



The Palestinian minority in Israel: The 'challenge' of the Jewish state and its implications

AS'AD GHANEM

ABSTRACT *The Palestinian minority in Israel, like minorities elsewhere in the modern world, has produced a demand for personal and group equality in the State of Israel. Developments in this sphere support the descriptions of the development of other minorities in various empirical and theoretical studies of societies that are deeply split on an ethnic or national basis. Minorities struggle in various situations against discrimination in order to achieve equality with the majority. The Palestinian minority in Israel wants a change in the ethnic, Jewish–Zionist character of the state. It wants to turn the state into the state of all its citizens and also wants a collective status similar to that enjoyed by the Jews. It wants directly to influence matters affecting these citizens and future developments and the future status of the minority itself. The minority's demands are extremely revolutionary in light of the ethnic character of the state and the fact that the Jewish majority supports a continuation of this character, generally giving priority to continued discrimination against the minority. The combination of the state and the majority support for the current minority policy suggests that the Palestinians will encounter a 'challenge' of institutional and public opposition to their demands. This pushes the minority to an inevitable deeper existential distress. The appearance of clear signs of a deterioration in the minority's status is leading to a multidimensional crisis. The situation described in this article confronts the state, majority, and minority with hard decisions concerning the nature of the partnership that can satisfy the demands of the majority and aspirations of the minority.*

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, local, regional and international politics have been significantly engaged in an intensive and ongoing discourse whose objective is to provide an appropriate response to the challenge presented by the vast mosaic of groups that consolidate around various bases, of which the most important are ethnic, religious and national. Inter-group struggles are not insoluble. The solutions are latent in a reasonable and appropriate response to the demands and needs of the various groups on both sides of the conflict; they can be guaranteed by the application of defined techniques for maintaining stability and public order in societies that are deeply divided between different ethnic or national groups.

As'ad Ghanem is at the Institute for Peace Research giv'at Haviva and the Political Science Department, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel.

The guidelines for a settlement and solution of intergroup problems are a product of combining the demands and needs of the minority group with the reaction of the majority and the state to these demands and needs. In the theoretical literature dealing with conflict resolution in pluralistic states that are deeply divided on an ethnic, religious or national basis, one can discern, in general lines, two levels of principles that lead to just and democratic solutions to the status of the minority groups.¹

The first is the individual level. This level of liberal rights has to do with the basic rights of members of the groups, rights to which one is entitled not on the basis of membership in particular groups but on the basis of equal citizenship in the state. Here it is possible to distinguish political, social, economic and cultural rights to which every human being is entitled as a citizen of his or her country. The pure application of a system based exclusively on these rights is the development of majoritarian-liberal democracy in which groups are not recognised as such and the state is not a party to any struggle between these groups, but instead grants equal rights to citizens as individuals on the basis of their citizenship.²

The second is the group level. Many minority groups in history have demanded and asserted their right to group equality.³ A minority group may demand expanded autonomy in addition to the equal liberal rights to which members of the group are entitled and full partnership in management of the affairs of state. The fullest development of this turns the state, officially and essentially, into a binational (or multinational, depending on the number of groups) state. This is a system whose essence is the recognition of groups as the prime component of the public order and the division of power, benefits and rights on a group basis, in addition to granting equality to all citizens on an individual basis. A prominent example of this is the arrangement between Flemings and Walloons in Belgium, the situation in Switzerland and that in Canada.⁴

How can states relate, in practice and theory, to the rights of groups on these two levels? In principle, one can distinguish two main approaches. The *first* approach involves discrimination against the non-dominant groups and preservation of the dominance of the majority, through the use of various techniques which may range from expulsion or annihilation, through subjugation and denial of democratic rights, to control with partial democratic rights for members of the minority group.⁵ All these possibilities and methods, which are adopted by states to regulate the status of groups by using the techniques mentioned above, are problematic, if only because they are inimical to the demands and needs of the weaker groups, on both the individual and group level. These techniques, which have been adopted and tried out by states in the past, have themselves been a source of conflict, frequently violent, and have led or will lead sooner or later to the collapse of the system of which they are part, or cause an acceleration of cruel processes of expulsion and genocide.

The *second* approach and alternative to one specific group ruling over the state and thereby providing the fuel for immediate or potential conflict, is to grant equality to all the population groups. This can be achieved by negotiations among the various groups or between the state and the deprived minorities.

In practice it can be achieved only by one of two techniques: territorial partition or elimination of group dominance.

The implementation of the two different approaches leads to two different concepts and models of states. The first is the *ethnic model*, in which countries and societies with deep ethnic divisions prefer one ethnic group over the others.⁶ In these countries, nationalism is ethnic rather than civil (territorial). Some of these countries have what is, formally speaking, a democratic system, but considerations of ethnic equality take precedence over democratic ones in the treatment of citizens. Others have adopted a totalitarian regime, and used both violent and non-violent methods towards subordinate groups in order to maintain the dominance of the ruling group. In both cases, one ethnic group (and its members as individuals) enjoys preference over the other groups (and their individual members). The difference lies in how the 'inferior' ethnic communities are treated.

The second concept is the *democratic model*. Democracy is a form of social organisation within a specific political framework. It entails the existence of two levels of agreement. The *essential level* concerns guarantees of the observance of two fundamental principles: (1) freedom and (2) equality before the law for all members of the society (today referred to as 'citizens'). The absence of one or both of these components renders the society undemocratic.⁷

In addition to the basic conditions mentioned above, democratic regimes that have emerged in deeply divided societies and states have also developed special arrangements through which the state and its organs endeavour to implement equalisation policies and even to establish institutions whose main purpose is to look for discrimination against citizens or members of certain groups within the society and to apply appropriate means for dealing with this discrimination. The democratic model is manifested in the abrogation of the dominance of any one group or the state's identification with it, the granting of full equality to all groups, and the rendering of the state neutral in the contest among such groups—that is, it is identified with all groups in equal measure. The arrangements include a real and honest attempt to cope with the problem of ethnic divisions and ensure equality among all ethnic groups and their members. These arrangements operate on two main levels: the personal, individual level and the group level.⁸

