



# Palestinians in Israel's 'democracy': The Judaization of the Galilee

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Briefing Paper

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## **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The 'Judaization of the Galilee' refers to Israeli state and regional policies aimed at increasing the proportion of Jewish residents in relation to Palestinians in the Galilee, an area in the north of the country which retained a sizeable Palestinian population after 1948.
- Judaizing the Galilee is just one element of Israel's regime of control over its Palestinian citizens, who face systematic discrimination.
- Palestinian citizens are routinely described as constituting a 'demographic threat'.
- Land expropriation and the establishment of Jewish communities have been the two main methods used for this Judaization process.
- Issues facing Palestinian citizens of Israel are far less familiar to observers in the West than Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories.
- The claim that Israel is 'the only democracy in the Middle East' needs to be challenged by the facts of consistent, cross-party policies by successive Israeli governments aimed at ensuring Jewish hegemony vis-à-vis the Palestinians, in the areas under its control.

## INTRODUCTION

*The project of 'Judaizing the Galilee' commenced when the state [of Israel] was founded and has continued in various guises to the present day...<sup>1</sup>*

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*The Judaization project is driven by the Zionist premise that Israel is a territory and a state that 'belongs' to, and only to, the Jewish people.<sup>2</sup>*

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Israel's regime of systematic discrimination against its Palestinian citizens, who make up 20 percent of the population, remains a marginalised issue. This is for a number of reasons, but one of them is the way in which many 'liberal' critiques of Israel focus almost exclusively on the military occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip. Thus in a similar way to the international community's official 'peace process', the question of Palestine is dramatically diminished, to the exclusion of two groups of Palestinians - the refugees and Israeli citizens. According to these boundaries of accepted censure, it was the post-1967 occupation which 'corrupted' Israel, and the timeline of Israel's crimes against the Palestinians starts with the first settlement housing units in the West Bank of the late 1960s, rather than with Deir Yassin and Ramla in 1948. Israel and its lobbyists have long portrayed the state as 'the only democracy in the Middle East', understanding the propaganda value of all its accompanying associations for the policy makers and the general public in the West. A deeper understanding of Israel's policies with regards to its Palestinian minority is crucial to exposing the 'only democracy' formulation, as well as contributing towards a reintegration of our analysis of Palestine/Israel. Though the 'Judaization' of the Galilee is one aspect of the Israeli state's relationship with its Palestinian citizens since 1948, it can help illuminate policy decisions made under Israeli apartheid rule from Nazareth and Umm al-Fahm, to Bil'in and Hebron.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 is referred to by Palestinians as the *Nakba* ('catastrophe'). An estimated 85 percent of the Palestinians who had been living in what became Israel were expelled, with 4 in 5 of their villages and towns destroyed or repopulated.<sup>3</sup> [See Map 1] This act of ethnic cleansing (euphemistically described as 'transfer' by many Zionist leaders) freed up substantial tracts of land, and between 1947 and 1949 the number of Jewish settlements increased by almost 50 percent.<sup>4</sup> The statistics point to the hundreds of thousands of personal stories of dispossession - for example, by mid-1949, "two-thirds of all land sown with grain in Israel" was 'abandoned' Palestinian land.<sup>5</sup> Of the Palestinians who remained in the new Jewish state, many of them inhabited the Galilee area. In the Negev (or Naqab) region in the south, the Palestinian Bedouins who had not been expelled were forcibly relocated to an area known as the Siyag ('fence' or 'closure'). Until 1966, Israel's Palestinian citizens were subject to a military regime that imposed travel restrictions, suppressed dissent, and carried out land expropriations. The Galilee and the Negev have remained areas of 'strategic concern' for the Israeli state for 60 years, on account of their proportionally higher number of Palestinians. Over the decades, the Galilee, the focus of this paper, has been the target of a twin-track process of spatial Judaization involving: (a) the expropriation of Palestinian land, and (b) the creation and encouragement of Jewish settlements. Between the early 1960s and the 1990s, the proportion of Jewish citizens in the population of Galilee increased by more than three-fold. Before examining how this took place, and how it remains a 'live' issue today, it is important to contextualise Judaization policies with the background of Israel's demography discourse.

