

CHAPTER 2

THE ARABS IN ISRAEL:

Internal and Regional Developments

The point of departure here is the impact of non-linguistic forces on Arab language education. A first source of explanation is the political transformations and their impacts on the Arabs in Israel. Language education policies will be understood against this background. In this chapter we will examine the socio-political circumstances over the last five decades which have influenced the Arab society in Israel. An understanding of the characteristics of Arab society in general and the collective identity of Arabs as citizens of the State of Israel in particular requires an examination of three related subjects: Israel and its policy towards the Arab minority, internal developments in the Arab society itself and regional developments and their influence on the Arabs in Israel.

1. THE JEWISH STATE AND THE ARAB MINORITY

The Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict and the concept of the State of Israel and its definition as a Jewish-Zionist State constitute two important components that determine the character of the relations between the Arab minority and the Jewish majority in the State of Israel. These relations are wrapped in tension and persistent friction.

A concern for security resulting from the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict was decisive in setting the relations between the two peoples. The foundation laid after the establishment of the state was that, since the Arabs in Israel are a national minority belonging to the Arab world with which they identify emotionally and physically, they constitute a security risk to Israel. As long as no

solution to this conflict is found they will continue to be a security risk (Reiter, 1996). In the light of this conception, Arabs are perceived as citizens whose loyalty to the state is “questionable and a factor with a latent potential of danger to its Zionist character (in the best case) or to its very existence (in the worst case)” (Benziman & Mansur, 1992: 211).

Security arguments brought about the relief of Arabs¹ in Israel from the obligation to do military service and strengthened the notion of “conflict of loyalties” (Reiter, 1996) or “dual loyalty” (Landau, 1971). According to these assumptions the loyalty of Arabs in Israel leans more to the Arab people. Though the question of loyalty exempted the Arabs from serving in the Israeli Defense Forces, it at the same time justified the authorities in discriminating against them, for there are many benefits that are granted only to those who have served in the army. Arabs are not eligible for these benefits.

The security issue was not the factor which fixed the position and set the status of the Arabs in Israel, but it was an important support. An even more fundamental component is built into the definition of Israel as a Jewish State, as expressly declared in the Declaration of Independence. Many laws have been passed in order to strengthen the concept and definition of Israel as a State of the Jewish people.

Without doubt the intensive concern with the constant security problems prevented a deep and genuine discussion of the substance and identity of Israel, and relegated the relations between the minority and the majority into a secondary concern. Decision makers in Israel did not expressly set a policy to be taken towards the Arabs in Israel, neither for the medium range nor for the long range. Decisions were made under the pressure of events (Benziman & Mansur, 1992). But these events were isolated and scattered. Therefore there was no active pressure on decision makers to take a definitive stance on the subject. In general, solutions were *ad hoc*. For example, after strikes or violent demonstrations, and especially after the first Land Day in 1976,² decisions were taken concerning the expropriation of lands.

Landau (1993) points to this lack of a general policy. The government of the day postponed the confrontation with the problems of the minority because of the ongoing conflict and because of the increasing internal tensions among Jews. Nissan (1986) goes even further in his arguments and claims that the policy of the various governments in Israel bypassed “the Arab problem” and did not deal

¹ The exceptions are Druze Arabs whose service in the Israeli army is compulsory, and some Bedouin Arabs who serve on a voluntary basis.

² The Israeli policy of confiscating Arab Lands in the Galilee prompted the Palestinians in Israel to protest against this policy. On March 30, 1976 violent clashes took place between Palestinians in Israel and the Israeli police, following an official declaration that the government intends to confiscate Arab lands for establishing Jewish settlements. Six Palestinians were killed and several were wounded. This day came to be known as the Land Day, which is remembered and celebrated annually by the Palestinians in Israel.

with it directly. The main purpose in bypassing it was to reduce the points of friction with the population, and this, according to Nissan, even "necessarily reduces 'the full and complete realization of Zionism' as Ben-Gurion demanded in his time" (ibid. 164).

It should not be understood from what has been said above that no improvement has occurred or that changes have not been brought about in the situation of the Arabs in the State of Israel in the course of time. In the past decade in particular, a substantial change has occurred in the awareness of the leaders in Israel of the need to reduce the gaps between the minority and the majority. This has found expression in the change of policies and in the taking of tangible steps to reduce social and economic gaps.³ The changes that were made were modest and limited to certain areas, and there has been no substantial change in the status of Arabs in Israel. Israeli Jews continue to take precedence over Arabs in the various areas of life.

Many researchers speak of the intensive processes of democratization that Israeli society has undergone and is undergoing constantly. When they speak of democratization, do they refer only to equality in concrete material things (such as financial allocations and economic resources)? Or to broader principal requirements such as symbols? A state which defines itself as the state of a single ethnic group surely violates the basic principles of democracy and equality for all, as is reflected openly in the exclusive immigration laws (e.g. the Law of Return) and the goals for use of the country's land. Equality would seem to be impossible in principle as long as the State does not modify its character as a Jewish State.

Israel is not the only country in the world that has a conflict like this, but the security problem adds uniqueness to the case. In this context Rouhana says (1997: 56) "When strict security measures are to be taken by any state, it is likely that some of the measures will violate democratic values and the rule of law." Israel used military government⁴ law as a means to control the Arab population (Lustick, 1980).

