

Israeli Palestinians

The Unwanted Who Stayed

By Jonathan Cook

Among the images of Israel's 60th Independence Day celebrations to be found on the internet is a photograph of CNN reporter Ben Wedeman being kicked firmly on the behind as he tries to run from the boot of an armed policeman. All around him, as other photographs reveal, journalists are fleeing for safety, families are being charged by mounted police, and parents can be seen grabbing toddlers as clouds of tear gas engulf them. The stragglers are shown with bloodied faces after a beating with police batons.

Surprisingly, none of these shocking scenes, or even a description of them, made it into Wedeman's Independence Day report – not even a reference to his having his butt kicked. No other mainstream media mentioned the incident either, despite the incongruity of so much brutality in Israel on a day supposedly of celebration. That is probably because the violent events took place not in the West Bank or Gaza but near Nazareth in the Galilee.

The victims of the police attacks were not Palestinians under belligerent occupation but Israeli citizens – even if of a peculiar kind. These Israelis were Palestinians rather than Jews, the last vestiges of Palestine's native people, most of whom were dispersed by the 1948 war that founded Israel. After the Jewish state expelled or terrorized into flight some 750,000 Palestinians, this group numbered just 150,000; today, there are 1.2 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, comprising a fifth of the country's population. Like most incidents involving the Palestinian minority, or "Israeli Arabs" as they are more usually referred to, the story simply did not fit the simple journalistic narrative of the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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About This Issue

Jonathan Cook, a British journalist and author, lives in Israel with his wife Sally and baby daughter, Bayan. In accepting our invitation to write, he told us that he would be e-mailing his manuscript from an internet café because his home computer was not connected to the national grid. Jonathan, it happens, had just moved his family into a new home and would have to wait up to six months for an internet connection. For most Israelis the wait is two to three days. But Jonathan and Sally are not like most Israelis. Sally's maiden name is Azzam and she is a native Palestinian citizen of Israel.

Sally's family was among the 150,000 Palestinians who did not end up as refugees in 1948 (750,000 did). Today, Israeli Palestinians number over 1.2 million. Their role in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian tragedy is clearly one of the most under-reported stories in our Western media. And, as Jonathan suggests, it may well be one of the most pivotal.

Our "Link's Links" on page 12 features an interview with a man whose website includes facts that are hard to find elsewhere on the internet, including information about a brightly painted bus that may be coming to a city or town near you.

Our book/video selections on pages 13-15 include two books by our feature writer Jonathan Cook.

John F. Mahoney
 Executive Director

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In the ongoing battle between the Israeli army and Palestinian fighters—or "terrorists," in the language of much of the U.S. media—where do Palestinians with Israeli citizenship fit? In this "clash of civilizations," are they on the Israeli side or the Palestinian one? And if they are with Israel, why was a special paramilitary unit, the so-called Border Police, called in to deal with them on Independence Day?

I, my wife from Nazareth, and our five-month-old daughter only narrowly avoided being caught up in the police violence. Like many other local families, we had chosen not to celebrate Israel's independence but to take part that day in commemorating the Nakba, or Catastrophe—the mirror event that befell the Palestinians during the 1948 war that founded a Jewish state on the ruins of their society.

As in years past, thousands of Israel's Palestinian citizens joined a procession to remember the refugees from the fighting in 1948 and their several million descendants, all of whom are banned from ever returning to their villages or even to Israel. By marching to one of the more than 400 Palestinian villages erased by the Israeli army in the wake of the war, we did what so many Palestinians can no longer do: we returned, if only symbolically and for a few hours, to Palestine. Among our number were some of the original inhabitants of the villages, refugees who despite being forced from their homes in 1948 had nonetheless remained inside the borders of the new Jewish state. Today they comprise nearly a quarter of Israel's Palestinian minority.

The destination this year was Saffuriya, once a powerful village two miles northwest of Nazareth, whose homes are now buried under the foliage of a forest planted by an international Zionist organization, the Jewish National Fund, and paid for with charitable donations from European and North American Jews. The lands of Saffuriya, meanwhile, are farmed by a rural cooperative—a moshav—named Zippori to which only Jews

can belong. As they must by law, the march organizers had applied for a police permit. We walked half a mile along the approved route across scrubland to the edge of Saffuriya's lands and a point overlooking a field where the organizers had originally hoped we might hear speeches from the refugees.

The police, however, had denied us permission to use the location, saying it was not suitable for a rally. Another spot had been chosen instead. But strangely, as we looked down on the destination we had been denied, we found the field occupied by a group of several dozen rightwing Israeli Jews waving flags, dancing and singing nationalist Hebrew songs. This was no spontaneous counter-demonstration: they had had the time and money to organize the hiring of eight portable toilets.

There is rarely any doubt about where power resides in a Jewish state. Both the Palestinian marchers and the Jewish nationalists are Israeli citizens, and each ostensibly enjoys the same rights. But the authorities had already favored the Jewish group in the allocation of a rallying point; now they showed even more demonstratively where their sympathies lay. Armed police lined the road separating the two groups, their backs to the Jewish demonstrators as they faced off menacingly with our march. Confrontation was not the goal of the procession and, peacefully enough, we moved on to our approved rallying location, hidden from view in a nearby forest.