## **THE DEMOGRAPHY DISCOURSE**

The practical policies of Judaization are shaped by the discourse in mainstream Israeli politics that sees Palestinian citizens as a 'demographic threat'. Describing one group of citizens as a 'threat' based on their ethno-religious identity sounds shocking, but in so far as it is framed as part of the political Zionist project of creating and maintain Jewish hegemony in Palestine/Israel, then there is a consistency and logic here. While Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has more recently got attention for his populist rhetoric directed against the state's Palestinian citizens, the 'demographic threat' has been an issue that crosses party lines. Yitzhak Rabin, for example, lauded by many as a 'dove', had his own understanding of the 'upper limit' for the percentage of the Palestinian minority, citing 20 percent of the population as "the red line for Arabs" that "must not be gone over."<sup>7</sup> When ex-PM Ehud Olmert participated in a 'Q&A' with *Ha'aretz* website readers in

June 2004, the then-Deputy Prime Minister responded to a question about the “‘demographic problem’ WITHIN Israel” [sic] by calling the state’s Palestinian citizens a “manageable problem”.<sup>8</sup>

The current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, while serving as Finance Minister in 2003, said that the ‘Israeli Arabs’ were the real “demographic problem”, in contrast to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.<sup>9</sup> A decade previously, Netanyahu had made the same point, arguing that “the statistics” show that the “demographic ‘threat’” comes “from the Arabs of pre-1967”.<sup>10</sup> In July 2009, the Housing Minister called it a “national duty” to “prevent the spread” of Palestinian citizens, and expressed his concerns that ““if we go on like we have until now, we will lose the Galilee.” The Minister added that “populations that should not mix are spreading there”.<sup>11</sup> In January 2010, the chair of the Knesset Lobby for Housing Solutions for Young Couples explained his support for subsidised “haredi-only housing in the Negev and in the Galilee” by pointing out that “the Arab population is on the rise”, and that therefore “it is a national interest to encourage Jews to move to these places”.<sup>12</sup>

An illustrative example of the preoccupation with demography is what became known as the Koenig Report, a leaked internal document written in 1976 by Israel Koenig, a senior official in the Minister of Interior. With its focus on the ‘demographic problem’ in the Galilee, here is how *Time* magazine covered the document at the time:

***Infiltration by secret agents. Reprisals against ‘negative’ citizens. Systematic job discrimination and measures to encourage emigration. To many Israelis, it all sounded like a prescription for a pogrom against Jews. In fact, they were an Israeli civil servant’s proposals for controlling Israel’s exploding Arab population.***<sup>13</sup>

Koenig suggested that the Israeli government “expand and deepen Jewish settlement in areas where the contiguity of the Arab population is prominent” and “limit ‘breaking of new ground’ by Arab settlements”.<sup>14</sup> Although the furore pushed Israeli government figures to distance themselves from the report, the denials were a transparent PR exercise, particularly, as Nazareth mayor at the time Tawfiq Zayad pointed out, “Many of Koenig’s recommendations are already official policy”.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the Interior Ministry’s Director-General defended “a Jewish majority” in the Galilee as “a legitimate goal”, the proposals were endorsed by “prominent

Jewish politicians from the Galilee”, and the memorandum’s co-author was picked by Yitzhak Rabin “as his candidate for appointment as director of the Labour Party’s Arab Department”.<sup>16</sup>

