

The  
**Palestinian-Arab**  
Minority in Israel, 1948-2000



*A Political Study*

**As'ad Ghanem**

## **The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948–2000**

SUNY series in Israeli Studies

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Russell Stone, editor

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*A Political Study*

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As'ad Ghanem

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To Ahlam, Lina, and Hala



# Contents

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List of Tables	xi
Preface	xiii
PART ONE	
INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1
1 THE PALESTINIAN-ARAB MINORITY IN ISRAEL: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	11
The Palestinian National Movement before 1948, 12	
Two Distinct Periods in the History of the Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 17	
Factors That Influence the Political Development of the Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 26	
PART TWO	
PALESTINIAN-ARABS IN ISRAEL: DIFFERENT MANIFESTATIONS OF POLITICS	29
2 POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL STREAMS AMONG THE PALESTINIAN-ARAB MINORITY IN ISRAEL	31
Classification of the Ideological and Political Streams among the Arabs in Israel, 31	
Criteria for Characterizing the Ideological Streams among the Arabs in Israel, 35	
Political and Ideological Streams among the Arabs in Israel, 36	
3 THE ISRAELI-ARAB STREAM	39
Organization and Public Support, 39	
Positions on Key Questions, 44	
Profile of the Israeli-Arab Stream, 61	



4	THE COMMUNIST STREAM	65
	Organization and Public Support, 65	
	Positions on Key Questions, 75	
	Profile of the Communist Stream, 92	
5	THE NATIONAL STREAM	95
	Organization and Public Support, 95	
	Positions on Key Questions, 106	
	Profile of the National Stream, 120	
6	THE ISLAMIC STREAM	123
	Organization and Public Support, 123	
	Positions on Key Questions, 125	
	Profile of the Islamic Stream, 135	
7	LOCAL POLITICS: THE CLAN AS AN ALTERNATIVE STREAM	137
	Local Elections, 140	
	The Committee of Arab Local Council Heads and the Follow-up Committee for Arabs in Israel as Consensus-Based Organizations, 151	
PART THREE		
THE POLITICAL DISTRESS OF THE PALESTINIAN-ARABS IN ISRAEL: LOOKING FOR WAYS OUT OF THE PREDICAMENT		155
8	THE POLITICAL DISTRESS OF THE PALESTINIAN-ARAB MINORITY AS A REFLECTION OF THE "JEWISH STATE" APPARATUS	157
	State and Majority Commitment to the Zionist- Jewish Nature of Israel: Excluding the Arabs, 157	
	The Predicament of Arab Politics in the Jewish State, 163	
	Civil Society as an Alternative, 170	
9	TOWARD FULFILLING THE RIGHT TO BE INCLUDED: THE ARABS' FUTURE IN A BINATIONAL PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI STATE	175
	The Multi-Faceted Distress in the Internal Dimension of the Palestinian-Arab Minority Development, 176	
	Toward Normalization of the Situation of the Arabs in Israel, 180	

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The Binational Reality in Mandatory Palestine/ Eretz Israel, 183	
Historical Sources for the Binational Idea, 184	
Factors Delaying a Separation between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Factors Raising the Likelihood of the Establishment of a Joint State, 190	
A Binational Model for Israeli-Palestinian Relations, 196	
The Palestinian-Arabs in Israel and the Binational System, 200	
Appendix	201
Notes	203
References	215
Index	229



# Tables

---

7.1	Participation in Local and Knesset Elections	141
7.2	Distribution of Votes in 1978, 1983, 1993, and 1998	147
7.3	Affiliation of Arab Local Council Heads	148
8.1	Voluntary Associations among the Arabs in Israel	172
Appendix		
	Distribution of the Arab Vote in Knesset Elections, 1949–1999	201



# Preface

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In this book, the fruit of long and diversified research, I have attempted to summarize my findings and impressions since I began studying Palestinian-Arab society in Israel some eight years ago. During this period I have focused on the aspects that interest me as a political scientist—namely, politics and its interaction with other sides of life—the social, economic, educational, religious, and so on.

This summary is not the outcome of work based exclusively on findings gathered using pure scientific tools. Indeed, the research findings are analyzed without denying a basic fact, which is that in all the past years, since I began to be involved in what is taking place in my own society, I have played a certain role in influencing political and social developments, whether as an independent actor or as part of the change processes implemented by voluntary organizations and public associations. Taking into account that the researcher's personal opinions inevitably influence his perspective on the situation and how he interprets it, I have endeavored to isolate my personal stance and offer readers a summary of the situation to the best of my understanding as a scholar.

