

Ghetto Citizenship: Palestinian Arabs in Israel

Oren Yiftachel

Introduction

This essay briefly reviews the status of Palestinian Arab citizenship in Israel.¹ Democratic citizenship is defined as full and equal membership to a political community, and entails a combination of legal, political, economic, and cultural rights and capabilities. In most recent formulations, full citizenship also means the extension of collective rights to national, ethnic and religious minorities.

As this essay will show, Arab citizenship in Israel has been structurally constrained by the state's ethnocratic regime and the associated hegemonic Judaization project. Since the 1990s, certain liberal trends have positively affected the minority's formal status and rights, but material, military, and economic developments have, at the same time, further constrained the Arabs' ability to exercise these rights. The Arabs in Israel are hence trapped by the contradictions of the Israeli regime—that is, between the state's self-proclaimed 'democracy,' and the persisting oppressive and excluding practices over the Palestinians, both in the Occupied Territories and Israel Proper.

The civil status of the Arabs in Israel may be conceptualized as being that of *ghettoized citizenship*, situated within a stratified system of 'creeping apartheid.' This undeclared system of control stretches over Israel Proper and the Occupied Territories, and sees groups such as Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, the Druze and Bedouins within the Green Line, Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox Jews, Jewish settlers, new Jewish immigrants (termed *Olim* in the Israeli Zionist lexicon) and migrant workers—all enjoying different *de jure* and *de facto* 'packages' of rights and capabilities. The civil status of these groups is determined by their ethnicity, religiosity, and location. (see: Yiftachel, 2006). The shaping of Arabs citizenship within the Green Line can only be understood as part of this system.

Israel's continuing violent occupation of the Palestinian Territories, and the settlement of more than 400,000 Jews beyond the Green Line, **(CBS, 2007)**, have exacted a high toll on the Israel's Arab minority: their expressions of natural support for their Palestinian brethren have, in turn, increased Jewish anti-Arab racism, especially in times of violent conflict. The persistent Zionist-Palestinian conflict has also denied the Arabs the possibility to raise their grievances in the Israeli public discourse, and has deprived them of precious material resources needed for development and empowerment.

¹ This essay also refers to Israel's Palestinian citizens as 'Arabs in Israel,' in order to clearly distinguish between them and their brethren in the Palestinian Territories and Diaspora, as well as to unequivocally include the Druze and Bedouin communities.

Conditions of citizenship

Israel was established in 1948 following the *Nakba*, when two-thirds of Palestinians were driven out and became long-term refugees. The 160,000 Palestinians who remained within independent Israel (13% of the state's population) formed a weak and fragmented 'enemy affiliated' community. Israel granted them formal citizenship, but placed them under military rule for 18 years. Since then, the minority has grown 8-fold, reaching 1.15 million in 2005, or 17% of the citizenry (CBS, 2007).

State policies have traditionally attempted to weaken the minority through segmentation (by separating the Druze and Bedouin communities), denial of most collective cultural or political rights, and pervasive material deprivation. The Arabs have, however, developed a collective political agenda based on grounding their status as a *national homeland minority*. They are determined to protect their property and heritage and to achieve equality and recognition.

Yet, formal citizenship and growing demographic weight have not translated into significant societal integration or political empowerment. Despite staging a long and non-violent campaign for equality and recognition, Arabs in Israel have made few achievements. During 6 decades of Israeli independence, Arabs have had only negligible impact on Israeli politics. One notable exception was the 1993 Oslo Accord, which was passed in the Knesset only due to Arab support. Yet the status of Arab citizenship was perhaps truly reflected when Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, declared Arab support of Oslo as a reason for the assassination.

Several examples can illustrate Arab marginalization:

Power sharing.

- In Israel's 31 governments, an Arab party was never a member of a ruling coalition.
- Only 2 Arabs ever served as a government minister (among 648 overall ministerial appointments), and only 1 Arab was appointed a Supreme Court judge in 55 appointments in 58 years.

Arabs are virtually excluded from Israel's scientific or business elites comprising less than 1% of university professorship, or membership to boards of directors.

Land ownership.

- Arabs have lost more than half the land they owned to state confiscations and have remained locked in their small geographical enclaves, where they control only 2.5% of the state area. **(Kedar, 2003)**
- No new Arab settlement has been allowed since 1948, except for coerced urbanization of Bedouin. [Areej; Crosslink to: The indigenous Palestinian Bedouin of the Naqab: forced urbanization and denied recognition, by Ismael Abu-Saad, in this Guide.] About half of the Bedouin of the Naqab region still reside on unrecognized villages on their ancestors' lands and are denied basic services and facilities (Yiftachel, 2000).