There is then a direct link between the ‘demography discourse’ and specific policies intended to contribute towards the Judaization of the Galilee. The Jewish Agency, an organization that continues to perform its key role as an agency with which the Israeli state can cooperate on Zionist policy priorities, relates the story of the creation of mitzpim (lookout) settlements in the Galilee (see below) by noting that the “large Arab population” in the region after 1948 had created “discomfort”.<sup>17</sup> The same connection between demography worries and Judaization is behind more recent Jewish Agency initiatives in the Galilee, as the organisation acts on its concerns to guarantee “a ‘Zionist majority’ in those areas.”<sup>18</sup> Just at the end of last year, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon warned that “we are losing the Negev and the Galilee”, and therefore “the focus for today is to Judaize the Negev and the Galilee”.<sup>19</sup>

In Israel, to talk of Palestinian citizens as a ‘threat’ is routine amongst government leaders and ministers from a wide range of the spectrum. Ian Lustick, in his seminal ‘Arabs in the Jewish State’, makes the important point that “because of the rhetorical inconvenience” of a “slogan” like “Judaize the Galilee”, Labour government spokespersons have “tended to substitute other phrases” like ‘populate the Galilee’ or ‘develop the Galilee’.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as Lustick stresses, “the crucial concern remains making and keeping the Galilee Jewish.” As Israeli journalist Noam Sheizaf put it recently, “viewing Jewish hegemony as a necessity is something that all Zionist parties have in common”, and that while there are differences between Labour and Lieberman, “all of them share the demographic obsession.”<sup>21</sup>

## **JUDAIZATION THROUGH LAND CONFISCATION**

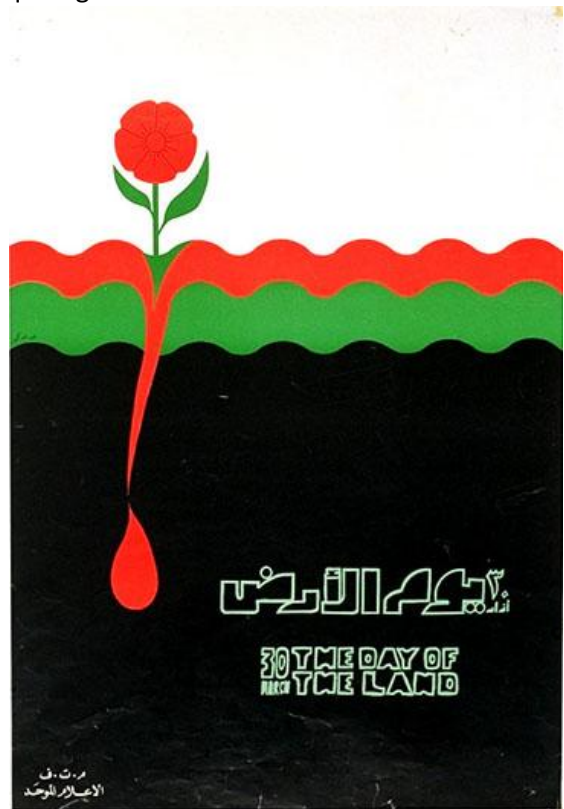
The first element of the Judaization drive was the confiscation of Palestinian property. This affected not only the Palestinian refugees who had been expelled, but also the Palestinian minority who remained and became citizens. There are, in fact, too many related laws to even summarise in this report, though the diversity of legislative methods were united in purpose:



*For the first few years of Israel's existence, many of the new laws continued to be rooted in earlier Ottoman and British law. These laws were later amended or replaced altogether. Even at an early stage, it became clear that Israel's unique interpretation of existing law would reflect the interests of the dominant (Jewish) settler community at the expense of Palestinians — whether those who had become citizens of the new state, or those who had been forced into exile...*<sup>22</sup>

This combination of 'emergency' laws, Knesset legislation - including most notably, the Absentee Property Law – ensured the large scale transfer of Palestinian land to the state and para-state agencies. This latter law, passed in 1950 to expropriate the property of the Palestinian refugees, also affected Palestinian citizens who had left their homes but stayed inside the borders of the new Jewish state. Around 1 in 4 of the Palestinians citizens in Israel is a so-called 'present absentee'.