A minority in an ethnic state faces uncomfortable situations both politically and existentially. These stem from the ethnic structure of the state. An ethnic state, by its very definition, excludes national groups other than the dominant ethnic group from the ensemble of national objectives of the state and grants the dominant group preferential treatment that is anchored in legislation. The unpleasant situation of discrimination against the minority ethnic group stems from the strategic refusal of the state to respond to demands for equality, belonging and equity within state mechanisms. Every ethnic group that wants to be part of the state system will demand equality, belonging and identity, values which are basic non-negotiable human needs that cannot be ignored or permanently repressed.⁹

The question is: what do the Palestinians in Israel desire for their group?¹⁰ What status would they prefer their group to have? What powers do they want

to have in the Israeli system? If they aspire to equality with the Jewish group/the Jews, what is the essence of this equality? What factors hinder its realisation? What changes must the system/state make in order to permit realisation of these aspirations?

The aspirations and demands of the Palestinians in Israel

The Palestinians in Israel, as citizens and as a minority group, want to attain equality with the majority Jewish group.¹¹ Most Arabs see this equality as constituting full parity with the Jews. The results of a survey that I conducted in early 1994 showed a strong commitment among Arabs to achieve equality with the Jewish majority, an equality which they saw as important for advancing the status of the Arabs.¹² In response to the question, 'To what extent is it important to achieve full equality in the state to advance the status of the Palestinians in Israel as a group?', 93.8% responded that it was 'very important' or 'important'. This equality was emphasised when the respondents were presented with a variety of areas related to gaps between Jews and Palestinians in the country: the public services, distribution of resources, public positions, participation in government, and parity in determining the nature and goals of the state (see below).

The Palestinians in Israel are not happy with the living conditions of their group (according to the same survey); they demand that the state serve them on an equal footing with the Jews, provide them with equal resources and equal public services, allocate appointments in the public sector on a fair basis to members of their group, permit them full partnership in government and the government coalition, and grant them parity in determining the nature and objectives of the state. In their eyes, the state should serve its citizens equally. In essence they are demanding that the state be the state of its citizens and not a state that serves the interests of one group (Jews) more favourably than those of other groups of its citizens. In essence this all reveals a desire for a change in the character of the state.

Respondents' answers to direct questions about the nature of the state indicate that the Palestinians in Israel are opposed to the Jewish-Zionist character of the country, expressed in a clear preference for Jews in every sphere related to the state, its future, its society and its citizens in general. The respondents are very conscious of the fact that Israel serves Jews first and foremost and not all its citizens; most of them (66.3%) believe that 'the State of Israel, according to its overt objectives and policy, manifests the fact that it is the state only of the Jews'. By contrast, only 33.7% think that the state evinces in its policies and objectives the fact that it is 'a state shared by its Jewish and Arab citizens'.

What change do the Palestinians in Israel want to see in the character of the state? They believe that they must achieve equality, something which they consider to be in doubt and even impossible as long as Israel is a 'Zionist-Jewish state'. Even though, according to the survey, they are split over whether Israel has 'a right to exist as a Jewish-Zionist state', roughly half (48.2%) do in fact believe that 'Israel has not right to exist as a Jewish-Zionist state'. In response to another question, the vast majority (86.4%) supported the abolition

TABLE 1
**The State of Israel's character should be (according to the
 Arabs) (N = 728) (%)**

1. The state only of the Jewish people	2.6
2. The state of the Jewish people and its Arab citizens	17.2
3. The state of its Jewish and Arab citizens	66.5
4. The state of its Arab and Jewish citizens and the Palestinian people wherever they are	11.9
5. Other	1.6

of this character. For most of them (58.6%), the state has no right to intervene in order 'to preserve the Jewish majority'.

This has two implications. First, Palestinians do not believe that the state should intervene in order to preserve the Jewish majority in the state; that is, it should not promote the immigration of Jews. In part, this would mean the repeal of the 'Law of Return' and an end to activities taken by the state in Israel and abroad to encourage Jewish immigration. Second, nothing must be done to hinder a process in which the Arab citizens of the state or any other group might become a majority; that is, the state should not be ethnic and an agent that intervenes or prefers one ethnic group over others among its citizens. In practice, this is a demand to abolish the ethnic character of the state (see Table 1) and turn it into a civil state with a liberal character in everything that has to do with its relations to citizenship and its citizens. According to the survey, most of the Palestinians in Israel (89.9%) believe that it is important to change the current character of the country and adopt a different one. For a majority of the Palestinians in Israel (66.5%), the preferred definition of the character of the state is 'the state of its Jewish and Arab citizens'.

What changes (in addition to abolishing the ethnic character, objectives and vocation of the state) must be made in order to express the essence of group equality that the Arabs wish to attain in Israel? What changes need to be made with regard to the group status of the Palestinians that would signify conversion of the state into 'the state of its citizens'?

In societies that are split on an ethnic, religious, national or other basis, we can distinguish various arrangements (or the absence thereof)—institutionalised legal frameworks (or abstract, partisan and non-institutionalised frameworks)—to regulate the status of the various groups and guarantee the stability of these societies. In practice there is an unlimited number of such possibilities; nevertheless, we can distinguish the broad lines of three types: irredentism and segregation leading to independence or annexation by another country; cultural, political or territorial autonomy; and incorporation and assimilation into a civil nation.¹³ An analysis of the answers to a survey conducted in early 1994 shows that the Palestinians in Israel want the country to develop a model of 'liberal democracy' with clear and distinct elements of the 'binational model'. Such an arrangement has traditionally been considered unrealistic because it combines elements of two different models for resolving the problems of minorities; more