For such a somber occasion, the mood was upbeat. The refugees were happy to have so many people show their support. Even a few dozen Israeli Jews had dared to cross the country's ethnic divide in solidarity. There were many families there too, parents like myself and my wife who believe in the importance of our children knowing something about their people's past and identity. Israel has a segregated education system and the Education Ministry bans all mention of Palestinian history in schools for Palestinian children. The domestic secret police, the much-feared Shin Bet, ensures compliance by interfering directly in the appointment and promotion of teachers and running a network of spies among the teaching staff and pupils. In other words, this was about the nearest thing to a field trip to Palestine most of these children are ever likely to have.

After several hours in the sun, our young daughter was getting irritable. We decided to head off early, ahead of the main crowd, wending our way with our stroller slowly down the stony path back towards the road, the

line of police and, further on, our parked car. As we neared the road, I saw something that should have set alarm bells ringing: members of a special unit of paramilitary police known as the Yassam were arriving on their motorbikes to join the Border Police. I have seen them a few times before but only in demonstrations where I knew from the outset that there would be trouble. Typically they are sent in to quell prison riots, and were frequently deployed early in the intifada to stop humanitarian aid convoys crossing from Israel into the besieged cities of the West Bank. Tear gas, batons and stun grenades are their calling card. It was entirely peaceful as we got into our car and drove away. I could not conceive of trouble at such a sensitive event, especially when so many young children were present. I should have known better.

A couple of hours later I received the first phone call from a friend, a Dutch woman, Therese Zbeidat, who was there with her Palestinian husband Ali and their two teenage daughters, Dina and Awda. A veteran of such demonstrations, she nonetheless sounded in shock. Therese told me how the police had fired tear gas and stun grenades at the families as they emerged from the trees. Clouds of gas had enveloped them as parents swept up their children and ran terrified back into the forest. She told me of babies retching and screaming from the pain of the offensive gas, and of confused and inconsolable toddlers separated from parents in the mad scramble for safety as police on horseback charged towards them. Her daughter Awda had been kicked by a policeman, and Awda's boyfriend seized and taken away after he stopped to help his mother who had stumbled and fallen. Palestinian journalists called to tell me about how they had been beaten and had their cameras "confiscated," presumably in an effort to conceal what had taken place. The Israeli authorities probably knew that they could count on the silence of CNN's editors.

Fortunately, however, in an era of more open media, we no longer have to rely on CNN and its ilk to learn about what took place. There is plenty of video evidence of the police violence on websites like YouTube.

Racial Profiling

Live among Israel's Palestinian minority for even a short time and one is forced to abandon the widely accepted notion of Israel as a liberal democracy.

Consider the airport. Israel revels in its image as a state that takes the security of its citizens seriously. But

which citizens? The country's Jews usually pass through the departure and arrival procedures without interference. Foreign visitors, from business people to sports stars, can be seen being politely questioned and their bags searched. Palestinian citizens, however, fare far worse than the foreigners. The Israeli media have barely scratched the surface of the indignities the minority are systematically subjected to when traveling, not only if they catch a plane in Israel but also when they try to return from abroad.

Uniquely, it seems, many of the world's airports, especially in Europe and the U.S., have handed over their security—and a small slice of their sovereignty—to Israel's security services concerning Israel-bound flights. In doing so, they have allowed Israel's policy of racial profiling to be applied on their own territory, in violation of their domestic laws.

Israel, of course, justifies its airport checks on security grounds, as it does all its violations of international law and moral norms. But the Palestinian minority has been responsible for precisely no attacks on Israeli carriers. In fact, the minority has shown itself to be quiescent in the extreme. Its ability and will to resist its dispossession—including the wholesale confiscation and nationalization of its remaining lands—was crushed long ago, during Israel's first two decades, when Palestinian "citizens" were subjected to a separate military government. In those days there was not even a pretense of democracy inside Israel, even though the rest of the world was lauding the Jewish state. Israel's Palestinian communities were isolated from each other through severe travel restrictions, independent newspapers and political parties were banned, dissident leaders were rounded up and held without charge, and the school curriculum was strictly controlled—as it still is—to prevent children learning about their history and identity. In this way, it was hoped, Palestinian citizens could be transformed into docile "Israeli Arabs," denied the chance either to identify as a separate national group or to integrate into the Israeli mainstream.

The goal of the airport checks should be seen in a similar light—as a continuation of the policies of the military government—rather than as security-related. They deter the country's Palestinian minority, especially its leadership, from being visible to the wider world and establishing links to outside organizations. Israel has crafted an invisible cage for its Palestinian citizens that echoes the steel and concrete cages it is building for the Palestinians under occupation. That may explain why leading members of the Palestinian community, from professors to

church leaders, are regularly humiliated with lengthy interrogations, and bag and body searches. In one case that received at least a little publicity, the editor of an Arab newspaper and the sole Palestinian representative in a press delegation accompanying Israel's president on an overseas tour, bowed out of the trip rather than be the only member of the party body-searched. None of the Jewish journalists came to his defense.

I have some idea of how he must have felt. When I fly with my wife, we are asked endlessly and disbelievingly about the circumstances of our wedding, as though we married only as a ruse to get past the security check and blow up a plane. Then our bags are X-rayed and searched at great length as we watch other passengers overtake us. But the experience pales in comparison with the occasions when either of us travels alone.

I have gone through the standard checks enough times to know that I must arrive at the airport at least three hours beforehand to stand any chance of making my flight. The assumption seems to be that as I am married to a Palestinian (even if she is a citizen of the country), and as she is not traveling with me, she or her family must have placed a bomb in my luggage or on me to blow up the plane. The fact that I have flown dozens of times out of Israel uneventfully does not gain me the benefit of the doubt.

