Land, Memory, and Identity: The Palestinian Internal Refugees in Israel

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Abstract

This article describes and analyzes the processes the Internal Refugees have experienced since the establishment of the state till this day from the perspective of the struggle over the "refugee identity." While the state has tried to undermine this identity as part of its policy against the Right of Return, activists from the refugees' communities have done their best to preserve it. In the late 1980s it looked as if the state's goal of uprooting the refugee identity was achieved, but the last decade witnessed an awakening of this identity. This has a lot to do with the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, but also, it is suggested here, with the very nature of "refugee identity," which has two components, of which one is positive ("my roots are there") and one is negative ("I am not from here").

Résumé

Cet article décrit et analyse les processus vécus les réfugiés internes depuis l'établissement de l'État (d'Israël), jusqu'à aujourd'hui et ce, à travers de leur lutte pour leur « identité comme réfugié ». Bien que l'État se soit efforcé de saper cette identité dans le cadre de sa politique contre le Droit au retour, les militants des camps de réfugiés ont tout fait pour la préserver. Vers la fin des années 80, il a semblé que l'État avait effectivement réussi à atteindre son but, soit de déraciner l'identité des réfugiés; mais la dernière décennie a vu une renaissance de cette identité. Les négociations de paix israélo-palestiniennes ont grandement contribué à cet état de chose, mais l'article suggère, qu'en plus, cela se rapporte à la nature même de « l'identité du réfugié », qui comporte deux aspects, l'un positif (« mes racines sont ici ») et l'autre négatif (« je ne suis pas d'ici »).

The Internal Refugees in Israel are Palestinians who were uprooted from their villages in the course of the 1948 war, but found refuge within the borders of the state and became its citizens. From 1948, up until today, they have continuously voiced their demand to return to their villages, only to be met by the refusal of all Israeli governments. For the most part, their lands were allocated to Jewish settlement. While constituting a part of the general refugee problem, the moral, political, and practical controversy about the Internal Refugees is one of the most concrete expressions of the structural conflict between the state of Israel and its Arab citizens.

This article aims to analyze the relations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Internal Refugees from the perspective of the struggle over the "refugee identity" from 1948 war onwards. After introducing the roots of the problem of the Internal Refugees and the legal mechanisms through which Israel took over their lands, the article deals with the Israeli policy of abolishing their identity, and with the resistance of groups within these communities. The last decade is witnessing a revival of the "refugee identity," which will be presented and analyzed at the end of the paper.

The Roots of the Problem and the Denial of Return

The roots of this phenomenon are to be found in the way in which Palestinian Arabs were uprooted from areas conquered by Jewish forces in the 1948 war. Terrified by the advancing Israeli army, whole communities had left their villages and sought refuge in neighbouring villages, which had not yet been conquered, or in large towns, which they believed would never be taken by the Israelis. But most of these villages and towns were indeed conquered, and their inhabitants, as well as their "guests," were uprooted. In the rare cases where the host communities had stayed in place, the refugees from the neighbouring villages stayed with

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them, or at least tried to.[1] That was the case with thousands of villagers from the eastern Galilee, who concentrated in the town of Nazareth prior to its occupation. The same goes for many refugees who, relying on the close ties between the Druze leadership and the Israeli army, fled to Druze villages, hoping they would be allowed to stay. Many others found asylum in villages which had surrendered later to the Israeli army without battle, and became parts of the new state of Israel with their inhabitants.[2]

The first reaction of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was to drive the refugees who remained in the state of Israel over the border, in order to prevent them from returning to their villages. Thousands of refugees were thus expelled from the region of Ramah and Peqi'in (in upper Galilee) and from the town of Majdal (Ashkelon, on the southern coast of the state). Similarly, Israel has pressured refugees who had settled in villages in the Arab triangle to leave their new homes prior to the allocation of this area to the state of Israel (as was agreed upon in talks with Jordan held in Rhodes).[3]

In spite of the forced expulsion, according to official estimates some twenty-five thousand Internal Refugees remained within the borders of the newborn state, mainly in the Galilee, constituting about one-sixth of the total Arab population.[4] Unable to carry on extensive acts of deportation after the war, Israel now had to tackle the task of preventing them from returning to their villages and reoccupying their lands.