TABLE 2

**The importance of selected items for the advancement of the Palestinians in Israel
(N = 768)**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Very important or important</i>	<i>Somewhat important</i>	<i>Not important</i>
Recognition by the authorities as a national minority	79.5	15.0	5.5
Establishment of an Arab university	78.2	13.9	7.9
Arab control of the Arab educational system and cultural life	78.2	14.6	7.1
The establishment of an Arab workers' association	76.7	15.1	8.2
The establishment of an Arab health fund	62.9	19.9	17.2
Expansion of the powers of Arab local authorities	87.5	9.8	2.7
Transfer of the Waqf to Arab administration	82.1	12.8	5.1
Election of the Follow-up Committee for Arab Affairs by the Palestinians in direct countrywide elections	73.7	15.2	10.9
Official recognition by the authorities of the Supreme Monitoring Committee as the representative of the Palestinians in Israel	73.9	17.1	9.0

recent theoretical literature, however, supports the idea that such a regime is possible on both the theoretical level and the practical level of daily life.¹⁴

The changes that the Arabs want for their group have two levels or dimensions: on the one hand, they insist on integration into the state and its institutions on a par with the Jews (including the allocation of resources, positions, the capacity for equal expression and influence over decision making and the political process in general); on the other hand, they also support institutional autonomy for their group. Their answers (see Table 2) emphasise the importance they attribute to 'recognition of their group as a national minority' by the state authorities and express an aspiration to achieve autonomy within the state. For example, they are in favour of an educational autonomy that would be expressed by 'the establishment of an Arab university', self-administration by the Arabs of their own educational system and cultural life (buildings, employees, curricula, and so on), and by the establishment of a whole series of Arab institutions that would express the essence of this institutional autonomy: 'the establishment of an Arab workers' organisation', 'the establishment of an Arab health fund', 'the transfer of the Waqf to Arab administration', 'expansion of the powers of Arab local authorities', and 'official recognition by the authorities of the Follow-up Committee as the representative of the Palestinians in Israel'. The respondents further emphasised the importance of the election of the members of the committee in direct elections, even though most Palestinians in Israel are not happy with its performance—only a small proportion expressed very great or great satisfaction with the functioning of the Follow-up Committee (24.5%). (There was a still lower degree of satisfaction with the performance of its affiliated bodies.) Similar data about Arab aspirations for cultural and educational autonomy were found by Smootha in surveys he conducted in 1976, 1980, 1985 and 1988.¹⁵

The figures show in essence that most the Palestinians in Israel are not happy with their group status and wish to achieve integration into the state and its

institutions, along with institutional autonomy—of course as part of the Israeli state and citizenship and in addition to the equality with the Jewish majority to which they aspire. In essence this autonomy within the framework of the state is of the binational type, an arrangement that reflects the existence of two national groups in the state—Jews and Arabs.

Israel as an ethnic state and the blocking of the minority

In democratic regimes, there are arrangements to safeguard the liberties of citizens and their equality before the law, alongside other structural arrangements intended to guarantee the minority the fulfilment of its right to equality and to conduct a political struggle to achieve its demands. Are there such arrangements and conditions in Israel that permit the Arab minority to attain equality or realise its demands for parity? Does the Jewish–Zionist commitment of the state hinder the realisation of these demands?

With regard to the combination of democracy and ethnicity, Israel should be classified as an ‘ethnic state’ like Turkey, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Canada (until about 20 years ago). Israel extends limited rights to members of the minority group and integrates them to a limited extent in its politics, society, economy and media—although by no means on a par with the Jews—while conducting a long-term policy of control and supervision that guarantees the preservation of Jewish dominance and the marginalisation of the Palestinian minority. On the one hand, in principle Israel permits its Palestinian citizens to realise their basic rights, such as suffrage and the right to run for office, along with freedom of expression, movement and association. On the other hand, it safeguards Jewish primacy in all spheres, including the laws of the state.¹⁶

On the one hand, Israel sustains democratic norms of government at the institutional level and implements such practices as regular elections, peaceful regime change, separation of powers, separation of the military and politics, and the like. On the other hand, it does not satisfy the substantive requirements for democracy. Israel as a state is identified with one ethnic/national group, the Jews, and adopts many methods so as to avoid including its Arab citizens as equal citizens who receive full benefits on a par with those received by the Jewish citizens. In practice, Israel preserves the inferiority of the Arabs *vis-à-vis* the Jews while discriminating against the former in a broad variety of spheres and at various levels, in order to preserve the status quo and prevent the Arabs from achieving equality. What is more, the Jewish majority supports the ethnic state and its policy towards the Arab minority. Its support for this is a guarantee of the continuation of the ethnic policy and practice that treats the Jews as superior and Arabs as inferior, and also guarantees the continued stability of the ethnic state. This makes life difficult for the minority and sends it a signal that the possibilities for changing its status in the present demographic and political situation are nil. This in turn pushes it towards a crisis situation and a quest for revolutionary solutions to its status within the system.

Israel as an ethnic state

Israel as a state and political system preserves the superiority of the Jews and inferiority of the Arabs on three levels over which it has jurisdiction.¹⁷

1. On the ideological and declarative level: the State of Israel was established as the state of the Jewish people. It has a Jewish–Zionist nature; its objectives, symbols and policies are built on the fact that it is the state of the Jewish people and denies the existence of the Palestinian national minority within it. This situation was exacerbated by the passage of the amendment to the Basic Law: The Knesset in 1985, which enshrined in law a ban on the participation in the Knesset election of lists that do not explicitly recognise the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. Not only does this situation lead to discrimination against Palestinian citizens on a daily basis and eliminate even the theoretical possibility of their achieving equality with the Jews, because of the need for the Jews to feel their superiority in their own state, it also leaves the Palestinian citizens in Israel both legally and formally without a framework that is defined as their state.

Palestinian citizens are discriminated against when it comes to the symbols and values of the state and its institutions. Compared with the Jews, who treat the symbols, values and institutions of the state as their own and see them as part of their heritage and a source of identification, Palestinian citizens feel alienated from these exclusively Jewish and Zionist symbols. Palestinian citizens cannot identify with many of the symbols of the state in which they are citizens, because these symbols are rooted exclusively in the religious and ideological tradition of the majority.