As I approach the security officer before the check-in, she (and it is always a she) asks me where I am from. Given Israel's strict enforcement of communal segregation based on ethnicity, this is a fairly accurate way of determining which side of the ethnic divide I belong to. My reply of "Nazareth"—given its international importance, my "Western-ness" and the fact that there is a Jewish city of almost the same name built on its confiscated land—does not provide the decisive evidence she needs. The questioning therefore intensifies in a coded format that needs deciphering for those untutored in Israel's version of racial profiling.

Why are you living in Nazareth? I work there. Did you make aliyah? ["Aliyah" literally means "ascension," the right of all Jews to come to Israel and automatically receive citizenship. It is an indirect way of asking if I am a Jew.] No. I am married to an Israeli. [If I claim a right to live in Israel based on marriage, it means I am not Jewish. My answer, however, leaves open the question of my wife's ethnicity.] What's your wife called? [Names invariably give away whether a citizen is Jewish or Palestinian.] Sally Cook. [My mother-in-law was pregnant when

she befriended a British couple on holiday and decided to name my wife after their daughter. My answer has not settled the matter of my wife's ethnicity. Her maiden name, "Azzam," would be a giveaway but I am not going to be that helpful.] What's her father's name? He died many years ago, but was called Edmond. [My wife's family are Maronite Christians, a group that for historic reasons prefers European names. Still no clue for the security officer, as my wife's family could have been Jewish immigrants who never Hebraicized their names.] What about her mother? Her name's Diana? [To test the security officer's racist intentions, I pronounce the name in as Anglicized form as I can, as in "Princess Diana," even though in Arabic it is pronounced distinctively "Dee-ana"] Does she have any brothers or sisters? [The official is sounding exasperated at the lengths she must go to extract the information she needs.] Yes, a brother called Ghassan. [Bingo, she knows I am married to a Palestinian citizen.]

Now the questions are over. She is scrawling coded numbers on stickers to be placed on every surface of my bags. I am sent to a separate queue where apparently a stronger X-ray machine will peer deeper into my suitcases. Then my bags are searched by hand for the best part of an hour. Depending on the circumstances, items may be confiscated or I may be told I am not allowed any hand luggage. "I hope you understand that these security precautions are necessary because we are concerned that someone may have placed something in your bags without your knowledge." I might just believe the "without your knowledge" excuse, except that next they want to take me off to a cubicle for an intimate body search. With practiced indignation, I respond: "So you think that someone hid something in my body without my noticing?"

And after all that, it is off to a holding center, often underground in foreign airports, as the final minutes to take-off tick by. There I make the most of consoling conversations with Palestinian citizens being detained alongside me. As the plane doors are about to close, I am escorted on in full view of the other passengers. Do they think I am a pop star? Their concerned expressions suggest not.

In the Declaration of Independence, the document that established Israel as a Jewish state on 14 May 1948, its drafters promised unequivocally to "uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex." My marriage to a Palestinian citizen and the subsequent residency procedures we have endured are proof enough that such talk of equality is hol-

low.

In Israel there is no civil marriage, or freedom of religion. In fact, the only piece of legislation approximating a Bill of Rights—the Basic Law on Freedom and Human Dignity of 1992—does not even include equality among its provisions. Instead, in all personal areas of one's life, one must subscribe to a confessional group and follow its rules. Need a divorce? Apply to the rabbinical courts if you are a Jew, to a panel of Greek bishops if you belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, or to the local sheikh if you are a Muslim. You're a non-believer? Not possible—everyone must belong to a sect in Israel. In my case, that means that I am counted as a Christian. In terms of marriage, that at least proved an advantage. Sally is a Christian Maronite, so we were free to marry so long as we could find a willing priest. Had she been a Muslim or Jew, however, we would have been forced to leave the country to wed—although generously Israel would at least have recognized the marriage on our return.

I was raised as a Methodist but, since there is no Methodism in Israel, Sally and I had to turn to a friendly Anglican bishop for dispensation to marry in his small church in Nazareth. Only after marriage, however, did the inequality of Israel's citizenship laws strike me with force.

Were I a Jew, I would have been entitled to citizenship even before our wedding. A Jewish friend who immigrated to Israel a few years ago told me she had caught a plane from London and completed the paperwork moments after landing. Her right to Israeli citizenship was guaranteed under the Law of Return of 1950. As a non-Jew, I have to rely on a different piece of legislation: namely, the Nationality Law of 1952. Under various amendments to this law passed since 2003, Sally would not have been able to marry and live with me had I been a Palestinian from the occupied West Bank or Gaza, or a citizen of an Arab country. Israel has blocked the freedom of Palestinian citizens to choose whom they marry, officially on security grounds.

In practice, however, Israeli politicians and the Shin Bet have been clear that their real fear is demographic: they do not want the proportion of Palestinians or Arabs to rise above 20 per cent of the population and thereby threaten the state's Jewishness. Such marriages are seen by Israeli Jews as a "right of return via the backdoor" because they could eventually confer citizenship on a Palestinian spouse. A Jewish state, after all, has to be allowed to gerrymander the population to ensure it maintains its Jewish

majority.

Fortunately, I am not covered by these amendments—so far at least. I get the more generous provisions offered to “Westerners,” even if they are nowhere near as generous as those for Jews. That means that Sally and I had to demonstrate conclusively that we really had married, even though the wedding was conducted in Israel. In total, we spent several months collecting some 20 different documents as proof. I now receive a temporary residence permit every year—as long as I pass the security checks. After five years I will be eligible for permanent residency, and could even seek citizenship, although I would have to be prepared to forgo my British passport.

