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The Arabs of Israel (Part 1)

Every Sixth Israeli

One of the most crucial problems of Israeli democracy is the status of Israel's ethnic minorities. Although Israel is far from the worst culprit in the treatment of its minority groups, the theme of the Israeli Arabs, or perhaps better put, Israelis of Palestinian Arab origin, is cause for worry. And these Israeli citizens themselves made it amply clear that there was great room for improvement—in October, violent demonstrations erupted in Arab villages throughout Israel. There was a certain degree of anti-Jewish rhetoric present in these protests. But they were short-lasting, and the list of complaints had nothing to do with the El-Aqsa uprising.

Israel's Arab citizens have been considered a marginal group since the inception of the Jewish state, beyond the bounds of the Israeli collective. This marginal ranking is the result of the self-definition of Israel as the Jewish homeland, founded upon the ruins of the previous Palestinian Arab society and eternally at war with the entire Arab, and by inference the wider Islamic, world. Israel is first and foremost a society of Jewish immigrants. Hence Israel's Arabs were denied access to much of the common goods of society, deliberately placed beyond the major spheres of influence. And until the end of the 1960's, they continued to be expelled from the majority of the ancestral lands still in their possession. In general terms, the Israeli state dealt with them as though the fratricidal Jewish-Palestinian clashes were being waged on an inter-community level within the confines of the Jewish state. The military administration limited their freedom of movement within the state, and served as a powerful vehicle for the leverage of anti-Arab pressure. Meaningful employment within Israel remained an impossible dream for Israel's Arab citizens.. Simultaneously, Israel's military authorities guaranteed that the Arabs would be wholly dependent on the Jewish state as far as their material survival was concerned; Arab internal political organization was systematically impeded, and they were hopefully to be co-opted as constituents for Israel's establishment political parties.

The relatively few Palestinians who remained within the borders of Israel following the collapse of Arab Palestine in 1948, approximately 160,000, were a divided and fragmented society. Their middle class lay in ruins, their intellectual leadership was no more, and no one sector was capable of constituting, or reconstructing, the spiritual and political life which had been lost. Overnight, or at least so it seemed, the Arabs of Palestine had ceased to be a national majority and had been transformed into a weakened and frightened minority....between the last month of 1947 and the middle of 1948, Palestinian Arab social structure ceased to exist as a viable entity. Over 350 Arab villages and urban zones were erased utterly, and the social and political life of the coastal areas was extinguished, (Jaffa, for example, which had boasted a Palestinian population of almost 80,000 prior to 1948, was reduced to a mere 4,000 demoralized refugees.) Of the almost 1.4 million Arabs who had been citizens of the colonial British mandate area, almost half of them were wrenched from their places of birth. They became refugees of all imaginable varieties, the vast majority emigrating beyond the Armistice Lines of the Jewish state. But even within Israel's borders, following the signing of the disengagement agreements between Israel and her neighbors,

many Palestinians were turned into a breed of internal refugees. They could not return to their original homes or villages, which in many cases had been razed to the ground, and their political identity remained unclear.

FROM PEASANT TO PROLETARIAT

Virtually the only existing infrastructure which the Israeli Arabs could preserve following the tragedy of 1948, ("Al-Naqba" in Arabic) was the nuclear and the extended family. And the military administration which was imposed on Israeli Arabs till 1966 was quick to manipulate that infrastructure for the perpetuation of political power and domination; this in accordance with tendencies already visible in the government sponsored primary and secondary school system. There, the Israeli-designed curriculum aimed to forge a brand new ethnic identity. It hoped to unravel the ties that bound Israeli Arabs to their former Palestinian Arab cultural matrix. It taught general and medieval Arab history, the Koran, the New Testament, and the recent history of Zionism in such a way that all ideological conflicts were artificially attenuated. The Bible and modern Israeli literature were also inserted for good measure.

The Arabs of Israel became bi-cultural and bi-lingual citizens, educated in accordance with the dictates of Israel's fledgling democracy. But they were methodically denied the right to work their communal lands and they were excluded from the macrosystem of social benefits, such as welfare, public sector employment, subsidized housing and the like. They were exempted from obligatory military service, apart from the Druze, and the Beduins, who enrolled as volunteers. Thus the Israeli Arabs became largely disenfranchised, on the spurious basis that they did not comply with the duties of the "average citizen."