One can find three reasons for the Israeli refusal to allow the return of the Internal Refugees to their villages and lands. The first was the will to expand Jewish settlement. In this context the uprooting of Arab residents was seen by Israeli Zionist leaders as a golden opportunity, after years of restrictions on Jewish land acquisition. The expected mass immigration of Jewish refugees from all over the world increased the need for land, and existing settlements were also demanding more agricultural land.[5] Thus in the course of war, old and new immigrants were settled in abandoned Arab villages, including those whose original inhabitants had found refuge in a neighbouring village.[6] In that period, among other such projects, kibbutz Megiddo was established on the lands of Lajjun, some of whose residents moved to Umm el Fahm. Kibbutz Yas'ur in western Galilee was established on the lands of el-Birweh, whose residents moved to Majd el-Kurum, Makr, and Jdeideh, while kibbutz Beit Ha'emek was established on the lands of Kweikat in western Galilee, some of whose former residents found refuge in Abu Sinan.[7] The settlement of new immigrants in abandoned Arab villages was to continue during the 1950s.

The second reason was security. The dominant concept among Israeli leadership at the time was that the Palestinians and the Arab states were preparing themselves for a second round of warfare in order to remove the disgrace of their defeat in 1948 and destroy the state of Israel. The Arab citizens of Israel were perceived as a fifth column, waiting for such a move and preparing to help it. This assumption resulted in the evacuation of Arab villages from border areas (Ikrit and Bir'am were the best-known examples). Thus the Bedouin of the Zbedat tribe in lower Galilee were evacuated under the accusation that they were delivering intelligence information from Jordan to Lebanon. Residents of small villages in the Triangle were transferred to larger villages.[8] The same kind of reasoning led to the decision to forbid resettlement of abandoned villages. Instead, the Internal Refugees were concentrated in towns or villages and were distanced from strategically important areas, such as main roads and highways.

The third reason can be seen as vengefulness or, alternatively, as a refusal to reward those who were conceived of as the agressors. The Jewish community perceived the 1948 war as one which was forced on its peace-loving members, so in the aftermath many of them supported an Iron Fist policy toward the Arab citizens, and particularly toward villagers who participated actively in the fighting. Those who started the war, so was the consensus, had to pay the price. Moreover, some believed that allowing the Internal Refugees to return to their villages in spite of their past aggression would be perceived by them as an indication of weakness and would cause them to disparage the state of Israel. This notion is illustrated in Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's reply to a question put by the communist member of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), Tawfik Tubi:

> The village of Birweh is an abandoned village destroyed in the battles. Its residents cooperated with the Qawuqji gangs [the term used by Israeli officials for the Arab Liberation Army, organised by the Arab Leauge to Assisst Palestinian Arabs in the war]. The IDF and the government dealt generously with them and permitted them to stay in villages near Birweh and to be residents of Israel.[9]

After the war, which took the life of six thousand Jews, one per cent of the Jewish population, the Zionist leadership saw no moral fault in refusing to allow the Internal Refugees to return home. Permitting them to remain in nearby villages was presented as a humanitarian gesture. Israel, aided by UNWRA, provided basic welfare in food and housing, while the refugees' land was settled by Jews.

The Appropriation of Land: Legal Mechanisms

Parallel to the denial of return, the state authorities began to undertake legislative measures designed to legally establish

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the appropriation of the refugees' lands. In June 1948, the first version of regulations transferring the lands of the refugees to the ownership of the State was published. Toward the end of 1949 the formulation of a more comprehensive law, the Law of Absentees' Property, was drafted for presentation to the Knesset. The newly established Authority for the Rehabilitation of the Refugees, composed of experts in land and Arab affairs, worked to define the Internal Refugees as absentees though they have remained in Israel, and hence have their lands given to the state. In October 1949, in the sixth meeting of the Committee, the Prime Minister's advisor, Zalman Lif, said: "The revised law would also include evacuated Arabs. According to the law every Arab who was not in his place of residence on a certain date, whatever the reason (plight, evacuation, transfer), is considered an absentee."[10]