The book consists of three parts. The first comprises the general introduction and chapter 1, which presents the historical background and surveys those factors that influenced the development of the Palestinian minority in Israel. The second part, begins with chapter 2, which presents the general framework of the second part of the book and presents a classification of the ideological and political currents among the Palestinian minority in Israel. Chapter 3 presents the Israeli-Arab stream within the Palestinian minority in Israel, including the major aspects on which I have chosen to focus: organization, positions, and profile. Chapter 4 through 6 deal in similar fashions with the Communists, the nationalist stream, and the Islamic stream respectively. Chapter 7 surveys the political scene on the local and municipal level.

In part 3 of the book, chapter 8 analyzes the political distress of Palestinian-Arab politics in Israel. Chapter 9, the last, expands on the

Arabs' distress in other realms and proposes a way out of it in the form of the inclusion of the Palestinians in Israel within a binational, Palestinian-Israeli solution that would include Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. It offers an optimum solution to all the issues on the agenda of a conflict that has been going on since the late nineteenth century.

Most of the data was gathered from the archives of the Arabic-language newspaper *al Ittihad*, the information center of the Institute for Peace Research at Givat Haviva, and the Israeli Arab section of the Jewish-Arab Center at the University of Haifa. I would like to express my gratitude to those in charge of these places. I would also like to thank the many persons who gave of their precious time and allowed me to interview them. Their names appear in the relevant chapters of this book.

Many of my colleagues, in the academic world and outside it, have helped me in my research and influenced my conclusions. I would like to thank all of them. Deserving special mention and gratitude are Prof. Nadim Rouhana, Prof. Oren Yiftachel, Prof. Majid al-Haj, Prof. Sammy Smooha, Dr. Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, Dr. Ilan Saban, the late Mr. Saliba Khamais, Mr. Alouph Hareven, Dr. Elie Rekhess, Mr. Khaled Abu Asba, Mr. Elias Eady, and Mr. Taha Ashkar.

Over the years, many students helped me gather my data and classify it. I should like to thank all of them, especially Rami Abbas and Anwar Abu Alhijja, and my students at the University of Haifa who helped me clarify some of the issues presented in this book. I would also like to thank Mr. Lenn Schramm, who edited my draft.

I have no doubt that this book is part of an ongoing research project starting in the past, continuing in the present, and moving toward the future. Many have contributed and continue to contribute to our understanding of the fundamental issues concerning the situation of the Palestinians in Israel, especially in light of the fact that this section of the Middle East and Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the internal conflict in Israel between Jews and Palestinians, is not addressed within the context of the peace agreements between the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and Israel. Hence sooner or later the situation of the Palestinians in Israel will rise as a key issue that the Palestinian national movement and Israel will have to deal with, each on its own and both of them together.

# Part One

## Introduction and Historical Background

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### INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the 1948 war and the establishment of the state of Israel, nearly two million persons lived within the borders of Mandatory Palestine, two-thirds of them Palestinian Arabs and one-third Jews. The vast majority of the Palestinians (almost 940,000) and almost all the Jews lived in the areas that became Israel. As a result of expulsions and mass flight, by the end of the war only about 150,000 Arabs—10 percent of all Palestinians—remained in the territory under Israeli control. The difficult situation of these Arabs was a direct result of the war and subsequent events. After the war they were distinguished from other Palestinians by the fact that they had stayed on their land and become citizens of Israel. In the intervening five decades, the Arab citizens of Israel have known many vagaries in their political, social, cultural, and economic development. In what follows I will enumerate some of the conspicuous hallmarks of the Arabs in Israel fifty years after they became a minority.

### DEMOGRAPHY

There has been a significant demographic evolution and modifications in the physical structure of Arab towns and villages. At the end of 1998, there were about 900,000 Arabs living within the Green Line—roughly 17 percent of the total population. The demographic growth created large Arab settlements, some of them distinctly urbanized. Of the 112 locales in Israel with 5,000 residents or more, 41 are Arab; 15 of the latter have more than 10,000 residents. A continuous belt of Arab settlements has emerged in several strips; in some areas the Arabs constitute an overwhelming majority (Sakhnin, Wadi Ara, Majd al-Kurum). This is in addition to the Arabs who live in the mixed cities (CBS 1999).