Even in those isolated villages where the land remained under local Arab control, the Israeli authorities made it virtually impossible for the villagers to cultivate it. Arab farmers were handicapped by excessively rigid quotas for water and electricity, imposed by the State; in addition, the central workers' union, the Histadrut, did not allow Arab farmers to affiliate themselves in the all important fields of credit, commercialization, and export marketing of goods. The large citrus-fruit plantations that had been the staple of Arab agriculture disappeared entirely. By the late 1950's, the local Arab farmers, the "falaheen", were producing enough to maintain their own households, nothing more. They were allowed an extremely limited excess production of vegetables and olive oil for the Jewish market.

It is hardly surprising then, that given these conditions, so many Israeli Arabs decided to abandon agriculture altogether. They would begin to swell the ranks of the burgeoning Arab urban proletariat. As the Israeli anthropologist Harry Rosenfeld has so trenchantly observed, in most cases the erstwhile farmer became a semi-unskilled laborer, and the urban poor increased their numbers as Arab estates gradually became extinct. Over three-fourths of this population lacked the skills to compete on the urban job market. And when Israel began to suffer from a lack of easily exploitable cheap labor, its Arab citizens finally managed to integrate themselves into the national economy-at the lowest rung with the least privileges, as construction workers and day-laborers.

THE MASSACRE OF KAFR KASSEM

For the Arab citizens of Israel, the events of Kafr Kassem are an open wound, a cause for outrage; for the Jewish citizens of Israel, Kafr Kassem was the trigger which set in motion a new consciousness regarding the Israeli Arabs. The theme could no longer be shelved, the facts were far too damning.

The history of Kafr Kassem unfolds in the wake of the 1956 Sinai Campaign. War with the Arabs increased Israeli paranoia regarding their control over the indigenous Arab population. With the outbreak of hostilities on October 29th of that year, the military authorities imposed a curfew in all the Arab villages, beginning at 5:00 PM. In Kafr Kassem the farmers were meanwhile tilling their field. And since news of the order had not reached them, they commenced their return home after the stated hour. The mayor of the village, who had been informed of the curfew only one half-hour before it was to be put into effect, promptly updated the local military authorities on the impossibility of communicating the measure to those villagers who were already outside Kafr Kassem. The same situation was repeated in many Arab towns throughout the Galilee. But it was only in Kafr Kassem where the military authorities interpreted this "breach of discipline" as sufficient reason to execute the supposed "delinquents"! The Israeli soldiers proceeded to round up the returning farmers and their families, men, women and children, and shot them to death. In total, 47 villagers were massacred. Despite the fact that the members of the particular brigade responsible all stood trial and received sentences of between 8 to 17 years in prison, all eventually had their punishments commuted to a maximum of three and one-half years in confinement. As for the unit commander, who actually issued the ambivalent order justifying the massacre, he received a symbolic fine of one cent...the equivalent of half an American penny.

CHANGING THE CONCEPT OF "FAMILY"

Following the Six Day War of June 1967, the long-entrenched family-clan structure of the "hamula", the tribe, ceased to provide relevant social answers for Israeli Arabs, although it persists as an important cultural construct. Its previous importance lay in its all-embracing role as intermediary between the villagers and the government, in obtaining agricultural licenses and related dispensations. But since the majority of Israel's Arabs no longer worked the land, or had any land to work, and sought their livelihood beyond their native areas, the political weight of the hamula declined sharply. The traditional form of marriage between first cousins, replete with a dowry for the bride, also lost popularity: salaried work meant that familial donations no longer set the "wedding price." Couples began to marry out of free will, not only parents' choice, and the nuclear family replaced the clan as the central decision making unit. In many sectors of Israeli Arab society, it was easy to discern the same hyper-individualistic tendencies which marked Israeli Jewish society.

And following the Israeli conquest of the West Bank and Gaza, Israeli Arabs could renew family contacts that had been torn asunder nearly a generation earlier. This meeting of peoples had profound consequences in the development of Israeli Arab political consciousness, as well as in their forms of political organization and dissemination. Perhaps the next most important factor governing the re-insertion of Israeli Arabs in the country's economic reality is the veritable collapse of the agricultural sector. Kibbutz ideals have given way to high-tech start-ups, and this will have repercussions on Israel's Arab citizens as well.

The Arabs of Israel (Part 2)

The New Israelis

Once the Israeli Arabs had re-encountered their Palestinian brethren in the territories taken by Israel in the Six Day War, the former undertook a lengthy and complex process of redefining their national identity, simultaneous with the consolidation of an economic infrastructure. They were doubly marginalized: they were the victims of inequality within the sphere of

Israeli society, nor could they really be accepted among the ranks of Palestinian nationalism. But a lot of time, and social changes, have occurred since then.