Thus in 1950, the Knesset accepted the Law of Absentees' Property, replacing emergency regulations on the subject. The definition of an absentee included "every Israeli citizen who left his regular abode in Israel (a) to a place outside Israel before 1948 or (b) for a place in Israel which was at that time occupied by forces which sought to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel or fought against it after its establishment."[11] Thus the Internal Refugees were defined as absentees even though they were present in the State on the relevant date and are legal citizens. This anomalous situation granted them (along with additional population groups) the title "present absentees." The legislation denied the Internal Refugees any possibility of winning legal assistance and made the transfer of their assets to the state completely legal. Appeals to the Supreme Court, based on claims that leaving their residence was temporary, now became irrelevant.

Along with this, the authorities encouraged the absorption of the refugees in the villages which they had fled to. They were given priority in leasing abandoned lands in places where they were concentrated. In few villages (mainly Makr, Jedeida, and Sha'ab in western Galilee, and Wadi Hamam and Akbara in eastern Galilee) houses were built for the Internal Refugees, but only on condition that they sign a document renouncing their assets in their villages of origin. Despite initial resistance, some refugees eventually agreed to settle in these villages.[12]

The 1952 Land Acquisition Law (LAL) gave absolute and retroactive confirmation to the transfer of the lands of the Internal Refugees to state ownership. This law included also lands of Internal Refugees who from a legal point of view were not absentee, for example those who had left their villages for others already conquered by the IDF, or who were sheltering near their village. On the other hand, the law determined a compensation mechanism for the Internal Refugees, in money or alternative lands. It was left to persuade the refugees to accept the compensation money, to make them sign a document renouncing any claim to their lands, and to help them resettle in one of the populated villages.

Landless: Stages in State-Refugee Relations

The introduction of the LAL marked a new era for the Internal Refugees. Alongside the 1952 decision to transfer UNRWA's authorities regarding the refugees to the Israeli government, the new law ended the period of the creation of the refugee problem and the appropriation of their lands. The vast majority of Internal Refugees were now dwelling in temporary housing in the outskirts of villages in the Galilee and the Triangle.

The law heralded the second phase of relations between Israel and the Internal Refugees, which lasted until 1958. After 1952, there was no more forced transfering of Arab citizens nor more land allocation by the state without some legal procedure. A reparation mechanism in the framework of the LAL was established during these years, yet most of the refugees upheld their demand to return to their villages, with only a few of them agreeing to give up their original homes and lands. During this period the refugees still perceived the prospect of returning to their villages as realistic. Only a few of them started to build permanent houses, frequently without permits. Toward the end of the period, families of Internal Refugees who had spread in different parts of Israel had began to voluntarily move to one chosen "temporary" village, in order to live alongside each other. In retrospect, this could be seen as a first sign of their coming to terms with the fact that they would probably not be allowed to reunite in their original home.

The third period, from 1958 to 1967, marked the settlement of the Internal Refugees in the villages in which they were absorbed. The reasons for their tendency to accept permanent settlement at that time were threefold. First, they realized that the refugee problem was not likely to be resolved by a "second round" of war between Israel and the Arab states, especially in light of Egypt's defeat in the 1956 Suez War. A second reason was the improvement and updating of the state's reparation mechanism, involving paying higher sums to the refugees in return for their lands and speeding up public building in the villages where they were living. The final reason was the extensive usage by Israel of the Internal Refugees' lands, which deepened their recognition that they will never get it back.

A new era began after the war of 1967, when the issue of the Internal Refugees was almost entirely removed from the public agenda. The main reason for this was that the burning personal problems of most of the refugees were settled,

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both for those who accepted reparations and for those who managed to cope by themselves. Public attention was now drawn to the territories conquered in 1967 and their inhabitants. This development was reflected in Knesset debates. Until 1967 the demand for returning the Internal Refugees to their villages was raised almost in every Knesset session. Since 1967 the subject has hardly been mentioned in Knesset debates.[13]

In recent years, and most intensively since the 1990s, the subject is once again emerging on the public agenda of the Arab population in Israel. The Arab parties and Hadash party[14] demanded a solution to the problem in their election platforms of 1996 and 1999. Dozens of committees were established by former inhabitants of abandoned villages and their descendants, under the umbrella of a national committee and organizing events in the villages. Last but not least, commemorating the Nakba (the Palestinian disaster of 1948) in abandoned villages has turned into a tradition among Palestinian citizens of Israel in recent years, under the slogan of returning the Internal Refugees to their villages.