2. On the structural level: the Arabs are involuntarily excluded at the structural level of Israeli institutions. These institutions are deemed to be the property of the Jews and are supposed to serve Jewish–Israeli or general Jewish objectives, and not necessarily Israeli objectives relevant to all citizens of the country, including the Palestinians among them. There are many means of exclusion at the structural level, such as the exclusion of Arabs from the centres of political decision making, their non-induction into the army, the non-employment of Palestinians in senior positions, the existence of special institutions to deal with Arabs, the structure of Arab education, which is discriminatory compared with that of other groups, discrimination against Palestinian citizens in the context of the structure of the public media, and so on.

3. On the executive and policy level: this includes various forms of discrimination and exclusion of Arabs, in many ways, from being treated as equal citizens—discrimination in legislation, discrimination in the allocation of budgets, and discrimination in the allocation of land. In Israel there is fundamental legal discrimination in favour of Jewish citizens and to the detriment of Arab citizens. The state pays a considerable price in its laws to emphasise its ethnic, Jewish–Zionist nature. The discrimination in law relates to the basic objectives of the state as they are expressed by its leaders and the Jewish majority. Thus, for example, the Law of Return and the Citizenship Law are two statutes that are intended to preserve and increase the Jewish majority in the state; their clear objective is to decrease the number of non-Jews, including Arabs. The main

manifestations of this are found in the Law of Return, the Law of Citizenship, the special legal status granted to non-Israeli Jewish institutions, and Amendment 7A to the Basic Law: The Knesset, passed in 1985. In addition, there is a whole series of legal arrangements that discriminate against the Arabs and give preference to the Jews on symbolic and substantive levels—mainly laws that give preferential status to the Jewish religious and ethnic heritage, symbols and values. When it comes to the allocation of budgets, Palestinian citizens suffer in practice from long-standing discrimination in almost every sector. The various spheres of this discrimination have been documented in many studies and reports, issued by both official bodies and various non-profit organisations, such as the annual report of Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Equal Opportunities in Israel. Despite recent changes for the better, pointed out by the studies referred to, up-to-date comparisons of the Jewish and Arab sectors in various areas indicate that the disparities that stem chiefly from discrimination persist and will evidently continue to exist and hamper the Palestinian citizens of Israel for many years to come.

There is also discrimination with regard to territorial distribution and the national and regional development plans. The vast majority of the lands belonging to Arab citizens have been expropriated during the five decades of Israel's existence. The state has adopted various means to deprive the Arabs of their land and turned most land into state land. This real estate is administered centrally by countrywide and regional planning bodies. The planning committees always include representatives of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Construction and Housing, the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund. The last two are funded by Jewish communities outside Israel and are supposed to serve the objectives of these communities or of Jews in Israel; they are committed to excluding the Arabs from any consideration as potential beneficiaries of state land. Even the Israeli institutions that are represented on these committees do not concern themselves with the interests of all citizens on an equal basis and give strong preference to Jews.

In practice, Israeli planning policy is meant to serve the Jews while excluding the Arabs from any consideration as beneficiaries. It preserves the benefits of planning exclusively for the Jews, even though the Arabs paid the historical and moral price of the realisation of the various Israeli plans. In this way planning policy serves as a tool for controlling the Arabs and preventing their 'expansion', while promoting the massive establishment of Jewish settlements with vast reserves of land for future development.

Support among the Jewish majority for the ethnic character of the state

What is the position of the Jewish majority towards the ethnic state and its policy towards the Palestinian minority in Israel—a policy that is intended to preserve this system? According to the results of a survey conducted in late 1995, the ethnic state and its policies towards the minority enjoy a significant degree of support among Jews; this massive support constitutes an insurance policy for the continuation of the ethnic system that discriminates in favour of the Jewish majority and against the Arab minority.¹⁸

According to the survey, most of the Jewish public in Israel supports the ethnic state and its policy towards the Arab minority. The Jews see Israel as a Jewish state and even as the state of the Jewish people and want to preserve the Jewish majority in Israel. The overwhelming majority (96.4%) wants to maintain this situation and the general conception that lies behind it, and to reinforce it on various levels. Some 72.1% of the Jewish public believe that Israel is the homeland of the Jews only; a similar percentage (72%) agree with the legal definition of the state as the state of the Jewish people, to the exclusion of its Arab citizens. Only a minority, 27.9%, are willing to support a version whereby Israel is the common homeland of Jews and Arabs. Some 59.1% of the Jews believe that the Jewish–Zionist nature of the state should be strengthened even further; 35.6% support leaving it as it is. A large proportion of the Jews (68.1%) believe that the Law of Return, which grants every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel and automatically acquire its citizenship, first-class citizenship, while not allowing the same right to other persons, including Arabs, should be preserved. Only 3% support its repeal.

With regard to the state and its character as a Jewish and democratic state, most Israeli Jews, if forced to choose between these two components, prefer the Jewish element over the democratic; 58.1% would prefer to live in a non-democratic Jewish state rather than a non-Jewish democratic state; the state must give preference to the Jews over its Arab citizens. Most Jews (74.1%) believe that the state should prefer the Jews to a great extent or somewhat over Arabs.

With regard to symbols and the Jewish hegemony thereof, most Israeli Jews are not willing to make any changes in order to include the Arabs and give them some symbolic representation. Some 85.6% are opposed to any change in the symbols of the state, such as the flag or national anthem, so that Arabs too could identify with them; the same percentage (85.6%) are opposed to rewording the national anthem so that Arabs could accept it. These symbols are Jewish and are derived from Jewish heritage; Jews in Israel consider the state to be their own and are not willing to give the Arabs a share in shaping it. In addition, almost a third of Jews (30.9%) believe that Arabs should be denied the right to vote in Knesset elections. All in all, it seems that most of the Jews are not happy with the fact that parties considered to be Arab, and which represent the interests of the Arab population, are allowed to run for the Knesset. Evidently this group, or broad swathes of it, believes that the Knesset is an institution that should include only Jewish parties representing Jewish interests.