The growth in the Arab population and the changes in the physical structure of the villages, including infrastructure development from the early 1970s on, have reinforced the Arabs' self-confidence and provided a basis for the emergence of cultural life, separate political organizations, and greater weight in joint Arab-Jewish organizations, as well as attempts to forge a separate Arab economy.

With regard to age structure, the Arabs of Israel are much younger than the Jews. Whereas about 46 percent of the Arabs are younger than seventeen, only 31 percent of the Jews fall into this category. Accordingly, even though Arabs constitute only about 16 percent of the Israeli population, they account for about 25 percent of the under-seventeen population. This age structure indicates a large potential for development if the state provides assistance to improve the level of education and physical development (CBS 1999).

#### GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION AND RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE

The Arabs of Israel are concentrated in three parts of the country. Most of them (about 60 percent) live in the Galilee, (a region that includes all of northern Israel from the Lebanese border down to a line drawn between Haifa and Beesan). About 20 percent live in the Triangle, (a region abutting the Green Line and running parallel to the coast between Haifa and Tel Aviv). Another 10 percent of the Arabs live in the southern region Al-Naqab. Finally, the remaining 10 percent live in the mixed cities of the coastal plain, such as Acre, Haifa, Leda, Ramle, and Yaffa (Ghanem 1992).

With regard to religious affiliation, the Arabs fall into three distinct groups: Muslims, who live in Arab communities all over the country, account for about 75 percent of them. Christians—almost all of them in the Galilee—account for about 14 percent. They are divided into many denominations: Catholic, Orthodox, Maronite, Protestant, and Armenian. The Druze, who live exclusively in the Galilee, account for the remaining 11 percent (Ghanem 1992).

#### MODERNIZATION

After the establishment of Israel, a process accompanied by the expulsion and mass flight of the Palestinian population, about 150,000 Palestinians remained in the country. This confused remnant of the Palestinian community was characterized by the absence of even a minimal level of organization, the predominance of traditional values and norms, and an economic, social, and cultural life typical of a traditional society at the

very beginning of modernization, including an extremely low level of education.

Under the impact of contact with the Jews and the influence of population streams copied from western Europe and the United States, this group entered upon a process of modernization. This was manifested in a slow and hesitant change of sociocultural values, an increase in the importance of the nuclear family, a slow change in the status of women, a steady drop in the fertility rate, an improvement in housing conditions and medical services, the development of municipal government and establishment of political and social organizations, and, especially, a consistent rise in the average educational level of Arabs in Israel, including a consistent upward trend in the number of those with a university education (Ghanem 1996).

The number and level of educated Arabs grew apace. In 1961, about 49 percent had had no schooling whatsoever, and only one percent had a postsecondary education. By 1996, the percentage of those with no formal schooling had plummeted to 8.3 percent, and that of those who had studied in a postsecondary institution had risen to about 7 percent. This reflects the improvement in the level of education, an increased awareness of the importance of advanced studies, and a greater willingness to invest in one's children and provide them with a higher level of education, where and when possible.

### ECONOMIC SITUATION AND STANDARD OF LIVING

There has also been slow economic progress in the Arab community. It had lost its agricultural basis as the result of a series of expropriations of land that was turned over to the Jewish sector. In parallel, the state did not encourage and did not initiate the development of an industrial base in the Arab sector. As a result, many Arab laborers commute daily to work in the Jewish cities. Surveys conducted of economic development in recent years show that although there has been some progress here, the large gap between the two sectors continues to expand. The economic problem is fed by the absence of an internal agricultural or industrial base and the consequent absolute dependence on the Jewish sector (Rouhana and Ghanem 1998).

The Arabs' standard of living has risen consistently over the years, but the gap between the Arab and Jewish sectors remains large and has not contracted. Average Arab family income in 1980 was 77 percent that of a Jewish family. In 1985 the figure had dropped to about 70 percent; by 1993 it had risen again slightly, to 72 percent. The percentage of Arab families living beneath the poverty line in 1993 was 2.26

times that of Jewish families. The fact that Arab families were more than twice as large as Jewish families, on average, exacerbates this disparity.