The State and the Uprooting of Refugee Identity

The activities of refugee committees provide the clearest indication of the revival of refugee identity among the Internal Refugees. This relatively new phenomenon is viewed unfavourably by the state of Israel, which has spent years in efforts to uproot this identity. In effect, over and above the legislation aimed at appropriating the lands of the Internal Refugees, the main state activity regarding this population was in the realm of identity. This is not a special characteristic of state activity among the refugees; state intervention in creating and neutralizing sub-identities[15] constituted a central element in controlling and supervising the population. Through varied bureaucratic and legal means, including use of force, the state authorities acted to uproot the collective refugee identity of this population on the assumption that this would weaken the refugees' demand to return to their villages of origin.

Analyzing "refugee identity" is essential to fully comprehand this point, and it reveals that this identity has two faces; one is positive, the other negative. The positive one is being native to a certain settlement which no longer exists, cherishing its abandoned pathways, destroyed houses, and lost scents. This aspect of identity can be called "I was there." It was pointedly expressed by Mahmoud Issa in his research on the refugees of the village of Lubya (which was located on the Tiberias-Nazareth road): "For youngsters, middle-aged or old, Lubya constitutes a basic identity image, a source to relate to in thought and sub-consciously, a model of cultural framework."[16]

The other aspect of refugee identity is the negative one, the self-conception, and the image of one in the eyes of others as a refugee, a foreigner who doesn't belong to his present place of dwelling. This image could be summed up in the notion: "I am not from here." This notion is expressed through a sense of alienation from the place of refuge, sometimes stressed by rejection projected by the absorbing community. This characteristic of identity was shown by Hasan Musa in the mid-1980s in his research concerning Internal Refugees from four Galilee villages. Twenty-eight out of eighty Internal Refugees who were asked about their sentiments reported feelings of alienation and a notion of being outsiders.[17]

Israel's main struggle was naturally directed against the positive identity, which preserved the connection between the refugees and their original villages. The action taken by the state consisted of physical activity aimed directly at the refugees and their lands, and indirect activity intended to influence both their consciousness and the general public discourse on the issue. The direct activity consisted of preventing the refugees from approaching their abandoned villages, as well as providing reparations or alternative housing. Among the measures taken to influence the refugee consciousness were obliterating the names of the abandoned villages from state maps; removing the Internal Refugees from UNWRA figures; registering them in the Population Registry as inhabitants of their host villages rather than their original ones; and excluding the abandoned villages and the refugee problem from the school curriculum, including that used for Arab pupils.

Preventing any access to the abandoned villages was primarily intended to create a complete break between the refugees and their villages, in order to enable handing over their lands to Jewish settlement. Accordingly, the first step to be taken by Israel was the total evacuation of the abandoned villages (in most of them there remained between five and ten percent of the original residents).[18] Subsequently the authorities were strict about repeatedly evacuating refugees who tried to get hold of their lands, with IDF units patrolling the abandoned villages in order to make sure that the residents were not to return. Anyone found in the abandoned villages was removed to neighbouring villages or expelled from the country.[19] In 1951 the sites of the abandoned villages were declared security areas, permitting legal measures to be taken against anyone entering them.[20] This was an intermediary step toward turning them into Jewish villages.

However, even after the transfer of the lands to Jewish settlement, the state continued to ensure that the refugees would be cut off from their former lands. The relevant Israeli authorities laid down that "under no circumstances

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must land be leased to Arabs formerly from that village, or originally from there." Moreover, they were not permitted to work, even not as labourers, in their former lands. In addition, Jews or Arabs leasing land in an abandoned village had to commit not to employ refugees whose origins were in that village.[21]

This was how the state took its primary step in the course of uprooting the positive refugee identity. The new generation born after the war, it was thought, would be unable to develop an emotional connection to the parental village, or claim "I am from there." Neither could the older generation go to their place of origin and point concretely at their homes. The destruction of the villages during the 1950s and 1960s was to symbolize forever the lack of any prospect of materializing the refugees' yearning to return home. But yet, the authorities assumed that even this was not enough if the "community of memory" remained intact.