One other law worth singling out, as “the major tool used for acquiring Palestinian land” is the Land (Acquisition for Public Purposes) Ordinance of 1943, or simply the Public Purposes Ordinance.<sup>23</sup> The use of this law by the Israeli state to carry out Judaization is instructive, since it is a good example of the way in which Israel has sought to conceal its apartheid behind a legal and bureaucratic facade. This law was actually recently amended by the Knesset, in order “to confirm state ownership of land confiscated from Palestinians”, crucially, “even where the land had not been used to serve the purpose for which it was originally confiscated”.<sup>24</sup> The Public Purposes Ordinance has been the instrument by which some of the most substantial land expropriations have been carried out, including the land used to create Upper Nazareth and Karmiel.<sup>25</sup> Some thirty years on from Israel's establishment, the average Palestinian community had lost at least two-thirds of its land.<sup>26</sup>





## **JUDAIZATION THROUGH JEWISH SETTLEMENT**

The second means of Judaization of the Galilee, following on from the expropriation of Palestinian land, has been the establishment of Jewish communities, and attempts to encourage Jews to move to the area. Both “governmental and nongovernmental agencies” have been involved in these “strenuous efforts” to “channel” Jewish citizens to settlements in the Galilee, a policy that has also meant “large public resources” being used to offer “incentives” to “settlers and investors”, such as “tax breaks, subsidized land and housing, lower interest rates, development of regional infrastructure, direct establishment grants, and rent assistance”.<sup>27</sup> Official plans for the Galilee region are not shy about indicating the rationale behind ‘development’ policies. A map leaked in 1995 “explicitly stated” the goal as Judaization, boosting the Jewish population of the Galilee and distributing them “in such a way that they would disrupt any Palestinian geographical continuity”.<sup>28</sup> In October 2001, a government plan for dozens of new communities was described in *Ha’aretz* as reflecting the “saying” that “if the Jews are not quick enough in grabbing the land, an Arab will come along and grab it”.<sup>29</sup> Just earlier this year, it was announced that the government planned to allocate land to discharged combat troops in particular ‘strategic’ regions, including the Galilee, in a move “likely to be seen as a continuation of the government’s controversial policy of encouraging Israeli Jews to reside in rural regions with large Arab populations”.<sup>30</sup>

The aforementioned confiscation of land from the Palestinian city of Nazareth, in order to create Upper Nazareth, is a prime example of the colonization drive in the Galilee. In a 1957 letter, reproduced in a publication marking the Jewish town’s thirtieth anniversary, then Prime Minister David Ben Gurion wrote that “the new settlement must be a Jewish town that will assert a Jewish presence in the area”.<sup>31</sup> The Israeli military’s ‘Planning Department Director’ affirmed that the role of Upper Nazareth would be to “emphasize and safeguard the Jewish character of the Galilee as a whole”.<sup>32</sup>

In the mid-1960s, an Israeli newspaper article described the creation of Upper Nazareth as a governmental decision “to impose on Arab Nazareth a Jewish town... whose purpose - whose basic, primary, and even sole purpose - is ‘to break’ Arab autonomy in the region and in this city, and later, to create a Jewish majority”.<sup>33</sup> For the current mayor of Upper Nazareth, Shimon Gapso, the ‘demographic’ struggle remains a pressing concern: “The State of Israel’s plan was



that 45% of the Galilee will be Jewish by 2010. In reality, we are less than 40%, and if the State doesn't make sure to bring Jews here en masse, we will lose the Galilee."<sup>34</sup>

Another example of the drive to move more Jews to the Galilee was the establishment of mitzpim settlements, begun in the late 1970s. These rural settlements were to be constructed "on hills overlooking key Arab villages", which though small, would suffice "to block the growth of adjacent Arab communities".<sup>35</sup> This strategy of creating "Jewish wedges between clusters of Arab villages" in order to "break the continuity of the Arab population in the region" was implemented "in a special procedure" that applied the provisions of a 1946 British Mandate law.<sup>36</sup> The Jewish Agency became "the driving force" behind this push, which by 1981 had led to the creation of 26 mitzpim, and by 1988, this figure had doubled.<sup>37</sup> [See Map 2. Many mitzpim communities are in the Misgav Regional Council, from whose website this image is taken.]