My Jewish friend, by contrast, has two passports in addition to her Israeli one. But then she is Jewish and this a Jewish state.

Citizenship v. Nationality

For many years, anyone could tell what ethnic group you belonged to—and more usefully for the authorities whether you were a Jew—simply by looking at your identity card. The older cards still have a line stating the holder’s “nationality” in exclusively ethnic or religious terms: Arab, Jew, Russian, Druze and so on. On the new cards, however, that line is gone. Strangely, however, the moment an official looks at my wife’s ID card, he seems to know exactly where she belongs in Israel’s ethnic hierarchy. Some observers say the answer is to be found in the card’s barcode number.

Interestingly, on a related issue, Israel has just become the first “democratic” state to require all citizens to provide their biometric data (fingerprints, facial images, etc.) for a national database. The likely abuse of such information in a country like Israel is great indeed.

The recording of “nationality” is a serious matter in Israel. In most countries, anyone who is a citizen is usually also a national. I am, for example, both a British citizen and a British national. In fact, I assumed these two words were virtual synonyms until I arrived in Israel. But here they most definitely are not. My wife’s passport records her nationality as Israeli, but that is actually a legal fiction. It is designed, I suppose, to satisfy border officials in other countries who expect the passport to describe her as an Israeli. Were it to state otherwise, she would technically be stateless and border guards might become suspicious in general of Israeli passports. But inside her own country, the pretense that her nationality is Israeli can be safely

dropped. Here, recorded by the Population Registry, her nationality is “Arab.” Other Israelis have a nationality selected from more than 130 categories—some of them obscure—chosen by the Interior Ministry, including Jew, Hebrew, Samaritan, Assyrian and Ethiopian. Pretty much everything, in fact, apart from “Israeli.” Why?

For a simple reason. Israel is a Jewish state, or, put another way, a state of the Jews. In other words, it belongs to Jews: it is their homeland, their birthright from more than 2,000 years ago. It does not belong to Israeli citizens, a fifth of whom are Palestinian. It cannot because then the Palestinians in Israel—and their relatives in exile—would also have a claim on the title deeds to the land. So a distinction must be made between citizenship and nationality to exclude them. That is why my wife can be an Israeli citizen but not an Israeli national. She has rights to live in Israel but no stake in “ownership” of her state, because only Jews can “own” the state. In fact, according to this view, even Jews who have never been citizens of Israel—Jews in the Diaspora—own the state. A Jew in Brooklyn who has never even visited Israel is officially seen to have more of an investment in the state than my wife whose family has lived in Nazareth for hundreds of years.

Ariel Sharon once explained this distinction during a speech in the Knesset. Palestinian citizens—“Israeli Arabs,” as he called them—had “rights in the land” whereas “all rights over the Land of Israel are Jewish rights.” In other words, Palestinian citizens are merely tenants, temporary or otherwise, while the Jewish people are the landlords of Israel.

Separate and Unequal

By design of the state, Palestinian and Jewish citizens live apart, in segregated spaces. I first discovered the practical implications one Friday evening after I had visited a musical event in the Palestinian town of Shafa’amr, near Nazareth. As I reached the edge of the town, my car broke down. Stranded in the dark, with no one in sight, I took comfort in the thought that I had breakdown insurance. I called the 24-hour hotline and asked for a mechanic or tow-truck to come to my aid. The woman on the other end of the line asked where I was. Innocently, I replied that I was next to Shafa’amr. There was a pause, presumably while she checked a map. “We can send someone tomorrow morning,” she replied. “But I am broken down in the middle of nowhere and need help right now,” I argued. “Sorry, we cannot help you now. You’ll have to wait till tomorrow. Call again then.”

I was saved that night by a passing Bedouin driver who picked me up and took me to Nazareth. When I related this story to friends the next day, no one was surprised. What then was I paying the breakdown company for, I asked. "You're deluded if you expect a Jewish company to send a driver into a Palestinian community at night," my friends agreed. "Their workers are taught to believe we'll kill them."

Stories like this have become commonplace in my life. I bought a bedroom suite from the IKEA store in the Jewish city of Netanya, north of Tel Aviv. Delivery was promised within three days, but a week later I still did not have the furniture. Every time I called, the delivery company said a driver was off sick or a truck had broken down. After a fortnight of excuses, I called IKEA's press office in Israel, told them I was a British journalist living in Nazareth and that I was planning to write a story about their delivery firm's racist policy towards Palestinian communities. Would they like to comment? A truck with the furniture arrived later that day.

Similarly, every time we move, Sally and I have had to wait weeks to get the national telecoms company, Bezeq, to sort out the connection to our home. None of my Jewish friends expects to wait more than a couple of days for a Bezeq technician. But then they live in Jewish communities. At the time of writing this article I have just moved to a central location in Nazareth and been told by Bezeq that we must wait six months for an internet connection. Apparently the technicians "have a problem reaching your area" — that is, the center of the largest Palestinian city in Israel.

Therese, my Dutch friend, lives a few miles north of Nazareth in the Palestinian town of Sakhnin. She once managed to speak to Bezeq's area manager after she had been forced to wait more than a month to get a technician to fix a broadband line she needed for work. At least he was honest: "We have orders from the government not to send our technicians into Arab areas. It's too dangerous for them."