The relative economic prosperity enjoyed by the State of Israel, subsequent to outbreak of hostilities in 1967, influenced both the standard of living of the Israeli Arabs and their insertion into Israeli society. Many of them gained economic independence, becoming successful small businessmen; in some cases, some individuals even became successful large-scale industrialists. From their previous status as unskilled laborers in the most menial jobs in Israeli society, Israeli Arabs began to attain positions requiring a high degree of specialization. And they began to make headway in a number of areas that were no longer attractive in the Jewish sector: they developed an ample trajectory in the job market, acquiring skills and knowledge which enabled them to work on contract and sub-contract terms. Companies which dealt in areas such as the paving of public thoroughfares, public works in general and an impressive coterie of industry—even those of a semi-governmental nature—began to open their doors to the Arab population. And, just as the African and Asian segments of the Jewish sector gradually left their unprestigious posts of physical labor in the late 50s, to be replaced by Israeli Arabs, those same Israeli Arabs were gradually supplanted by Palestinian labor from the territories, as they moved farther up the latter.

All things considered, the industrialization of the Arab sector remained quite limited. Companies owned by Arabs were generally small in scope, commercial, and dealt with sub-contracting, handicrafts and transport. And many of them could not break their dependence on the wider circle of Jewish buyers, contractors, and business networks. Hence, the Arab clothing industry became one of the greatest suppliers of the flourishing Jewish textile industry. Arab industry was hemmed in by its own tradition, concentrating on time-honored products such as textile weaving and nutritional supplies; the Jewish industries demanded a higher degree of technological sophistication and know-how. The lack of government subsidies and budgetary stimulus for the Arab sector also retarded progress in this sphere.

The extraordinary demographic growth of the Arab population of Israel, from 150,000 in 1948 to 1,100,000 in 2000, demonstrated an increase of 4% annually. This, combined with insufficient urbanization and bureaucratic obstacles which hindered the needed construction, explains why the density per person of Israeli Arab areas is so characterized by vast overcrowding. Not for nothing is there so much illegal construction in the Arab sector, encompassing a rough estimate of 30% of the overall construction in this area! The Israeli authorities, despite their grumbling, have had to turn a blind eye to the majority of this activity; when the authorities adopted a more severe approach, the result was the out and out destruction of many of these dwellings.

LAND AND POLITICS

The demographic process bespeaks a new political reality for the Arabs of Israel. Even as early as the late 50s, political activism had begun to surface, kindling the fires of paranoia among many Israeli Jews. And despite the fact that they were not yet ready to constitute an autonomous and change-effecting political entity, a radical change can be noted in Israeli Arab political activity. This is best expressed in the events of March 30, 1976: with the general strike affecting all segments of the Israeli Arab population, as well as the use of violence by the main protagonists. The National Commission for the Defense of Arab Lands, called for the strike, baptizing it with the name of Land Day. As had occurred so many times in the past, the central issue was the confiscation of Arab property in Northern Israel, executed under the banner of the Judaization of the Galilee. Arab protesters confronted armed units of the Israeli Border Patrol. Six Arabs died in the clashes, countless more were injured

and arrested. For the vast majority of the Galilee Arabs, the events harked back to the massacre of Kafr Kassem, two decades earlier. But as opposed to the more passive and frightened attitude displayed by Israeli Arabs in 1956, this time they behaved with a heightened level of political consciousness and self-confidence. From a socio-political angle, Land day marked the coming of age of the Israeli Communist Party Rakach, which had mounted the organizing committee of the protests. And in 1988, Land day was declared by Arabs on both sides of the green line to be commemorated as an official show of solidarity: the message was clear-Israeli Arabs had returned to the bosom of Palestinian nationalism. And rakach was far from the only political agrupation which began to tout openly nationalist Arab sentiments; others went farther. Take, for example, the Sons of the Village, which increased its adepts by leaps and bounds in the late 1970s, largely because it offered an ideological alternative to the Communist Party. The newer group called on Israeli Arabs to boycott the national elections, reducing their collaboration with the perceived enemy: the Israeli Zionist state. In addition, the Sons of the Village aspired to the transformation of Israel into a secular and democratic state with equal rights for all of its citizens.

But their most profound impact was felt within the internal confines of Arab society, and their most vitriolic criticism centered on the traditional tribal-clan structure of Israeli Arab village life. As the new radicals reasoned, this matrix not only impeded the forward movement of Arab culture. It facilitated Jewish military and political domination of the same.