Here, the reparation mechanism came to force. Internal Refugees were put under enormous pressure to accept compensation arrangements and give up their land. Most Internal Refugees abstained from demanding reparation for their lost lands. They perceived such an agreement as cutting themselves off from the ideal of return, on the personal, communal, and national levels. Moreover, this norm of refusal constituted a principle, which united the refugees and preserved their identity. Breaking it would lead to the disintegration of their communities.

Conscious of all that, the Israeli establishment was striving to split the refugee consensus. The Israeli authorities realized that undermining the holy principle of "no compensation" would break the social solidarity of the refugees and their collective identity. This explains why the Israeli authorities decided in September 1954 to seek individual refugees who would agree to accept reparations. They thought this was the way to break the opposition of the refugee community to the proposed arrangement.[22] As shown by data from the Israel Land Authority, this activity proved fruitful.[23] The number of Internal Refugees requesting reparations and giving up their land constantly grew, and the refugee identity began to disintegrate. The state's success in spreading the refugees in different villages hastened the collapse of the old community frameworks which had preserved the refugee identity.

Alongside those activities, the state kept aiming to penetrate the refugee consciousness. In his book, Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson presents the role of Population Census, maps, and museums in the construction of national identities.[24] The same institutions were used by Israel for uprooting the refugee identity. Israel did not mention the origins of the Internal Refugees in the formal statistics; they were not included in the UNWRA registry and the abandoned villages did not appear on maps. It goes without saying that no museum was established in Israel to commemorate life in the villages which no longer existed. Altogether these facts are aimed at emphasizing the message that the refugees are no longer connected to their original villages, and that they do not constitute a distinct community.

In Israeli Arab schools, neither the Nakba and the refugee problem in general, nor the problem of the Internal Refugees in particular, was ever mentioned. Teachers trying to present these issues were subjected to the scrutiny of the Security Service, as was the case of a teacher from the northern town of Acre who said: "The government robbed us of our lands and drove us from our villages though the holy books of three faiths – the Jewish, the Muslim and the Christian – state that it is forbidden." His words were relayed to the Security Service which passed them on to the Ministry of Education.[25]

In the mid-1980s, it looked as if the goal of uprooting the refugee identity was achieved. In the conclusions of his research published in 1986, the Israeli-Palestinian sociologist, Majid al-Haj, wrote: "There is nothing distinguishing the refugees from other Arabs in the general community. Unlike refugees in other places, who established voluntary societies and other social frameworks, the internal Arab refugees have no organizational frameworks of any sort."[26] Similarly, Alexander Bligh could present the settlement of the refugees in the state of Israel as a successful example of such a project.[27] Al-Haj added, however, that half of his interviewees reported a "feeling of being a refugee" although this had no concrete expression, at least not in the position taken by these refugees toward Israeli society or the state's establishment.[28]

The Refugee Identity: Renewed Awakening and Opposition

The reality described above changed completely in the early 1990s. The political discourse of the Palestinians in Israel regarding the Internal Refugees was in upheaval. The reawakening of the refugee identity invoked identification among the masses. This process kept accelerating with the establishment of over twenty local associations of Internal Refugees, under the umbrella of a national committee.

The speedy revival of the "refugee identity" shows that even without social, institutional, and organizational frameworks, it was preserved not only by the first generation, the refugees themselves, but by their descendants as well. It proves that an internal stratum maintained itself over the years in spite of the described governmental policies. We can assume that the preservation of the refugee identity was fed during the first years by the struggle to

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return to the original villages, and was later reinforced by the alienation felt by the refugees in their new homes.

This feeling was the result of the objective situation in these villages, aggravated by a shortage of land. "I generally try to forget I am a refugee," al-Haj quotes one of his interviewees, "but when I see the local people going with their families to their fields, while I, like the other refugees, have no property, I feel very strongly that I am different from the other sons of the village." Many other interviewees expressed similar sentiments.