Social separation between Jews and Arabs, as part of structural separation, distances the Jews from the Arabs and makes it possible to direct material benefits to Jewish citizens; this too is part of the ethnic policy. This policy has broad support among the Jews. At the structural–social level significant numbers of Jews are not willing for their supervisor at work to be an Arab; 43.8% are not willing to have an Arab boss; 25.6% are willing but would prefer a Jew. Some 56.3% are willing to live only in an exclusively Jewish neighbourhood; 23.4% are willing to live in a mixed neighbourhood but would prefer to live in a Jewish neighbourhood.

From the cultural perspective, a majority of Israeli Jews want to preserve the primacy of Hebrew culture and language and are not willing to let Arab culture

and language participate in the shaping of Israeli culture. Israeli Jews are not interested in cultural contacts with Arabs. A significant percentage (30.1%) believed that there is no reason to relate to Arab culture as an important part of the national culture in Israel; 39.7% have reservations about this idea. A majority (59.9%) are opposed to the playing of Arab music on Hebrew radio; 70.7% believe that there is no reason for the law to stipulate that the names of streets and towns appear on road signs in Arabic as well as Hebrew, even though Arabic is, by law, an official language of the State of Israel. Some 48.6% of the Jews are opposed or tend to be opposed to the possibility that the Jews and Palestinians in Israel might create shared values and customs.

The Jews reject the establishment of an egalitarian democratic state in Israel. Some 91.9% do not agree that Israel should stop being a Jewish–Zionist state and become a consociational democracy, in which the Jews and the Arabs would be recognised as equal national groups, be represented according to their proportion of the population, and be equal partners in running the country. An even larger majority (95.5%) are not willing for Israel to turn into a liberal democracy, to stop being a Jewish–Zionist state, to abolish its recognition of Jews and Arabs as separate groups, to allow them to compete among themselves freely, and allow those among them who so desire to live together and intermarry. The Jews are satisfied with the ethnic state; they wish to preserve it and even strengthen it. According to the data surveyed above, there is support and legitimacy among the Jews for the ethnic state and its policies towards its Arab citizens, even though the latter suffer from the ethnic policy and are experiencing a crisis as a result of its policies towards them, as we shall see below.

According to the leading Israeli sociologist, Sammy Smooha, the Jewish public's support for the ethnic-Jewish state consists of the following elements: (1) the Arabs constitute a hostile minority which has to be watched; (2) the Arabs should be grateful for the progress they have enjoyed since 1948; (3) Israel is the state of the Jewish people and also a Jewish–Zionist state—the Arabs should be content with limited individual rights and not demand recognition as a national minority; (4) the Arabs constitute a new minority with no connection to the Palestinian people; (5) the Arabs have to accept the fact of their being outside the power and decision-making junctions in the state.¹⁹

The situation of the Palestinians in Israel in light of the policies adopted towards them

Since the establishment of Israel 50 years ago, the Palestinians in Israel have known many changes, influenced by many factors, such as the internal complexity of Arab society, Israeli policy towards them, the attitude of the Palestinian national movement towards them, and many others. Changes at the social, cultural, economic and political levels have been documented in dozens of primary and secondary research studies.²⁰ Despite the great differences among scholars with regard to areas of study and discipline, reliance on general theories, and the presentation of different models, the literature on Palestinians

in Israel can be said to follow a single approach that might be called 'the normal development approach'.²¹ This approach describes the development of the Palestinians in Israel as being similar to that of other minorities in Western democracies. It presents this development along the lines described below which, scholars assert, are typical for the development of the Arabs. In the basic approach followed in most of the research literature written and published in Israel and abroad to date, there is a large number of elements that can bolster the main argument: the Palestinians in Israel are undergoing a process of natural development and normalisation, which includes processes of construction and consolidation that are turning them into a society with the characteristics of a normal society.²²

In the preferred optimum situation of a democratic state, an Arab minority would be able to achieve equality. This is the spirit in which the Arabs seek equality in Israel. But because of the ethnic mission of the state and its policies, which preclude any possibility of equality, even at the level of basic laws,²³ Israel employs two policy components in its treatment of the Arabs—the maximum ethnic component and the limited democratic one. The ethnic policy emphasises the primacy of the Jews in every sphere, while the democratic policy integrates the Arabs to a limited extent and creates a mistaken feeling of normal development even among members of the minority. It furthers the perplexing situation in which members of the minority find themselves. As a result of this policy, the minority faces a severe existential crisis that percolates into many domains of collective existence. The distress includes various dimensions of the development of the Palestinian minority and also applies to the relations between this group and the state and between this group and the Palestinian people.

The combination of the limited democratic element with the ethnic element in orientating policy towards the Arab minority impedes the minority rather than helps it. It creates a feeling of progress and integration in the life of the state and a mistaken sense of normal development. In practice the options available do not help the minority achieve equality and contribute to a confused situation of development; what is more, they cause the existing structure of the minority to disintegrate while preventing its integration into the structures of the state. Thus ultimately the minority loses its way of life and social and political structure and cannot adopt some substitute for them. This is manifested in the existential distress and crisis that beset the minority as the ethno-national state and its minority policy gain strength.

In my opinion, the normal development model suffers from a fundamental error in understanding the situation of the Arabs. The correct approach for understanding the development of the Arabs is that known in the literature as the 'crisis development approach',²⁴ according to which the Palestinian–Arab community in Israel faces distress and crisis on two levels, daily and strategic, which could develop further in the future. In the current situation, the alternatives available to the Arabs with regard to their relations with the state and the Palestinian people are limited and do not permit it to develop normally. Below I will discuss the internal dimension of this development among the Arab minority in Israel.