Economic well-being.

- The 1990-2005 average income of Arab workers is only 68% of that of their Jewish counterparts.

- Their mean level of higher education reaches only one-third of the Jewish rate. .

Their levels of negative social indicators, such as incarceration and infant mortality, are substantially higher . (**Adva, 2007**)

Loss of life due to deployment of force by the state.

- The Israeli state has pervasively used violence against the minority, most conspicuously in events such as Kufr Qassem massacre in 1956 when 49 Arab citizens were killed, and state reaction to mass protest events like Land Day in 1976, when 6 Arab demonstrators were killed by the police, and the October Events of 2000, when 13 more were killed.
- By contrast, state authorities have killed 1 Jew in 6 decades of very active (and much more extensive) Jewish political protest. (**Shafir and Peled, 2002**).

Judaization and the Arab Minority

The inability of the Arabs to translate their formal citizenship into substantive and equal membership stems, first and foremost, from the state ethnocratic structure. Judaization—and the associated de-Arabization—the result of the Zionist hegemonic project, which dictates the goals, resources and policies of state institutions and wide-ranging racist attitudes towards the Arab minority. Judaization is the state’s main ideology, which overrides its formal commitment to democracy. Despite its gradual waning in recent years in the face of growing globalization, the Judaization ideology is still dominant, and is fueled by the ongoing dialectics of violence between Jews and Palestinians.

A recent liberalizing trend within the Israeli regime has seen the enactment of basic laws on several civil rights and liberties, such as **Human dignity and liberty, gay rights and freedom of occupation**. This has prompted most Israeli scholars to define the state as a democracy. However, as the ethnocratic (and non-democratic) Judaization project continues, the new liberties, which have positively affected groups such as homosexuals and women, have had little material effect on the Arab minority.

Let us briefly examine how the ethnocratic regime structurally marginalizes Israel’s Palestinian Arab citizens in key societal arenas:

Demography. Israel allows only Jewish immigration. The lynchpins of the system have been the Law of Return, and the parallel denial of return for Palestinian refugees. To date, Israel has received 2.8 million Jewish migrants, and it continues to actively and globally encourage Jewish immigration. /At the same time, Israel prevents the return of Palestinians refugees and imposes very strict constraints on the entry of any Palestinian, including a recent law (**The Nationality and Entry into Israel Law**) prohibiting family reunion between Arab citizens and their Palestinian spouses from abroad.

Space. Since 1948, Israel has pursued the maximal transfer of land control to Jewish hands, the settlement of Jews in all parts of Israel/Palestine, the segregation and ghettoization of Arabs, coupled with severe restriction of Palestinian-Arab settlement and development. At present, Palestinian Arabs, who form 17% of the state’s population, control only 2.7% of the state’s municipal jurisdictions, and own only 3.5% of the land area. (**Kedar**

and Yiftachel, 2006). State land, by and large, is used for exclusively Jewish purposes. Since 1948, the state has established more than 700 new Jewish settlements and not 1 Arab settlement. The only exception is the towns established for coerced concentration of the Bedouin (Yiftachel, 2000) [Crosslink to: The indigenous Palestinian Bedouin of the Naqab: forced urbanization and denied recognition, by Ismael Abu-Saad, in this Guide.]

In the 2000 Qaadan ruling, the Israeli High Court upheld the right of all citizens (including Arabs) to purchase state land, but this is yet to have an influence on Arab mobility or spatial equality. The exclusion of Arabs from most Israeli Jewish² space is augmented by the official role allocated to international Jewish organizations, such as the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Agency, in Israel's formal system of planning and development.

Armed forces. 'Security' (that is, Jewish security) is known as Israel's "second religion" and enjoys an extremely powerful position in dictating state policies and practices. The armed forces have been totally dominated by Jews, while Israel's Arab citizens have not been drafted to the Israel Defense Force (IDF) except for the co-opted Druze and a few Bedouin. Most Arabs are denied the possibility of serving in the army or other communal services. At the same time, this denial is used to justify their discrimination. This has diminished their ability to pursue personal mobility and seriously constrained their employment opportunities.

Development. Policies guiding development and capital accumulation have also weighed heavily in favor of Jews, evidenced in the patterns of developmental incentives, industrial and employment location, water allocation policies, and employment practices. The state's recent liberalization and global outlook, and subsequent retreat from state regulation, have further deepened the economic gaps between Arabs and Jews.