LEFT ON THE SIDELINES-EVEN MORE THAN BEFORE

Israeli Arabs were ever more at the behest of major currents at work in the larger Palestinian framework, including both the secular nationalism of the PLO and the revivalist wave of Islamic fundamentalism. To make matters more complicated, the PLO, in its first twenty years, demonstrated a shocking ignorance of Israeli Arab reality. Yassir Arafat himself actually only addressed the electoral policy of the Israeli Arabs in 1988, concurrent with the potential recognition of the State of Israel in that same year. Simultaneously, many sectors of the Israeli Arab populace openly supported the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, within part of the historical borders of the Palestine mandate. Two states for two peoples, as the Communist Party had long proposed. But not all Israeli Arabs agreed that the PLO was the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This ambivalence was due to the militance and indiscriminate terrorism practiced by the representatives of that organization: a classic case is the general strike which Israeli Arabs declared as an act of solidarity with the Intifada. Jewish fears that this manifestation of support would turn violent, or would extend to the inner workings of the Israeli economy, were quickly allayed. In fact, the Arabs of Israel, the Arabs of 1948, constitute the only element of The Palestinian People who did not participate in the large-scale popular rebellion or in terror action in any significant way, (barring exceptions which remain just that: exceptions.) The Israeli Arab sociologist Magid Al-Haj of Haifa University has coined the term known as double marginality: being relegated to the sidelines of both the Jewish and the Palestinian national movements.

However, as regards the current uprising, the participation of the Israeli Arabs in the ElAksa Intifada has been, indubitably, more extensive than previously. But the only genuine episodes of violence within the Green Line were limited to a paltry few days.

It was just the perfect recipe, however, to raise up the specter, ever-present in so many Israeli minds, of the disloyal Arab traitor within our midst. When Israeli Arab hopes for equality within the Zionist context were effectively thwarted, their demands were indeed radicalized: they called for a state which would not differentiate between its citizens on an ethnic basis.

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And they called for cultural autonomy: such as that proffered by the controversial intellectual Azmi Bishara. And their long-standing ambivalence towards the use of violence in the national struggle was far from uniform. The Palestinian cause could not be reduced to simple equations.

Israeli Arab citizens continue to remain on the periphery of Israeli society, their internal divisions and heterogeneity notwithstanding. But the distance between the focal points of power and the disempowered margins is not clearly discerned. Even Jewish-Palestinian coexistence has its advantages, principally the lack of any real alternative. The minority will aspire to greater accomplishments, and the beneficial aspects of this situation would aid both sides in the conflict. We have long since transcended the era of a passive acquiescence in inequality: the Israeli Arab is now engaged in an on-going examination of Israeli Jewish society, and its receptiveness towards its Arab citizens.

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World Zionist Organisation

Discrimination Against Israeli Arabs

According to the [2004 U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) for *Israel and the occupied territories*, the Israeli government "did little to reduce institutional, legal, and societal discrimination against the country's Arab citizens."[\[1\]](#)

Examples of [discrimination](#) against Israeli Arabs cited in the State Department report include the following:

- "According to a 2003 [Haifa University](#) study, a tendency existed to impose heavier prison terms to Arab citizens than to [Jewish](#) citizens. Human rights advocates claimed that Arab citizens were more likely to be convicted of murder and to have been denied bail."
- "Government spending on children was proportionally lower in predominantly Arab areas than in Jewish areas. ... According to the Government's February 2002 report to the U.N., government investment per Arab pupil was approximately 60 percent of investment per Jewish pupil. ... According to [Human Rights Watch](#), during the year, the Government provided 1 teacher for every 16 Jewish primary school children compared to 1 teacher for every 19.7 Arab children. "
- "The [Orr Commission of Inquiry](#)'s report ... stated that the 'Government handling of the Arab sector has been primarily neglectful and discriminatory,' that the Government 'did not show sufficient sensitivity to the needs of the Arab population, and did not take enough action to allocate state resources in an equal manner.' As a result, 'serious distress prevailed in the Arab sector in various areas. Evidence of distress included [poverty](#), [unemployment](#), a shortage of land, serious problems in the education system, and substantially defective infrastructure.'"
- "In November, the Israeli-Arab advocacy NGO [Sikkuy](#)'s annual report stated that 45 percent of Arab families were poor, in contrast to 15 percent of Jewish families, and that the rate of [infant mortality](#) in the Arab sector was 8 out of 1,000 births--twice that of the Jewish population."
- "According to a report by [Mossawa](#), [racist](#) violence against Arab citizens has increased, and the Government has not done enough to prevent this problem. The annual report cited 17 acts of violence by Jewish citizens against Arab citizens. ... A Haifa University poll released in June revealed that over 63 percent of Jews believed that the Government should encourage Israeli Arabs to [emigrate](#)."
- "Approximately 93 percent of land in the country was [public domain](#), including that owned by the state and some 12.5 percent owned by the [Jewish National Fund](#) (JNF). All public land by law may only be leased, not sold. The JNF's statutes prohibit the sale or lease of land to non-Jews. In October, civil rights groups petitioned the High Court of Justice claiming that a bid announcement by the Israel Land Administration (ILA) involving JNF land was discriminatory in that it banned Arabs from bidding."
- "Israeli-Arab advocacy organizations have challenged the Government's policy of demolishing illegal buildings in the Arab sector, and claimed that the Government was more restrictive in issuing [building permits](#) in Arab communities than in Jewish communities, thereby not accommodating [natural growth](#). In February, security forces