The economic and social field

The changes in the size of the Arab population and in the physical structure of the village have not been accompanied by appropriate economic development. Arab towns still have no industrial zones or industry;²⁵ Arab communities are at the bottom of the scale in indices of the socioeconomic condition of communities in Israel.²⁶ About 60% of the Arab citizens of Israel live below the poverty line according to official statistics.²⁷ The Arabs suffer from a severe housing shortage as a result of government policies. This problem has become worse over the years.²⁸ Many Arab villages are still not recognised; that is, they do not receive any basic services such as water, electricity, and the like.²⁹ The Bedouin Palestinians who live in the Negev and constitute about 10% of all the Palestinians in Israel suffer from ongoing persecution by the authorities; their ownership of the land is not officially recognised and the state is attempting to concentrate them in settlements it has chosen for them, unlike the Jews in the Negev who choose their own way of life and mode of habitation.³⁰ With regard to their economic status, the Arabs suffer at every level and parity between them and the Jews is still very far away.

Socially, the *hamula* (clan) still exists as a traditional-primitive institution and is the basis of the social structure of the Palestinians in Israel. The nuclear family, which has assumed a key economic role, has still not taken on the same prominence at the social and political levels. This leads to many social and political complications and hinders the development of the Arab community in Israel.³¹ It also places a question mark over the ability of the Palestinians in Israel to adjust to democratic norms of life and behaviour.

The condition of the individual, in light of the function of the *hamula*, is very severe. Arab society discriminates against the individual and does not give him or her sufficient room for normal development. The most significant manifestation of the discrimination against the individual is the condition of Arab women as individuals, subject to a tremendous set of pressures. Their situation as a minority within the Arab minority is such that their status is poor and they suffer many disadvantages, both absolute as well as in relation to the Jewish women in the country.³²

The internal development associated with demographic changes and social and economic changes, in addition to the experience of the Palestinians in Israel with the political system practised in the country, has led to the partial adoption of ways of life and democratic patterns of conduct and thought by the Palestinians in Israel. The social and economic complications and the selective policy of the Israeli authorities have led to the creation of a number of significant contradictions that accompany the process of democratisation being experienced by the Arabs.³³ The main contradictions are: active participation in Israeli politics at the national level alongside a limited ability to influence decision making at the Israeli national level; a strong fight for equality and integration in the Israeli system, accompanied by the establishment of Arab-Palestinian national organisations; a rise in 'violent' incidents committed by Arabs during the period of the *intifada*, alongside the development of a consensus among them concerning the need and obligation to wage their struggle within the framework of Israeli law;

the absence of an opportunity to elect a countrywide leadership for the Arabs, alongside the fact that the Follow-up Committee emerged and functions, at least on the surface, as a countrywide leadership for the Arabs; voting patterns in national elections that give maximum weight to national and ideological considerations, alongside voting patterns in local elections based on the *hamula*.

These oppositions point to a practical difficulty in the assimilation of democracy so that it can become an integral part of the Arabs' lives. Their life in two worlds, democratic and traditional-undemocratic, makes things difficult for the Arabs and complicates their ability to develop as a democratic group internally and to be absorbed as an integral part of the political, social and economic life of the State of Israel. In practice this leads to thinking about special arrangements that would be appropriate for the Arabs as a group and individuals within the Israeli system.

The political field

In the existing situation, both the Israeli identity and a Palestinian identity for the Arab citizens of Israel cannot be whole and inclusive. This sums up the problem of the collective identity of the Arab citizens.³⁴ The Palestinian component in the identity of the Palestinians in Israel cannot be whole when the Palestinian national movement is setting up a Palestinian homeland in a different place. The strength of the Israeli component in their identity is a subject of controversy in the literature.³⁵ In their official definition, the Palestinians in Israel are citizens of the state. But their Israeli identity does not exist if one considers the essence of collective identity to be a sense of psychological affiliation and emotional sympathy. The difficulty in their situation is not in the opposition between the two full identities, Israeli and Palestinian, but the incompleteness of both identities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, chiefly because of the military government, the Arabs were prevented from crystallising a strong leadership that could spearhead their struggle to advance their status on two levels: the day-to-day level and the group level. The abolition of the military government and the slow release from its shadow led to the beginnings of the consolidation of a group leadership in the form of the Council of Heads of Arab Local Councils, established in 1974, and later in the follow-up Committee for Arab Affairs, established in 1982. These organisations have led the struggle of the Arabs since the mid-1970s, a struggle that reached its acme in the late 1980s with the proclamation of a strike on Equality Day in June 1987 and on Peace Day in December 1987—general strikes that symbolised the two chief points in the struggle of the Palestinians in Israel—equality and peace. Since then there has been a slow deterioration in the status of the Follow-up Committee. In recent years it has not been a source of authority, neither for the general public nor even for its members, and has been subject to paralysis stemming from power struggles between different groups represented on the committee. Significant political pluralism has been experienced by Israeli Arabs during the 1980s, with the appearance and consolidation of the Islamic Movement, the appearance of the Progressive List for Peace, the Democratic Arab Party, and other countrywide organisations and local associa-

tions. Instead of this development strengthening the status of the leadership that represented different strata and cross-sections of the Palestinians in Israel, it led to its weakening and disintegration. The monitoring committee became an arena of perpetual squabbling between the representatives of the different political forces, until it was frequently better not to convene the committee to avoid such scenes. This weakened the strength of the follow-up committee, which since the beginning of the 1990s has no longer played a significant function for the Arabs or *vis-à-vis* the Israeli authorities, even though in practice the objectives that it was established to pursue, namely peace and equality, have still not been achieved—especially equality, which seems particularly far away.

The problem on this level is inherent in the fact that the leadership of the Palestinians in Israel, whether represented on the follow-up Committee or not, still has not formulated an agreed demand for group particularism for the Palestinians in Israel, such as recognition as a national minority with its own national, linguistic, cultural and moral characteristics, even in general terms. It has certainly not inculcated this demand in the general public, as was done by the leaders of the Palestinian national movement in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and diaspora when it formulated the demand for Palestinian self-determination and disseminated it to the entire Palestinian people, or as the Zionist–Jewish national movement did in disseminating the same demand to the Jewish people. Even though the concept of ‘national minority’ and the Arabs’ demand to be recognised as such has become a cliché and daily demand, the practical meaning of such recognition is still not clear. Even the Communist Party and DFPE (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality), which actually originated this concept, are still not sure, to judge from the literature they circulate as parties or individuals or through their spokespersons, what is the clear and precise significance of this concept.