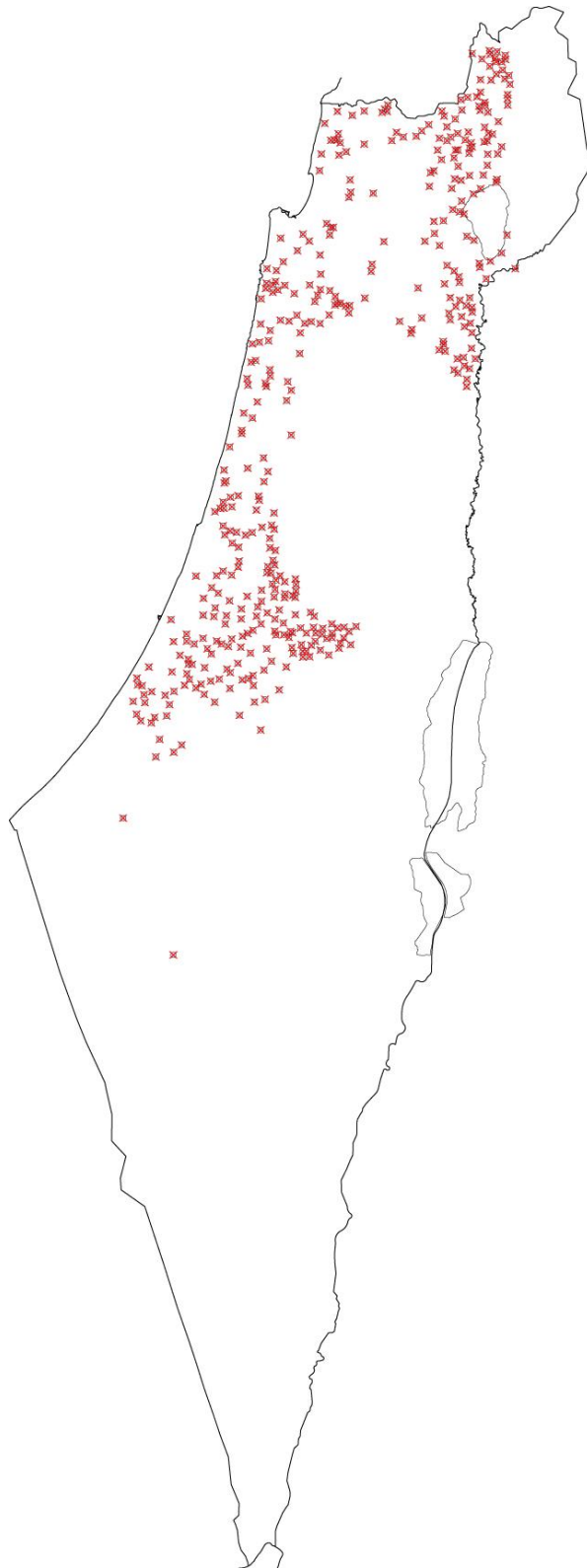
One way to consolidate the role played by establishing Jewish communities in the Galilee has been through selection committees. These committees, which admit or deny entry to the community based on 'social suitability', operate in almost 70 percent of the total towns in Israel, and 85 percent of the villages.<sup>38</sup> According to *Human Rights Watch*, the selection committees, which are made up of "government and community representatives as well as a senior official in the Jewish Agency or the Zionist Organization", have "notoriously been used to exclude Arabs from living in rural Jewish communities".<sup>39</sup> In June 2009, a bill was proposed in the Knesset (and later approved by ministers) which would "ensure that small communities in the Negev and the Galilee retain their "Zionist identity".<sup>40</sup>