Even were this fear justified, which it is not, why then does Bezeq not send Palestinian technicians into communities like Nazareth and Sakhnin? Because, like most state utilities, it has a covert policy of refusing employment to Palestinian citizens. There are fewer than a dozen Palestinians among Bezeq's 10,000-strong workforce. How do I know? Because I know one, someone who was given an apprenticeship in a special Bezeq training school in Jerusalem in the 1970s — a brief aberration in official policy.

There is at least an official source for the figures for another massive state concern, the Electricity Corporation. Nachman Tal, a former senior adviser in the "Arab section" of the Shin Bet, revealed to the Ha'aretz newspaper that when he made an enquiry in 2004 he discovered that there were only six Palestinian citizens among the 13,000 staff of the electricity company. Fortunately, for electrical problems we can rely on local electricians.

Enforcing this segregated employment structure are official public institutions, state monopolies, and the government itself. The most important is the Histadrut, the trade union federation and, peculiarly, also one of the country's biggest employers. In the tradition of "Hebrew labor," it has worked relentlessly to exclude the Palestinian minority from a voice in workers' issues over many decades.

The Histadrut runs some of Israel's biggest firms and, until the 1990s and a wave of privatizations, had diverse concerns, including a newspaper, the country's largest bank, a construction firm, the national bus company Egged, and a dairy production company. In the late 1970s, even though the Histadrut was the second largest employer in the country after the government and at the height of its power, there was not a single Histadrut-owned firm or factory in a Palestinian community, nor were there any Palestinian managers in its 600 industries. Things have barely improved since. Almost no industry has been established in Palestinian communities, both because of a lack of space following land confiscations by the state and because the government has encouraged businesses to locate to Jewish areas through special development grants.

The Great Land Swindle

My friend Ziad Awaisie was one of the organizers of the Saffuriya procession that marked this year's Nakba Day. His parents, children at the time, were forced to flee from the village in July 1948, when the fledgling Israeli air force bombed their homes for two hours. Most of the villagers headed north towards Lebanon and permanent exile from their homeland. But the families of Ziad's parents left for Nazareth, believing — rightly — that the new Israeli army would not dare to tarnish its image by attacking one of the holiest cities in Christendom. Along with other Saffuriya families, they created a refugee neighborhood in Nazareth called Sufafra, named after their former village. Their new homes look down on the fields in the valley their ancestors once farmed but which are now out of

bounds to them.

This exclusion is legally enforced. Ziad and his parents are known as “present absentees”—one of several Orwellian phrases invented by Israeli lawyers. Considered “present” in Israel but “absent” from their property, Ziad’s parents are denied—in violation of international law—the right to return to the homes they were forced to evacuate during the 1948 war. Immediately after that war, one in four Palestinian citizens found themselves classified as present absentees. Because this status is inherited, there are believed to be nearly 300,000 in Israel today. They are permanently denied any right to their families’ homes, land, bank accounts, businesses, and all belongings, which were taken by a state official called the Custodian of Absentee Property and then passed on to the government for distribution to Jewish immigrants. This was dispossession on a massive scale against a group that are supposedly citizens with equal rights.

But the state’s systematic confiscation of Palestinian property has not ended there. One in 10 Palestinian citizens live in what are called “unrecognized villages”—that is, unrecognized by their own state. Many are Bedouin living in the desert region of the south, the Negev. In Israel’s early years, the Bedouin tribes—isolated by the military government from the rest of the country—were ordered by the army to move from their ancestral grounds to various locations in the northern Negev around the newly “Judaized” city of Beersheva (formerly the Palestinian city of Bir Saba). With amazing chutzpah, Israel now claims that these forcibly relocated Bedouin have no title deeds or historic connection to the lands they were transferred to and are therefore “squatters.” It has been seeking to evict them from their homes ever since.

The Building and Planning Law of 1965 formalized this official view, criminalizing all the inhabitants of the unrecognized villages. It is illegal for state utilities like the Electricity Corporation and Mekorot, the water company, to supply the villagers with services. The unrecognized villages are also not entitled to council representation, depriving them of the right to access roads, schools and health clinics. Without a council, no master plan can be drawn up for the villages, making all homes there illegal and under continuous threat of demolition.

The meaning of being unrecognized is particularly evident in Wadi al-Naim, a village of 4,000 Bedouin a few miles south of Beersheva. There, the state has built a giant electricity generating station for the Negev on top of the village, as though the inhabitants did not exist. The villag-

ers have no access to the electricity, even though they have to suffer the environmental and health consequences of living under thousands of power lines.

A stone’s throw from their homes is also to be found the country’s largest chemical waste dump, Ramat Hovav. A recent survey found a significant increase in cancer rates among those living within a 13-mile radius of the dump. The researchers, however, overlooked Wadi al-Naim, even though it is the nearest community to Ramat Hovav, failing in their duty of scientific rigor but cravenly abiding by official ideology that the village does not exist.

The inhabitants of Wadi al-Naim, like other Bedouin in the unrecognized villages, must endure the special attention of a paramilitary police force set up especially for them by Ariel Sharon in the 1970s called the Green Patrol. The Patrol’s diverse environmental duties include killing the Bedouin’s herds of cattle, sheep and black goats, destroying their homes, and spraying their crops with herbicides from the air. Most Bedouin in unrecognized villages are forced to live in tin shacks, without heating in the winter or air-conditioning in the summer; they must carry water long distances to their homes from standpipes, a minimal concession forced on the government by the courts; and their children must walk miles to reach a school in an official and recognized Bedouin community, or simply not go.