The cultural field

The severe situation with regard to identity is related to a ripening crisis of cultural and social values, at least among the Arab elite. After the 1948 war the Palestinians in Israel found themselves involuntarily cut off from Palestinian culture and the Arab world. The war also caused the total destruction of their urban centres, and of the middle-class and cultural elite who should have continued to nurture Palestinian Arab culture. The Arab population was left without an infrastructure for creating and fostering Arab culture and without channels to the Arab mother culture. The first window to the Arab world was opened after the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967. After that, additional channels to the Arab world opened over time, following the peace agreement with Egypt and later with Jordan. The Arab world itself is suffering from an existential cultural crisis. Israel, on the other hand, offered effervescent cultural institutions and cultural activity. Because these are dominated by Jewish–Zionist slogans, the Arabs were left only with the possibility of adopting the outer glitter of ‘Western’ Israeli culture, with no connection to their own authentic roots.

In the light of Israel’s mix of ethnic policy and limited democratic components, plus the continuing lack of attention paid by the Palestinian national

movement to the Arabs of Israel and their difficulties, the problems discussed above, as well as many others that cannot be discussed here,³⁶ may develop into a crisis that will weigh down the Arabs, their relations with the majority, and their relations with the Palestinian national movement.³⁷ Thus the crisis of the minority will not only be the lot of the minority but will also influence developments in the region. Escaping the crisis will require changes on two levels: the Israeli and the Palestinian. At the structural level, these changes must guarantee the Arabs the theoretical and practical possibility of belonging to both dimensions, the national and the civil, at the same time. This can occur only in an egalitarian liberal or binational state.

Summary and implications

The categorisation of states as democratic or non-democratic in nature, using the criteria of the existence of formal elected institutions, a separation of powers and other formal icons of democracy, is simply not appropriate in an age when national and ethnic-group affiliations are so important and even critical for individuals and their development. In this age we must give greater weight to substantive components of democracy such as personal liberties and the equality before the law of all citizens, both as individuals and as members of different ethnic groups. These elements are crucial because they have to do with treating citizens as citizens, even if they belong to different groups.

Countries that systematically and sweepingly give preference to citizens who belong to one group out of all those that constitute its citizens are ethnic states, not democracies. Israel, like many other countries in the world (Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Canada until the 1960s, Malaysia) is not a democracy if one looks at it from the perspective of the ethnic divide between Jews and Arabs. It is, instead, an ethnic state that implements sophisticated policies of exclusion against its Arab minority. In principle it offers its Arab citizens the opportunity to participate in its political, economic, cultural and social life, but by no means offers them parity. It preserves the primacy of the Jews in all spheres and gives them preference in terms of symbols, substance, structures and resource-allocation policies.

The minority's demands are highly revolutionary in light of the ethnic character of the state and the fact that the Jewish majority supports a continuation of this character and generally gives priority to continued discrimination against the minority. The combination of the state and majority support for this minority policy suggests that Palestinians in Israel will encounter an challenge of institutional and public opposition to their demands. This pushes the minority inexorably in to deeper existential crisis. The appearance of clear signs of a deterioration in the minority's status is leading to a multidimensional crisis.³⁸

The ethnic character of Israeli nationalism, Jewish and Palestinian, and the absence of equal citizenship or territorial nationhood that might unite all citizens, do not leave many options for future development. The situation described here confronts the state, the majority and the minority with hard decisions concerning the nature of the partnership that can satisfy the demands of the majority and aspirations of the minority. On the one hand, the state and the Jewish majority

will face a difficult situation if they continue to ignore the demands and aspirations of the minority. Israel and its majority cannot continue to maintain an ethnic system and policies against the Palestinian citizens. The state will have to give serious consideration to implementing equality within the community of its citizens. On the other hand, the minority must become more and more aware of the limitations that the state, its nature, and the support thereof by the Jewish majority impose on its future development—a situation that deepens its daily strategic and existential problems. The exacerbation of these problems will lead it to a willingness to think about solutions for achieving equality that seem quite unreasonable today.

If such equality cannot be attained within the existing political regime, it can be realised by the construction of a binational system in the country. Such a system can emerge only with the support of the Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza strip. If the attempt to build a Palestinian state in the territories fails—something that seems almost certain in the conditions prevailing today, for a number of reasons³⁹—then the only option that will remain open to the Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza strip will be incorporation into a single political framework with the Jews and a continuing aspiration for individual and group equality that will be expressed, perhaps after a long struggle, by the establishment of a binational system.

Notes

¹ TR Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict*, Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1993; TR Gurr & Barbara Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994; and W Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

² A Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977; S Smootha, 'Minority status in an ethnic democracy: the status of the Arab minority in Israel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13 (3), 1990, pp 389–413.

³ D Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.

⁴ Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*; Smootha, 'Minority status in an ethnic democracy'; and L Vos, 'Nationalism, democracy, and the Belgian state' in Richard Caplan & John Fefer (eds), *Europe's New Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp 85–100.

⁵ Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; L. Kuper, *Race, Class and Power: Ideology and Revolutionary Change*, London: Duckworth, 1971; L Kuper, *The Pity of It All: Polarisation of Racial and Ethnic Relations*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977; H Fien, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, London: Sage Publications, 1993; and Smootha, 'Minority status in an ethnic democracy'.

⁶ C Maynes, 'Containing ethnic conflict', *Foreign Policy*, 90, 1993, pp 3–21.

⁷ David Collier & Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy with adjectives: conceptual innovation in comparative research', *World Politics*, 49, 1997, pp 430–451.

⁸ See Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*.

⁹ J Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1990.

¹⁰ In this article I will generally use the term 'the Palestinians in Israel' to refer to the group being studied. On occasion, though, I also use parallel designations, such as 'the Arab minority', 'the Palestinian minority', and 'the Arabs in Israel'.