# MEM

## MIDDLE EAST MONITOR

BREIFING PAPER - March 2010

[Map 1] - 'Map of the Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948' (from Malkit Shoshan and Bert de Mynck, 'One Land Two Systems', FAST (online) Magazine, [http://www.seamless-israel.org/images/online%20magazine/ONE\\_LAND.html](http://www.seamless-israel.org/images/online%20magazine/ONE_LAND.html))





## CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted two particular methods that the Israeli state has used in order to try and advance the goal of Judaizing the Galilee; land confiscation and the creation of Jewish settlements. As ex-deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti has related, these two policies are only part of the picture (in both the Galilee and the Negev). After the Land Day protests of 1976 which were a response to large-scale land expropriations, “more sophisticated methods” were “pursued”:

*Small Jewish settlements were established in the midst of Arab areas in order to fragment ‘Arab blocks’; Bedouin tribes in the Negev were ‘concentrated’ in ‘planned towns’ so their pastureland could be taken over; Jewish-dominated regional councils were set up in mixed rural areas, giving the Jewish representatives control over municipal services (notably planning) for the Arab villages under their jurisdiction; approximately 100 Arab villages, both large and small, were designated as ‘unrecognized’ and thus deprived of basic infrastructure (such as provision of water and electricity) and municipal services (schools, building permits, etc.); the municipal boundaries of Arab towns and villages were drawn in such a way that no space remained for their expansion, and construction outside them was defined as ‘illegal’ and subject to demolition.”<sup>41</sup>*

It is important to make sure that Israel’s policies in the Galilee are put in their proper context, for the same priorities of Judaization can be seen at work in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. This linkage is made by Israeli officials themselves, as well as by organizations like the Jewish Agency, whose Settlement Department “intentionally does not distinguish” between the Occupied Territories and Israel ‘proper’.<sup>42</sup> In a 2006 interview with the “adviser to the prime minister on settlements” Uzi Keren, the official was “at pains to stress his commitment to bolstering the Jewish population of the Golan, the Galilee and the Negev, along with his concern for the West Bank and Gaza settlers”, since, in his own words, “settlement is settlement”. Keren noted approvingly the policy pursued by Sharon of creating “new settlements in the Galilee” in order to “demographically strengthen” the area.<sup>43</sup>

In June 2009, Upper Nazareth mayor Shimon Gapso called “Jewish settlement in the Galilee” a matter “of national importance”. He added that “as a man of Greater Israel”, he thinks “it is more important to settle in the Galilee than in Judea and Samaria”, and urged “the settlers there to come here”.<sup>44</sup> A few months later,

Silvan Shalom, Deputy PM and Minister for Development of the Negev and Galilee, held a press conference with prominent religious Zionist rabbis and announced steps “to encourage 300,000 Israelis to move to the Negev and an equal number to the Galilee by 2020”.<sup>45</sup> Shalom emphasised the need to “work together to settle all parts of Israel, including the Negev and Galilee and Judea and Samaria”, and that focussing on an area like the Galilee “should not come at the expense of settling all of Israel”. Rabbi Melamed concurred, saying that “the mitzvah to settle the Land of Israel applied to all the land, and that it was especially important now to ensure a significant Jewish majority in the Negev and Galilee.”

The unpalatable truth is that “the Judaization of space is at the heart of Israel’s ethno-national regime”.<sup>46</sup> This brief examination of Israeli policies in the Galilee is far from being a comprehensive account of the ways in which Israel seeks to maintain Jewish hegemony in Palestine/Israel, yet is enough in and of itself to call into serious question the claim that Israel is a ‘liberal democracy’. Considering Israeli policies towards the Palestinians in their totality, whether second-class citizens inside the pre-’67 borders, Palestinians under military rule, or indeed the refugees, can bring clarity to analysis and urgency to the need for civil society and international governments to hold Israel to account for its grave breaches of international law and continued denial of basic Palestinian rights.

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for the establishment of Karmiel [Judaization of the Galilee]. If I were to tell this directly I would be denounced as a racist.” Cohen, 2010, p.117 note.

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