demolished several homes allegedly built without authorization in the Arab village of Beineh."

- "In June, the Supreme Court ruled that omitting Arab towns from specific government social and economic plans is discriminatory. This judgment builds on previous assessments of disadvantages suffered by Arab Israelis."
- "Israeli-Arab organizations have challenged as discriminatory the 1996 "[Master Plan for the Northern Areas of Israel](#)," which listed as priority goals increasing the Galilee's Jewish population and blocking the [territorial contiguity](#) of Arab towns."
- "Israeli Arabs were underrepresented in the student bodies and faculties of most universities and in higher professional and business ranks. The Bureau of Statistics noted that the median number of school years for the Jewish population is 3 years more than for the Arab population. Well educated Arabs often were unable to find jobs commensurate with their level of education. According to Sikkuy, Arab citizens held approximately 60 to 70 of the country's 5,000 university faculty positions."
- "Israeli Arabs were not required to perform mandatory [military service](#) and, in practice, only a small percentage of Israeli Arabs served in the military. Those who did not serve in the army had less access than other citizens to social and economic benefits for which military service was a [prerequisite](#) or an [advantage](#), such as housing, new-household [subsidies](#), and employment, especially government or security-related industrial employment. Regarding the latter, for security reasons, Israeli Arabs generally were restricted from working in companies with defense contracts or in security-related fields."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Arabs#Discrimination_Against_Israeli_Arabs

Israeli Arabs, Arab Land, and Arab Refugees

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Events immediately before and during the War of Independence and during the first years of independence remain, so far as those events involved the Arab residents of Palestine, matters of bitter and emotional dispute. Palestinian Arab refugees insist that they were driven out of their homeland by Jewish terrorists and regular Jewish military forces; the government of Israel asserts that the invading Arab forces urged the Palestinian Arabs to leave their houses temporarily to avoid the perils of the war that would end the Jewish intrusion into Arab lands. Forty years after the event, advocates of Arabs or Jews continue to present and believe diametrically opposed descriptions of those events.

According to British Mandate Authority population figures in 1947, there were about 1.3 million Arabs in all of Palestine. Between 700,000 and 900,000 of the Arabs lived in the region eventually bounded by the 1949 Armistice line, the so-called Green Line. By the time the fighting stopped, there were only about 170,000 Arabs left in the new State of Israel. By the summer of 1949, about 750,000 Palestinian Arabs were living in squalid refugee camps, set up virtually overnight in territories adjacent to Israel's borders. About 300,000 lived in the Gaza Strip, which was occupied by the Egyptian army. Another 450,000 became unwelcome residents of the West Bank of the Jordan, recently occupied by the Arab Legion of Transjordan.

The Arabs who remained inside post-1948 Israel became citizens of the Jewish state. They had voting rights equal to the state's Jewish community, and according to Israel's Declaration of Independence were guaranteed social and political equality. Because Israel's parliament has never passed a constitution, however, Arab rights in the Jewish state have remained precarious. Israel's Arab residents were seen both by Jewish Israelis and by themselves as aliens in a foreign country. They had been waging war since the 1920s against Zionism and could not be expected to accept enthusiastically residence in the Jewish state. The institutions of the new state were designed to facilitate the growth of the Jewish nation, which in many instances entailed a perceived infringement upon Arab rights. Thus, Arab land was confiscated to make way for Jewish immigrants, the Hebrew language and Judaism predominated over Arabic and Islam, foreign economic aid poured into the Jewish economy while Arab agriculture and business received only meager assistance, and Israeli security concerns severely restricted the Arabs' freedom of movement.