¹¹ A Ghanem, 'Palestinians in Israel part of problem and not of solution: their status in peace era', *State, Government and International Relations*, 41/42, 1996 (in Hebrew); Ghanem, 'Political participation among Arabs in Israel', doctorate thesis, Haifa: Department of Political Science, Faculty for Social Sciences and Mathematics, Haifa University, 1996 (in Hebrew); and N Rouhana, *Identities in Conflict: Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.

¹² The survey was conducted by me as part of my doctoral dissertation, at the University of Haifa, on 'Political participation by the Arabs in Israel', under the direction of Prof Gabriel Ben-Dor of the Department of

- Political Science and Prof Majd al-Hajj of the Department of Sociology. The representative countrywide sample encompassed 768 respondents selected randomly using the Kish method. The sampling error was 3%–4%.
- ¹³ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.
 - ¹⁴ Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures*.
 - ¹⁵ See S Smootha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, Vol 2, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.
 - ¹⁶ Rouhana, *Identities in Conflict*; and D Krezmer, *The Legal Status of the Arabs in Israel*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990.
 - ¹⁷ For more details see A Ghanem, 'State and minority in Israel: the case of ethnic state and the predicament of its minority', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21 (3), 1998, pp 428–448.
 - ¹⁸ The survey, run by Prof Sammy Smootha of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University of Haifa, with my partnership, was conducted in September–October 1995 among a representative sample of 1200 Israeli Jewish respondents aged 18 and above. In parallel, a representative survey was taken of Arab citizens of Israel, with 1202 respondents above age 18. The sampling error is 3%. Both surveys investigated Jewish–Arab relations.
 - ¹⁹ S Smootha, 'Arab–Jewish relations in Israel in the peace era', in J Landare, A Ghanem & A Hareven (eds), in *The Arab Citizens of Israel towards the Twenty-First Century. A Special Issue of Hamizrah Hehadash*, (in Jerusalem: The Magness Press), 1995, pp 64–78, Hebrew.
 - ²⁰ S Smootha, *Social Research on Arabs in Israel 1977–1982: A Bibliography*, Haifa: The Jewish–Arab Center, University of Haifa, 1984; S Smootha & Ora Cibulski, *Social Research on Arabs in Israel 1948–1976: Trends and Annotated Bibliography*. The Jewish–Arab Center, University of Haifa, 1987; O Yiftachel, 'Model of "ethnic democracy" and Jewish–Arab relations in Israel: geographical, historical and political aspects', *Horizons in Geography*, 37–38, 1993, pp 51–59 (in Hebrew).
 - ²¹ Ghanem, 'Palestinians in Israel part of problem and not of solution'; Ghanem, *Political Participation Among Arabs in Israel*; and N Rouhana & A Ghanem, 'The crisis of minorities in an ethnic state: the case of the Palestinian citizens in Israel', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30, 1998, pp 321–346.
 - ²² For details see Ghanem, 'Palestinians in Israel part of problem and not of solution'; Ghanem, *Political Participation Among Arabs in Israel*; and Rouhana & Ghanem, 'The crisis of minorities in an ethnic state'. Krezmer, *The Legal Status of the Arabs in Israel*.
 - ²³ Ghanem, 'Palestinians in Israel part of problem and not of solution'; Ghanem, *Political Participation Among Arabs in Israel*; and Rouhana & Ghanem, 'The crisis of minorities in an ethnic state'.
 - ²⁴ A Hareven & A Ghanem (eds), *Equality and Integration: Retrospect and Prospects*, Jerusalem: Sikkuy, 1996.
 - ²⁵ Sikkuy (The association for advancement of equal opportunity), *The Socio-Economic level of Jewish and Arab Communities in Israel: a Comparative Data*, Jerusalem: Sikkuy, 1996 (in Hebrew).
 - ²⁶ Hareven & Ghanem (eds), *Equality and Integration; A Fars, Poverty in Arab Society in Israel*, Beit Berl: Center for Study of Arab Society in Israel, 1996 (in Hebrew).
 - ²⁷ Z Rosenhak, *Housing Policies and Arabs in Israel, 1948–1977*, Jerusalem: Florsheimer Institute for Political Research, 1996 (in Hebrew).
 - ²⁸ A Ghanem, *Arabs in Israel towards 21st Century*. A survey of basic infrastructure, Giv'at Institute for Peace Research 1993 (Hebrew).
 - ²⁹ T Fenster, *The Bedouin in Israel–1993*, Jerusalem; Sikkuy, 1993.
 - ³⁰ N Rouhana & A Ghanem, 'The democratization of a traditional minority in an ethnic democracy: the Palestinians in Israel', in Edy Kaufman, S Abed & R Rothstein (eds), *Democracy, Peace and The Israel–Palestinian Conflict*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993, pp 163–188.
 - ³¹ K Bader-Araf, 'The Arab women in Israel: towards the twenty-first century', *Hamizrah Hehadash*, XXXVII, 1995, pp 188–206 (in Hebrew).
 - ³² Rouhana & Ghanem, 'The democratization of a traditional minority in an ethnic democracy'.
 - ³³ Rouhana, *Identities in Conflict*.
 - ³⁴ Smootha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*; Rouhana, *Identities in Conflict*.
 - ³⁵ Ghanem, 'Palestinians in Israel part of problem and not of solution'; Ghanem, *Political Participation Among Arabs in Israel*; Rouhana & A Ghanem, 'The crisis of minorities in an ethnic state'.
 - ³⁶ Rouhana & Ghanem, 'The crisis of minorities in an ethnic state'.
 - ³⁷ Rouhana & Ghanem, 'The crisis of minorities in an ethnic state'.
 - ³⁸ A Ghanem & S Osacky-Lazar, 'Towards an alternative Israeli–Palestinian discourse: one state, two communities', *Palestine–Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, III, (3–4), 1996, pp 91–92; and A Ghanem, 'One problem, one solution', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 23–29 July, 1998.