, official declarations of the Arab population are at best misleading and leave this community in the areas directly surrounding the Galilee at 73 percent of the total population.⁶ Arabs remain the dominant population in the Galilee despite the exodus of 1948, the two-decade long military government following Israel's establishment, and the explicit post-1967 policies of spatial Judaization. The tone of *imminence* associated with the growing Arab population in place of the contention that their status as the majority in the area has *already* been realized serves as an effective mobilizing tool for the Israeli government which adopts social and economic policies that discriminate against the supposed "soon to be" dominant Arabs with little effective opposition.

The establishment of exclusively Jewish settlements through "spatial Judaization" is the primary tools through which the 'Jewish state' and its various institutions have implemented a policy of land-grabbing. Israel has acted intensively to achieve this end through the establishment of Jewish settlements throughout the territory from 1948 until today. New tactics and methods developed since the First Intifada reflect an intensification of these *Judaizing* measures, and are mirrored in government decisions to establish new settlements, employ strategies to ensure the use of land solely by Jewish citizens, construct *new types* of settlements, while, simultaneously, announcing legal tenders, warnings and evacuation orders to Arabs in these areas.⁷

The Naqab: Coexistence without Existence?

The ambition of Israeli policy-makers to simultaneously limit the spatial development of Palestinian institutions, villages and urban centers requires significant (il)legal and political manipulation and misrepresentation by Israeli officials and urban planners. In 1986, through the establishment of an inter-ministerial commission headed by Chairman Yaakov Markovitz, the Israeli government studied what it deems "illegal construction in the Southern Arab sector."⁸ This commission concluded that *illegal construction* "involves anything build outside the boundaries of the village master plan" deeming Arab villages and towns *illegal* or as *unrecognized settlements*.⁹

This is the reality for the 136,500 Palestinian Bedouins living in the Naqab, where approximately half of them reside in villages unrecognized by the state.¹⁰ What is particularly compelling is that many of the approximately 40 Arab villages which remain legally unrecognized and socially and

⁴ Hana Hamdan, *The Policy of Settlement and "Spatial Judaization" in the Naqab*, Adalah's Newsletter, Volume 11, March 2005, p.4.

⁵ Falah, pp.84-85.

⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁷ Israel Lands Administration and the Ministry of National Infrastructure, *New and Renewed Records*, 2004.

⁸ Falah, p.43.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hamdan, p.6.

economically isolated existed prior to the establishment of the state, and some were even organized according to the explicit orders of the state during its Military Government.¹¹

Hence, when a community is “outside the master plan” it is effectively stripped of legal status, and social and economic rights; not to mention access to and representation from civic institutions. Effectively, these Arabs do not *exist*. Indeed, such realities dilute any romantic notions of ‘ethnic coexistence’ for the logical precursor to any serious discussion on *coexistence* is the acknowledgment of unconditional legal and historical *existence*.

Forgotten Palestinians and the Failed Policy of Spatial Judaization

After 60 years of spatial Judaization, Israeli policy-makers are realizing that the expected accelerations to their urban planning and rural developments were both unsuccessful. While effectively driving tens of thousands of Palestinians away from their lands in 1948 and, through each incursion since, impeding the development and growth of the remaining Arabs, state-led efforts to arrive at a considerable Jewish demographic advantage remain significantly less than initially projected.¹² Despite the efforts of the government, the *implanted* Jewish population has not settled on the territory in significant numbers thus diluting the much desired Zionist link between a people and a land.

Indeed, when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the attention is often on the Arabs in the Occupied Territories, ignoring the struggles of the Arab minority in Israel. Academia neglects to mention that the Arabs in Israel continue to endure similarly repressive policies. Perhaps worse is their struggle, as the state-led policies of ethnic cleansing and spatial Judaization targeting these *forgotten Palestinians* are conducted under the deluding umbrella of ‘Israeli citizenship’. Indeed, the asymmetrical economic, military and political relationship between Arabs and Jews in the region leaves the most effective option for opposition as the legal one; however limited.

Total Words: 1, 269

¹¹ D. Bachor, *The Government Approved the Establishment of 14 New Community Settlements*. Ynet, 21 July 2002 (Hebrew).

¹² Yiftachel, O., *Land, Planning and Inequality: Space Division between Jews and Arabs in Israel*, Adva Center, 2000 (Hebrew).