Law. Until the 1980s, the legal system, by and large, backed Judaization the country. This included implicit support for the 1948-1966 military government, and for the occupation and settlement of the Occupied Territories. (**Kimmerling, 2004**). With regard to civil law, religious regulations were adopted by the state that prohibited civil marriage, thereby deepening the chasm between Jewish and Arab citizens. Since the 1990s, with the advent of a liberal-tending "judicial activism," the system has increased its independence and protection of civil rights, although this has not seriously challenged the practices of Judaization, as most recently noted by the passing of the law prohibiting Arab family reunification, which violates a basic human right in the name of ethnic engineering.

Public culture. State symbols, such as the flag, national anthem, ceremonies, and logos all stress the Jewishness of the state, as do national holidays and weekends, which are all structured around the Jewish calendar. Hebrew is used in nearly all bureaucratic and legal forums. Arabic is also an official language, but is rarely used for official state business. Place names, maps, road signs, state media, and the arts are all predominantly Hebrew and Jewish. The public discourse and culture have often been dominated by racist undertones towards the Arab citizens, with concepts such as "voluntary transfer," "demographic problem," "population exchange" and the minority being referred to as a "cancerous" growth being routinely discussed by leading personalities, such as former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Housing Minister, Ephraim Eitam, and Welfare Minister Elli Yishai.

Ghetto citizenship

As we have seen, despite Israel's self-definition as Jewish and democratic, it is in effect a *Judaizing* state, with democracy being subordinated to the (often racist) exigencies of Judaization in all central societal arenas—legal, institutional, material, and executive. The Judaization project has framed the meaning of Israeli citizenship, and worked to both exclude and marginalize the state's Arab citizens.

Israel's settler colonialism and violent oppression of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories has further marginalized the status of the Arabs in Israel, given their natural support for the uprising Palestinians. The "separate and unequal" citizenship structure actively prevents the creation of an integrative civil Israeli political community.

The result has produced a discriminatory and deeply flawed Israeli citizenship structure, with the allocation of stratified 'packages' of rights and capabilities based on ethnic origins. Obviously, there are serious gaps between this reality and the notion of equal democratic citizenship outlined above. One prime example is the 2006 appointment of MK Avigdor Lieberman of the 'Yisrael Beteinu' (Our Home Israel) party—who openly espouses the forced removal of Arab localities from Israel—as Deputy Prime Minister in the Israeli government.

Therefore, Palestinian Arab citizenship in Israel can be characterized as existing in a ghetto. This ghetto is multifaceted – political, cultural, economic and administrative, and as a result also spatial. The Palestinian Arabs in Israel are officially part of society, yet, structurally marginalized by domination, exclusions, and disempowerment

Sources

- Adva Center for Social Equality (2007). *Social Profile*. Tel-Aviv, Adva Center.
- CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) (2007), *Statistical Abstracts*, Jerusalem, Government Printers.
- Ghanem, A. (2003). "The Status of the Palestinians in Israel in the Era of Peace: Part of the Problem but not Part of the Solution." *Israel Affairs* 9(1-2): 263-289.
- Kedar, S. (2003). *On the Legal Geography of Ethnocratic Settler States: Law and Geography Current Legal Issues*. J. Holder and C. Harrison. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 401-442.
- Kedar, S. and O. Yiftachel (2006). *Land Regime and Social Relations in Israel. Realizing Property Rights: Swiss Human Rights Book*. H. de Soto and F. Cheneval. Zurich, Ruffer&Rub Publishing House. 1: 129-146.
- Kimmerling, B. (2004). *Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: the Israeli State and Society between Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Wars*. Tel-Aviv, Am-Oved (Hebrew).
- Rouhana, N. Saleh n, Sultany N Eds. (2004). *Citizenship without Voice: the Palestinians in Israel*. Haifa, Mada al-Karmel Center (Arabic).
- Shafir G. and Peled Y. *Being Israeli: the Dynamics of Israeli Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Yiftachel, O. (2006). *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*. Philadelphia, Pennpress, University of Pennsylvania.
- Yiftachel O. *Land, Planning and Inequality: the Division of Space between Arabs and Jews in Israel*. Tel-Aviv: Adva, 2000. (Hebrew and English).

Further Reading

Ghanem A. *The Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2000.

Smooha S. The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. *Nations and Nationalism* 8(s4): 475-503, 2002.

Yonah Y. *For Difference*. Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 2005. (Hebrew).

Relevant Internet Sites

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/citizenship/>

http://www.sikkuy.org.il/aravit/about_ar.html

<http://www.adalah.org.il>

http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/download/Focus4-2002_Kymlicka.pdf