The purpose of this intimidation, neglect and violence is to force the unrecognized villagers off their lands again, but this time into a handful of profoundly neglected townships, or urban reservations, established for the Bedouin since the 1970s on a few of the formerly unrecognized villages. The state calls this policy “concentrating” the Negev’s “scattered” communities. So far half the Negev’s Bedouin population—about 80,000 people—have been relocated to the townships. The Bedouin are crammed into these towns without access either to the land they need to continue their way of life as pastoral farmers or the urban infrastructure for them to develop their communities. Instead those who are employed work at minimum wages in factories in Jewish communities. As a result, the Bedouin townships are at the bottom of every socio-economic index. The latest surveys suggest that the Bedouin are deserting the townships, preferring the dignity—despite the deprivations—of life in an unrecognized village.

Much of the land belonging to the Palestinian minority has been taken through these twin policies of declaring large numbers of Palestinian citizens “absentees” and a significant proportion of their communities “unrecog-

nized." But other pretexts have been established in law to convert yet more land into state property: the creation of closed military zones in Palestinian areas (a policy later adopted in the occupied territories); the declaration of Palestinian land as uncultivated or "fallow" (in a Catch-22, often after it has been made a closed zone); and the use of Palestinian land for the building of national infrastructure projects or in the "national interest," meaning in practice for the exclusive use of Jews.

Nazareth, the effective capital of the Palestinian minority, has been subjected to such schemes in an aggressive manner. In the late 1950s most of its outlying lands were confiscated on the grounds that they were needed for the construction of government regional offices. In fact, not only were the offices built but so too was a new Jewish town. Upper Nazareth was the spearhead of a "Judaization" program in the Galilee that continues to this day.

Upper Nazareth, still smaller in population than Nazareth, now has three times as much land as its Palestinian neighbor. It has also been generously allocated special development grants not available to Nazareth, and has many large industrial zones, compared to a minuscule site in Nazareth. Upper Nazareth's local council alone benefits from the business rates and property taxes levied on its industry and government offices, even though they are built on land taken from Nazareth.

At least 70 per cent of the minority's land has been confiscated since 1948. Along with the property of the Palestinian refugees in exile, these lands have been taken by the state or transferred to the Jewish National Fund, to be held in trust for the Jewish people worldwide. Today, 93 per cent of Israeli territory is "nationalized," for the benefit of the Jewish nation, with only about 3 per cent owned privately either by individual Palestinians or by their communities.

Even much of this 3 per cent has been taken out of the control of its Palestinian owners and their elected local representatives. Outside the tightly defined limits of Palestinian communities, land in rural areas like the Galilee falls under the jurisdiction of regional councils, established to empower the hundreds of scattered and exclusively Jewish communities implanted next to Palestinian towns and villages. They ensure that Palestinian land cannot be developed for the benefit of the community or to meet the growing demand for housing, but remains as private smallholdings, usually cultivated as olive groves.

In addition, Israel has not built a single new Palestin-

ian community in six decades, despite the minority growing eightfold in the meantime. It has also strictly enforced a policy of house demolitions against Palestinian citizens who build illegally, which most must do because the planning authorities refuse to approve the master plans needed to legalize the expansion of Palestinian communities. Instead Palestinian towns and villages have become tightly contained ghettos. This approach to the Palestinian minority contrasts starkly with the state's determination to satisfy the "natural growth" of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank by endlessly building new homes there.

The Glass Wall

Most sympathetic studies of the Palestinian minority concentrate on the economic and social discrimination it suffers, creating the false impression that Palestinians are simply second-class citizens, much like blacks in America and Muslims in Europe. Certainly, Palestinians inside Israel suffer far greater levels of poverty than Jews, far higher unemployment and their separate school system is a pale reflection of the Jewish one.

The following figures give a brief impression of this discrimination. A study last year revealed that Israel's Palestinian citizens ranked in 66th place out of 177 countries in the Human Development Index (measuring standards of living, poverty and progress)—43 positions below the general ranking for Israeli citizens. The gross domestic product per capita for the Palestinian minority is a third of that of the Jewish majority, and is identical to that in Romania and Iran. The level of education in Jordan, Lebanon and Libya is higher than that of Palestinians in Israel. And the level of health among the Palestinian minority is lower than countries such as Costa Rica and Cuba.

This kind of discrimination, however, barely scratches the surface of the Palestinian experience of life inside Israel. The core problem for Palestinian citizens is that they are not true citizens at all: they are more akin to guest workers, whose rights may be terminated at some future date should the Jewish majority so decide. Nonetheless, Israel has sought to create the illusion that it has extended meaningful citizenship to its Palestinian minority through a policy I characterize as the "glass wall."

The glass wall, like its steel and concrete cousins in the occupied territories, tightly limits the ability of Palestinians to exercise their rights but, unlike the more famous wall, is invisible to onlookers. Nowhere is this deception more true than in the minority's apparent right to political

representation. Thus, most observers assume Israel is a normal democracy for the simple reason that its Palestinian citizens have the vote. However, this has been an easy generosity for a state in which, after an earlier campaign of ethnic cleansing, there is a clear Jewish majority. In fact, in an indication of how irrelevant universal suffrage has been in ensuring meaningful representation for the Palestinian minority, Israel allowed its Palestinian citizens to vote in parliamentary elections from the moment the state was created, even though they were also subject to martial law for the next two decades.