These characteristics of the Arab population of Israel, as well as others not mentioned above, constitute the basic infrastructure for a presentation of the “normal development approach,” which is the theoretical and empirical model most often employed to describe the Arabs’ condition and development. After that I will consider the alternate model on which this book is based.

### STUDIES OF THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARABS IN ISRAEL

In recent years, scholars interested in multiethnic societies have turned their attention to political development in such countries. Some of their studies have focused on clarifying the political and social questions that influence the political evolution of these countries in general and of its various constituent groups. Israel is deeply riven by the existence of ethnic, religious, and national groups that compete for control of the various systems that make up the state. Scholars tend to present a division based on ethnic-national affiliation—Palestinian Arabs versus Jews; to further subdivide the Jews into ethnic communities—Ashkenazim versus Sephardim; and to add several other classifications of greater or lesser importance.

Here I will focus on trying to understand the political evolution of the Palestinians who became Israeli citizens in 1948 when the state was established. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of scholars and studies dealing with the political development of the Arabs in Israel (see Yiftachel 1993b). The research problem is rooted in the attempt to come up with an original but acceptable way to understand the political development of the Palestinian-Arab minority. Studies of the Arabs in Israel present a number of alternate models and approaches for understanding their status and political development. In principle, these can all be arranged under two headings: the normal development model and the distress model.

#### THE NORMAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

According to the normal development model, as the Arabs endeavored to adopt the living standard and norms of the majority, they went through significant changes in the social, cultural, economic, and political arenas, which have been documented in dozens of original and secondary studies (for a review of the literature, see Smootha 1984; Smootha and Cibulski 1987; Yiftachel 1993b). For all the significant

variation among scholars when it comes to disciplines and research specialties, reliance on general theories, and presentation of models, the literature about the Arabs in Israel tends to describe their development as being similar to that of minorities in Western democracies (Ghanem 1996a; 1996b; Rouhana and Ghanem 1998). It asserts that the following are the typical lines of the Arabs' development:

1. The Arabs of Israel went through a process of becoming aware of their status as a minority that wishes to perpetuate that status and does not aspire for self-determination or for secession and annexation by another country. This means that the future political orientation of the Arabs in Israel is fairly clear and includes recognition of what exists and the aspiration to improve it within the Israeli context (see, for example, Smootha 1989a; 1992; Rekhess 1993).

2. Since 1948, the Arab minority has gone through the process of clarifying the various strands within its identity, and notably parallel processes of Palestinization and Israelization. In the Palestinian dimension, it has arrived at a clear definition of itself as part of the Palestinian people while recognizing its unique status within the Palestinian national movement because it is also Israeli and part of the Israeli milieu (see, for example, Smootha 1989a; 1992; Rekhess 1993; Landau 1993). This identity expresses and serves the dual affiliation of the Arabs in Israel.

3. The Arab minority in Israel is experiencing an accelerated process of modernization, chiefly as a result of its special link with Israeli society. This process encompasses every segment and stratum of Arab society in Israel. It is manifested, *inter alia*, in the adoption of Western norms, values, and lifestyles, under the influence of Israeli society. These are "progressive" values, as compared to those held by the Arabs in Israel in the past. They are very different from the values of Arab societies elsewhere in the Arab world (see, for example, Smootha 1989a; 1992; Rekhess 1993; Landau 1993). Ultimately this process will modernize the Arabs in Israel and help them integrate into the Israeli context.

4. The Arabs in Israel have experienced advanced processes of political organization that involved the rapid but controlled emergence of political pluralism, as parliamentary and extraparliamentary parties and movements arose and consolidated their positions since the early 1970s. In addition to the Communist Party, which was the central and just about the only political force and dominated the Arab scheme for many years, the Sons of the Village,

the Islamic Movement, the Progressive Movement, and the Democratic Arab Party have all been established since the early 1970s. Many other lesser known and for the most part local organizations have sprung up. At the same time, the Jewish-Zionist parties moved from reliance on satellite lists to accepting Arab members on an equal footing with Jews, at least formally. In general, the various parties and movements offer the Arabs different hues of ideology and political thinking, reflected in their platforms. These incorporate various answers and solutions for extricating the Arabs from their problems—internally or externally (see, for example, Reiter and Aharoni 1992). This development has permitted adequate representation for all the political, social, and ideological streams among the Arabs of Israel.

5. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Arabs in Israel established representative bodies that bring together all the political streams in the Arab sector. Various committees were set up during the 1970s, including the Committee of Heads of Arab Local Authorities (1974) and the Land Defense Committee (1975). The Supreme Monitoring Committee for Israeli Arab Affairs was set up in the 1980s, along with subcommittees for education, health care, sports, and welfare. These bodies garnered recognition as representative organizations. The Monitoring Committee even functioned as a collective leadership of the Arab minority and was recognized as such by the Arabs, by the Israeli government, and by the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Diaspora (see, for example, Rouhana 1989; Al-Haj 1988b). This development testifies to internal consolidation as the result of a process of normal development.

6. As part of their development, the Arabs in Israel built up institutions of local government and grappled effectively with the local problems of Arab communities. These institutions also waged successful campaigns against the central government to obtain adequate levels of funding (see, for example, Al-Haj and Rosenfeld 1990a).

7. Because of its contact with Jewish-sector institutions, the Arab minority in Israel is developing as a political, democratic, and pluralistic community, with multiple political parties and movements and social streams. It is adopting democratic norms and values and democratic modes of conduct on most levels, such as the nuclear family, the clan, the attitude to other people, respect for the law, and so on. This development promotes its integration

into the national political and social system. This model, which is found in most of the research literature written and published to date, seems to assume, consciously or otherwise, a number of elements that can buttress the main contention: the Arabs in Israel are experiencing a process of natural development and normalization. This involves the ongoing processes of construction and consolidation that are turning it into a society with all the characteristics of a modern well-ordered society.

### THE DISTRESS MODEL

The distress model sees the development of the Arabs in Israel in light of the ethnic character of the country. The normal development model would be applicable if Israel were a state with a democratic system that guarantees full equality for all its citizens. In the normal condition of a country that practices the standard democratic system and grants equal rights to all its citizens, as individuals and as members of groups, by virtue of their citizenship, groups can attain or realize equality on both levels, or at least on one of them, depending on the nature of the democratic system (Lijphart 1977). In a liberal democracy of the type epitomized by the United States, for example, competition for determining the “general good” is conducted not between groups but between equal citizens, whatever their national or ethnic affiliation. In a consociational democracy, of the sort that existed in Lebanon until the mid-seventies and still exists there formally, the competition to determine the general good is not among citizens by virtue of their citizenship but by virtue of their affiliation with a particular ethnic group or confession. Hence it is the groups that compete to determine the public arrangements and divide up power and rewards (see Smootha 1990a; Ghanem 1998a).

In the case at hand—that of a national minority group in an ethnic state—even though the state is democratic on the procedural level, in its relations with the minority it lapses into an ethnic state that practices systematic discrimination at all levels against the minority. In such a state, democracy can be no more than semidemocracy, because the state is identified with one group only; that is, it offers a national home to only one of the ethnic groups within its society (see Maynes 1993) and offers only partial equality to members of other groups. In such a state, the majority controls the various organs of authority and permits minorities to enjoy only limited individual and collective equality (for details on the limitations of Israeli democracy because it is an ethnic state, see Smootha 1990a; 1998; Ghanem 1998a; Rouhana 1997; Yiftachel 1997a; 1997b; Ghanem, Rouhana, and Yiftachel 1998).

In an ethnic state in which the majority rules over a minority, intentional policy, both overt and covert, shunts the development of the minority into pressured conditions. If appropriate means are not adopted to deal with this situation, these conditions create a distress that can grow into a serious crisis in the minority's relations with its surroundings, including the majority group and the state, as well as in its own internal structure. There are ample examples of the crises that have beset minorities in nondemocratic ethnic states—the Kurds in Iraq, the blacks in South Africa under apartheid—as well as in democratic states—the Catholics in Northern Ireland, the Chinese in Malaysia, the Kurds in Turkey, and the Hungarians in Romania (Horowitz 1985). In all these cases, the minorities suffered an external and internal crisis that eventually attained crisis proportions, leading to an eruption of tension and a degeneration of the political system into violence that could have been prevented had the system accorded parity to the minority.