After independence the areas in which 90 percent of the Arabs lived were placed under military government. This system and the assignment of almost unfettered powers to military governors were based on the Defense (Emergency) Regulations promulgated by the British Mandate Authority in 1945. Using the 1945 regulations as a legal base, the government created three areas or zones to be ruled by the Ministry of Defense. The most important was the Northern Area, also known as the Galilee Area, the locale of about two-thirds of the Arab population. The second critical area was the so-called Little Triangle, located between the villages of Et Tira and Et Taiyiba near the border with Jordan (then Transjordan). The third area included much of the Negev Desert, the region traversed by the previously apolitical nomadic beduins.

The most salient feature of military government was restriction of movement. Article 125

of the Defense (Emergency) Regulations empowered military governors to declare any specified area "offlimits " to those having no written authorization. The area was then declared a security zone and thus closed to Israeli Arabs who lacked written permission either from the army chief of staff or the minister of defense. Under these provisions, 93 out of 104 Arab villages in Israel were constituted as closed areas out of which no one could move without a military permit. In these areas, official acts of military governors were, with rare exceptions, not subject to review by the civil courts. Individuals could be arrested and imprisoned on unspecified charges, and private property was subject to search and seizure without warrant. Furthermore, the physical expulsion of individuals or groups from the state was not subject to review by the civil courts.

Another land expropriation measure evolved from the Defense (Emergency) Regulations, which were passed in 1949 and renewed annually until 1972 when the legislation was allowed to lapse. Under this law, the Ministry of Defense could, subject to approval by an appropriate committee of the Knesset, create security zones in all or part of what was designated as the "protected zone," an area that included lands adjacent to Israel's borders and other specified areas. According to Sabri Jiryis, an Arab political economist who based his work exclusively on Israeli government sources, the defense minister used this law to categorize "almost half of Galilee, all of the Triangle, an area near the Gaza Strip, and another along the Jerusalem-Jaffa railway line near Batir as security zones." A clause of the law provided that permanent as well as temporary residents could be required to leave the zone and that the individual expelled had four days within which to appeal the eviction notice to an appeals committee. The decisions of these committees were not subject to review or appeal by a civil court.

Yet another measure enacted by the Knesset in 1949 was the Emergency Regulations (Cultivation of Waste Lands) Ordinance. One use of this law was to transfer to kibbutzim or other Jewish settlements land in the security zones that was lying fallow because the owner of the land or other property was not allowed to enter the zone as a result of national security legislation. The 1949 law provided that such land transfers were valid only for a period of two years and eleven months, but subsequent amending legislation extended the validity of the transfers for the duration of the state of emergency.

Another common procedure was for the military government to seize up to 40 percent of the land in a given region--the maximum allowed for national security reasons--and to transfer the land to a new kibbutz or moshav. Between 1948 and 1953, about 370 new Jewish settlements were built, and an estimated 350 of the settlements were established on what was termed abandoned Arab property.

The property of the Arabs who were refugees outside the state and the property expropriated from the Arabs who remained in Israel became a major asset to the new state. According to Don Peretz, an American scholar, by 1954 "more than one-third of Israel's Jewish population lived on absentee property, and nearly a third of the new immigrants (250,000 people) settled in the urban areas abandoned by Arabs." The fleeing Arabs emptied thriving cities such as Jaffa, Acre (Akko), Lydda (Lod), and Ramla, plus "338 towns and villages and large parts of 94 other cities and towns, containing nearly a quarter of all the buildings in Israel."

To the Israeli Arabs, one of the more devastating aspects of the loss of their property was their knowledge that the loss was legally irreversible. The early Zionist settlers--particularly those of the Second Aliyah--adopted a rigid policy that land purchased or in any way acquired by a Jewish organization or individual could never again be sold, leased,

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or rented to a nonJew . The policy went so far as to preclude the use of non-Jewish labor on the land. This policy was carried over into the new state. At independence the State of Israel succeeded to the "state lands" of the British Mandate Authority, which had "inherited" the lands held by the government of the Ottoman Empire. The Jewish National Fund was the operating and controlling agency of the Land Development Authority and ensured that land once held by Jews-- either individually or by the "sovereign state of the Jewish people"--did not revert to non-Jews. This denied Israel's nonJewish , mostly Arab, population access to about 95 percent of the land.

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<http://countrystudies.us/israel/23.htm>