Two factors ensure that political power in Israel is retained solely in Jewish hands and used exclusively for the benefit of the Jewish population. The first is that the country's independent Palestinian parties, including the one small Jewish and Palestinian coexistence party, have been excluded from every government coalition and every major decision-making body in Israel's history. In contrast, small Jewish parties, of religious fundamentalists or openly fascistic groups, have been regularly invited into such coalitions. The second is that all the political parties participating in national elections must pledge their loyalty and commitment to the concept of Israel as a Jewish state. In this sense, therefore, even when Palestinian citizens contest elections, they must operate within a political framework that is an entirely Jewish, Zionist one. Because Palestinian parties, like Jewish parties, must pledge a commitment to a "Jewish and democratic state," all of them skate close to illegality when they campaign for Israel's democratization.

The constant threat of disqualification, and prosecution, of the minority's politicians has been an effective way to rein in free speech and silence dissent. In the years following the outbreak of the second intifada, Israel launched investigations of all of its Palestinian MKs, regularly accusing them of incitement or sedition when they promoted their political platforms. The country's two most influential Arab leaders, the nationalist Azmi Bishara and Sheikh Raed Salah of the Islamic Movement, have both been hounded relentlessly by the security services. They were also prosecuted in cases that later largely collapsed because of a lack of evidence but which did grave damage to their reputations and that of Palestinian citizens generally. Salah ended up spending several years in jail and Bishara has been forced into exile under threat of long-term imprisonment for treason.

Despite the Palestinian minority's total exclusion from political influence, the climate is growing ever more hos-

tile to their representatives. This trend has been particularly evident since the Palestinian parties began demanding Israel's reform from a Jewish state to "a state of all its citizens," or a liberal democracy. In the 2003 Knesset election, two Palestinian candidates and one party, that of Bishara, were banned from standing by the Central Election Committee, a body dominated by the main Zionist parties. The disqualifications were made possible by a May 2002 amendment to the Basic Law on the Knesset that outlaws candidates and parties that "deny the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state." The disqualifications were overturned at the last minute by the Supreme Court, though only by a wafer-thin majority.

As a result, Jewish MKs have been seeking to bypass the court. The first piece of "loyalty legislation" was passed in July this year, allowing the citizenship of anyone committing a "breach of trust" with the state to be revoked. Such a breach is defined broadly, and includes anyone who has lived in any of nine Arab or Muslim states, as well as in Gaza. The revocation does not require a conviction for treason, and can be implemented without the citizen affected being present. At the time of writing, a related bill had passed its early readings to strip anyone of the right to stand for election if they have visited an "enemy state," again most of the Arab countries, in the past seven years. Such legislation would disqualify the candidature of most of the current 10 Knesset members belonging to Palestinian parties.

In contrast to the Palestinian minority's exclusion from the corridors of power, Diaspora Jews (who do not have Israeli citizenship) have strong representation inside the political system and in state agencies through various international Zionist bodies: chiefly the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund inside Israel, and the World Zionist Organization in the occupied territories. These bodies have a keen influence on the decision-making process relating to two key issues: the immigration and settlement of Jews in Israel (and the West Bank); and the confiscation of Palestinian land for exclusive use by Jews. Although these Zionist organizations enjoy a quasi-governmental status, none is subject to Israel's anti-discrimination legislation (itself rarely enforced). According to their charters, these organizations represent the interests of world Jewry, not Israel's population, and can therefore entirely ignore the Palestinian minority in their decisions.

If the minority's representatives are first in the firing line, Palestinian citizens are likely to follow closely be-

hind. During the second intifada, concern about the country's demographic trends has reached fever pitch, with concern regularly expressed from the prime minister down that the minority's high birth rate and campaign for Israel's democratization threaten Israel's future as a Jewish state. The Herzliya Conference, an annual security convention launched in late 2000, set the ball rolling. Its theme was the danger posed by the growth of the Palestinian minority and its connections to its ethnic kin in the occupied territories.

From this conference new kinds of legislative assault on the citizenship of Palestinians have emerged, including the amendments to the 1952 Nationality Law and a series of "loyalty" bills. Opinion polls soon identified similar worries among the Jewish public. A survey in 2003 showed 57 per cent thought Palestinian citizens should be encouraged to emigrate, through inducements or force. In a follow-up poll in 2006 the figure had risen to 62 per cent. In another survey that year 68 per cent of Israeli Jews said they did not want to live next to a Palestinian citizen.

These racist views have been encouraged by leading journalists, academics and politicians of all persuasions, fearful that the presence of a growing Palestinian minority will one day destroy the state's Jewishness. Many advocate "transfer" – the popular euphemism in Israel for ethnic cleansing – including revisionist historians like Benny Morris and former prime ministers from across the political spectrum: Binyamin Netanyahu, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak.

Leading the charge in promoting "transfer" is Israel's far-right, particularly Avigdor Lieberman, a Moldovan immigrant and leader of the increasingly popular Yisrael Beiteinu party. Lieberman, once director-general of the Likud party, has been promoting the "Separation of Nations" whereby mutual transfers of territory ensure Jewish settlers in the occupied territories are included inside an expanded Israeli state, but as many Palestinians as possible are relocated to what he calls a future Palestinian state – though like most Israelis he appears to mean by statehood no more than a patchwork of ghettos in the West Bank and a besieged prison in Gaza.