³ A number of examples can give an indication of the changes which have occurred: The interruption of the expropriation of lands (mainly in the Little Triangle and in the Galilee); relaxation of the legitimacy of many buildings built illegally; decrease in the gaps between local authorities; cancellation of the discrimination against Arabs in children's allowances; integration of Arab academics in the government service; allocation of budgets in a meaningful way for education and health, roads, building and housing; establishment of funds for prizes granted to Arab writers for creativity and the awarding of the Israel Prize to Arabs. On the political level the Arabs served as a key bloc in Rabin's second term of office, and political agreements were even signed with the two Arab parties.

⁴ Israeli Military Government (1948-1966) was assigned to base the land area of Israel in the territories that had an Arab majority in the years 1948-1949, to thwart the possibility that local Arabs would assist military activity prompted by the neighboring Arab states, to

Security provided an excuse for many things. One was expropriation of Arab land, and the eviction of villages and towns of all their people. Another is discrimination against Arabs in the allocation of resources and payments such as National Insurance for children (until recently) and tuition in institutions of higher education.

2. INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

Having examined central matters in the policy of Israel towards the Arab minority, we will examine the internal developments that occurred in the Arab population itself. Changes occurred mainly in three areas: demography, socio-economy and education. We will attempt in the following to show how Israeli policy influenced the developments in these areas.

2.1 Demography

On 29 November 1947 the United Nations Assembly decided to divide Mandatory Palestine into two states: one Jewish and the other, Arab. The population within the boundaries of the designated Jewish State was estimated at 866,000: 514,000 Jews and almost 352,000 Arabs. Towards the end of 1947 in Mandatory Palestine there were 1,970,000 people, two thirds Arab and one third Jewish (Cohen 1948; Gilbert 1989; Kaiman 1984).

With the intensity of battles between the Jews on one side and the Palestinians and Arab armies on the other, many Palestinians were driven out or escaped with their lives from their homes, a large part to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the rest to neighboring Arab countries, mainly Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (Nazzal et. al, 1974).

Jewish policy was a major contributor to the fleeing of the Palestinian population (Morris, 1991). Towards the end of the war of 1948 only 156,000 Palestinians remained in the Jewish State (Al-Haj & Rosenfeld 1990). Those who stayed were for the most part villagers. Some 80% lived in villages in three principal areas: Galilee, the Little Triangle⁵ and the Negev (Kanaana 1975). As a result of the 1948 war the urban Palestinian population had (about 200,000)

oversee the movements of Arabs in sensitive regions, to restrain any hostile nationalist Arab organization, and to see to the rapid and effective punishment of security offenders.

⁵ The Little Triangle is a geographic term and reality that was coined only after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It is located between the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Coast region. In the cease-fire of Rhodes Agreement, Jordan handed over the area to Israel. Its borders were dictated by military events and political agreements. The population of the Little Triangle is about 200,000, about 20% of the total population of Palestinians in Israel.

almost disappeared and only 6% remained (Lustick, 1980). In addition, about 20% became "internal refugees"⁶ after they were forced by Israeli authorities to move to other settlements in Israel because of the destruction of their villages during and after the war (Al-Haj 1988a). Evacuees were not permitted to return because their villages and towns were taken over by Jewish settlers (Ozacky-Lazar 1993).⁷ Mustafa Kabaha and Barazilai (1996) report that the third generation of internal refugees is integrating well in the new places of living, despite the fact that they express a desire to return to their original villages.

In addition to this Israel has confiscated much land from the Palestinians since the establishment of the state, and especially in the 1950s. This influenced the employment structure of the Palestinians, as we shall discuss below.

Except for the results of the war and the confiscation of the lands of the Palestinians in Israel, especially in the 1950s, particularly in the Little Triangle and Galilee, the Arabs in those regions in Israel have not undergone any drastic demographic changes since then. However, considerable changes are occurring in the demography of the Bedouins in the Negev. Continuing a policy that began in Ottoman times of moving Bedouin from nomadic to sedentary living, Israel has expropriated lands that belong to them in an attempt to settle them in permanent settlements (Alafenish 1987; Falah, 1989). The struggle between the Bedouins and the government continues to this day.

The Arabs in Israel constitute 16 percent of the total population, numbering approximately 1,038,400⁸ (Israeli Statistical Almanac, 1999). The increase in the population is a result of the birth rate, which was on the average 4.4% per year from 1948 to 1988 (Israeli Statistical Almanac, 1989: 39). Beginning with the 1960s until today there has been a gradual and continuing decline in the birth

⁶ These are Palestinians who remained in Israel and were forced by Israeli authorities to move to new settlements in Israel since most of their villages were demolished during and immediately after the war, or the Israeli authorities evacuated them for security considerations and promised to allow them to return back. However, the evacuees were not allowed to come back, since their settlements were occupied by Israeli Jewish settlers.

⁷ The well-known cases are the villages Ikrit and Bar'am. These villages, next to the Lebanese border, were evacuated in the middle of the 1948 war by the Israeli army. The Israeli authorities promised to let them return when the war was over. However, until today the villagers have not been permitted to return, and for about 50 years they have been waging a public and legal struggle for their return to their villages, but so far in vain.

⁸ In Israeli statistics East Jerusalem is included as part of the Arab population in the State of Israel. The Arab population of East Jerusalem, which includes the Old City and the inhabited areas outside it, numbers 180,00 people. East Jerusalem is not included in describing Arab language education, not only for political reasons, but because linguistically and in terms of language education it has more to do with the West Bank than the Arabs in Israel.

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