The distress model has evolved as a reaction to the normal development model. It maintains that the latter is flawed by a fundamental misperception of the situation of the Arabs (Ghanem 1996a; 1996b; 1998a; Rouhana and Ghanem 1998). The Palestinian-Arab community in Israel is in fact in distress on the verge of deteriorating to a crisis on two levels, tactical and strategic. The community's options in its relations with the state and with the Palestinian people are limited and do not permit it to develop normally. On the one hand, Israel is an ethnic state that restricts the development of the Arab minority. On the other hand, the Arab minority isolation from their own people and from the Arab nation has impinged upon their internal development.

A minority in an ethnic state is confronted by uncomfortable political and existential situations that stem from the ethnic structure of the state. An ethnic state by definition excludes national-ethnic collectives other than the dominant group from the national objectives and affords the dominant group a preferential treatment anchored in the legal system. The discrimination against the minority group stems from the strategic refusal of the state to accept its demands for equality, participation, and equity within the apparatus of the state. Any ethnic group that wishes to be part of the state system will demand, as a matter of course, equality, security, and identity. These are basic and nonnegotiable human needs that cannot be ignored or repressed permanently (Burton 1990).

At every appropriate level of political awareness and group consciousness, any national or ethnic minority will demand equal opportunities and equal access to resources and power (Gurr 1993). It is in this spirit that the Arab minority demands equality within Israel. But be-

cause of the ethnic mission of the state, which anchors the impossibility of genuine equality in basic laws (Kretzmer 1990; Ghanem 1998a), Israel relies on two policy elements in its dealings with its Arab citizens—a maximum ethnic component and a limited democratic one. The ethnic policy emphasizes the superiority of the Jews in all spheres. The democratic policy incorporates the Arabs to a limited extent and produces an erroneous sense of normal development, even among members of the minority group, when in fact it exacerbates the distressing situation in which they find themselves.

The combination of limited democracy and ethnic orientation, which guides policy toward the minority, harms the minority rather than helping it. It creates a sense of progress and involvement in the life of the state and a deceptive aura of normal development. In fact, the options available do not help the minority attain equality and actually create a confused developmental situation that erodes the existing structure of the minority while not permitting it to integrate into the state. Ultimately the minority forfeits its traditional way of life, and political and social structure, but cannot adopt a different path. This leads to the existential stress and crisis situations that beset the minority. Because of the ethnic policy, the minority faces a grave existential threat that permeates its collective life in many areas. This distress involves various dimensions of the development of the Arab minority and applies to its relations with both the state and the Palestinian people (see Ghanem 1996a; 1996b; 1998a; Rouhana and Ghanem 1998).

This book describes a central axis of the life and development of the Arabs in Israel—their political world. I will be considering the specific implications of the distress model for the political life of the Arab citizens of Israel. My basic thesis is that in the context of distressed development, their political development suffers from a distress manifested in a severe restriction of their political development. In my opinion, their political development in the organizational and ideological spheres and their political participation suffer from the severe restrictions that stem first and foremost from the ethnic character of the state of Israel and their isolation from the Palestinian people and Arab nation.





# 1

## The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel

### *Historical Background*

---

The dispersal of the Palestinians disrupted and impeded social and political processes that had been at work among them before the 1948 war. Many villages were destroyed, totally or partially. Their inhabitants fled the country or moved elsewhere in Israel, where they became “internal refugees” (al-Haj 1986; 1988). Numerous families were split in two, with some members in Israel and others in neighboring Arab states. The incipient industry that had begun to appear in Arab communities, as well as voluntary and social organizations, were wiped out. Worst of all, processes that should have produced greater cohesion among all Palestinians and could have led to the emergence of a Palestinian political entity were disrupted or halted in their tracks.

In addition to the disruption and delay in these processes, the various segments of the Palestinian people, who lived under different regimes, suffered problems that were both similar and different, but common to all was that they were the result of the 1948 war and together generated the hard core of what has since been called the “Palestinian problem.” In 1952 there were about 1.6 million Palestinians, of whom only 11 percent lived in Israel; 18 percent lived in the Gaza Strip, and 47 percent in the West Bank. The balance, some 21 percent, lived in neighboring countries, and 3 percent elsewhere.

The problems and condition of the Arabs in Israel, immediately after the 1948 war, were a direct outcome of the hostilities and their aftermath. The essential difference between them and other Palestinians lay in the fact that they had remained on their land and become Israeli citizens. This important fact did not help them much, however, because as far as the Israeli authorities and security services were concerned, they were deemed in many respects to be part of the Arab and Palestinian “enemy” and subjected to various measures to deter or repress