In putting forward his proposal, Lieberman has exhumed the idea of transfer from the dark recesses of Zionism, freeing Israeli politicians to speak about it openly, especially as part of what may be presented as a potential "peace agreement" with the Palestinians of the occupied territories. In particular, he has made respectable the idea of transferring the Little Triangle, a small area of Israeli territory close to the West Bank and densely populated with a 250,000 Palestinian citizens, to a future Palestinian state. He also proposes to require a loyalty oath from Palestinian citizens who remain inside Israel, not to their country but to Israel as a Jewish state. Those refusing would presumably be expelled. In October 2006 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appointed Lieberman to his cabinet as deputy prime minister. Shortly afterwards, on a trip to the U.S., Lieberman explained his vision of conditional Israeli citizenship to American Jewish leaders at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy in Washington: "He who is not ready to recognize Israel as a Jewish and Zionist state cannot be a citizen of the country."

A consensus appears to be forming behind the Lieberman approach. Shortly before the Annapolis conference in November 2007, called by President George W. Bush to revive the peace process stalled since Camp David in 2000, Israel's foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, observed that a Palestinian state would be the "answer" to Israel's Palestinian citizens: "They cannot ask for the declaration of a Palestinian state while working against the nature of the State of Israel as home unto the Jewish people." Earlier, in August, President Shimon Peres, holder of a post intended to embody the nation's unity, proposed exchanging Jewish settlement blocs in the occupied territories for Palestinian areas inside Israel.

Today, it may be that the outlook for the Palestinian minority is bleaker than it has been for decades. ■

Jonathan Cook is a writer and journalist living in Nazareth, Israel. He is the author of "Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State," and "Israel and the Clash of Civilizations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East," both available from AMEU (see page 13). His website is www.jkcook.net

From The Link's Links

<http://qumsiyeh.org/>

Go



Interview with Mazin Qumsiyeh about his website, "Qumsiyeh: A Human Rights Web."

What is your objective and how would you measure the results? *The main objectives are to (1) compile information on Palestine and on U.S. and Israeli policies that is not available elsewhere or difficult to find, and (2) to take action on the basis of positive examples. The website is a companion and archive for the Wheels of Justice listserve, where these actions and stories are posted regularly. We measure results by responses to our specific calls to action. When we issue a petition or a call to action, we usually note between 300-800 responses within the first 48 hours. Website hits are another indication but less important than people taking actions.*

How does the listserve work? *The listserve WheelsofJustice@lists.riseup.net has over 15,000 subscribers. Subscribers receive regular e-mails and can access the archives. A recent subscriber survey showed that most are interested in reports from Palestine and Iraq, news articles not normally seen in mainstream Western media, action items and activist tools. The listserve has been in operation for nine years. People can subscribe and unsubscribe easily and they are never inundated with messages (no more than 2-3 posts per week).*

I have to say that in some ways there is so much that it is a bit overwhelming: video clips, an evolving "how-to" manual for activists, human

rights blogs, Jewish voices, history lessons. You even print the hate mail sent your way. How do you manage to physically maintain the site and keep things current? *Current information and action alerts are posted at the blog area on <http://www.qumsiyeh.org/rightsblog2008/>. That is what I update 2-3 times per week. Other parts of the website are updated as things materialize. For example, if I publish a newspaper op-ed, I post it under articles, and if I get tips for the activism page, I post them there. The site could use a bit more flair and be easier to navigate for information; this is something I'm working on.*

The "Wheels of Justice" project is highlighted on your site. What is that effort about? *The bus tour (JusticeWheels.org) presents first-hand experiences of occupations in Iraq and Palestine. We canvass the United States with education, outreach, training, active non-violent resistance, and network/community-building. We have spoken at 1200 colleges and universities, over 250 middle and high schools, and at hundreds of churches and community centers. It is a very effective outreach project that delivers truth to the U.S. public long denied it by a biased mainstream media.*

Tell us something about yourself and how you came to commit so much time and energy to this project? *My background is in science (PhD in biology) and medicine (board certification in medical genetics). Both taught me to get all the data before offering an opinion or taking a course of action. I have published three books and more than 130 scientific papers. It is essential that activists possess the best factual information. For that reason, I began the website for my own use, a repository of data so to speak. As it evolved I am grateful that others found it useful. Things sometimes get to where they are not by choice. For example, after constant exposure to the usual Zionist talking points, I thought it useful to put together responses using data to counter Zionist lies; this section of the website was posted six months ago and has become more useful over time. We will keep updating it. There is always a shortage of time but we can all contribute according to our circumstances. I am fortunate to have a flexible job and to have more time now that my son is grown.*

--Dr. Qumsiyeh was interviewed by AMEU President Bob Norberg

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Balizer, A.	Witness in Palestine	2007	400	\$26.95	\$19.95	Jewish-American condemns Israel's occupation.
Baroud, R.	The Second Palestinian Intifada	2006	216	\$18.00	\$16.50	Palestinians respond to ethnocide against them.
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Carter, J.	Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid	2006	265	\$27.00	\$19.50	A critical analysis of Israel's occupation.
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Karmi, G.	Married to Another Man	2007	350	\$29.95	\$22.50	Israel's dilemma in Palestine.
Khalidi, R.	The Iron Cage	2006	281	\$24.95	\$19.95	Why Palestinians don't have a state.
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Kovel, J.	Overcoming Zionism	2007	299	\$26.95	\$18.95	How Israel can heal its "state-sponsored racism."
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