In this situation it is no wonder that the negative refugee identity was preserved into the second generation and became the basis of the refugees' identity. But the refugee committees which were established in the 1990s are not satisfied with only this part of the refugee identity. Most of their activity aims to reconstruct the positive components of it. Committee activists, along with some members of the second and third refugee generations, are renewing physical contact with the abandoned villages through work camps and restoration activities, thus strengthening refugee consciousness and identity. Those activities mirror and compete to an extent with the measures taken by the state over the years, regarding maps, museums (or, in fact, their absence), and population census. The participation of second and third generations in those activities helps to strengthen their contact with their villages of origin and does away in practice with the separation which the state had tried to enforce.

In addition, the refugee identity is strengthened by a series of symbolic and educational means intended to construct a new discourse. In recent years quite a few books concerning the abandoned villages were published by Palestinian citizens of Israel and in other Palestinian communities. Some, like *All That Remains* by Walid Khalidi, document all the villages,[29] while the majority survey particular villages or districts in pre-1948 Palestine. Written by refugees, internal or external, in the framework of academic research or as a private initiative, these books constitute a mobile written museum.

The refugees' committees are now planning a census of Israel's Internal Refugees. In addition to strengthening identity, this will constitute the factual basis for planned legal and public struggles. Another move aimed at reconstituting lost communities is the rehabilitation of those who accepted reparations in the past.

All in all, it appears that the attempts by the Israeli establishment to neutralize refugee identity have failed, just as the supreme goal for which it strove – the creation of an Arab-Israeli identity cut off from maternal Palestinian identity – did not succeed. Perhaps it shoes how limited external factors are in the process of crystallization of identities.

However, in order to present a full picture, one must examine the reawakening of the refugee identity in its historical context, along with the beginning of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian political leadership. As the political dialogue proceeded, it seemed that the contradiction between the focal points of identity among Palestinians in Israel – Israeli civic identity on one hand and Palestinian national identity on the other – was diminished. This process brought about a strengthening of Israeli identity among the Palestinians in Israel (along with, and not instead of, their Palestinian identity). It has been acknowledged by the P.L.O. and the Israeli government, who agreed not to include the Internal Refugee problem in the discussion (yet to take place in the unforseeable future) of the general Palestinian refugee problem. The Internal Refugees have decided to carry on with their struggle as Israeli citizens, demanding the correction of an injustice done to them. The Internal Refugees, as the other Palestinian citizens of Israel, hoped that the peace process would encourage Israel to come to terms with them as well as with the P.L.O. and the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the diaspora.[30]

Another explanation for renewal of the refugees' struggle is one suggested by Arnon Sofer. Sofer believes that it is a result of a feeling among Israeli Arabs that Israeli sovereignty in areas of dense Arab population was weakened through prolonged Israeli compromise. He claims that the demands of the Internal Refugees are part of a process aiming to transform Israel from a Jewish state to a state of all its citizens.[31] According to this concept, strengthening the Palestinian identity of Arab Israeli citizens, like the reinforcement of refugee identity, represents a threat to the Jewish-Zionist identity of Israel.

The demographic factor should also be considered. As years went by, the refugees' descendants were more and more distressed by the problem of land shortage. Israel kept appropriating land from villages which were not destroyed during the 1948 war. However, the land and housing problems of the Internal Refugees (especially those who refused to accept reparations) were much graver than those of the rest of the population. The hope voiced by activists that the lands could be returned by a political struggle gave some new hope.

The above-mentioned factors complement one another, and each of them had its influence on the revival of the refugee identity. Nevertheless, in spite of this revival of identity, and activities in the abandoned villages, it is still too early to determine to what extent the revival incorporates the whole refugee population (some villages have not organized at all, others have only symbolic representation). Neither is it clear to what extent they will persist in their

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struggle and how successful it will be. The answers to those questions depend greatly on the position to be adopted by the state. For the time being one can hardly observe any sign of change in Israel's old policies, opposing any expression of the right of return for refugees, internal or external. The armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority since the outburst of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000, as well as the crisis of trust between the state and its Arab citizens in the wake of these events, has only resulted up to now in strengthening the traditional Jewish-Israeli position rejecting any change in the status quo. Hence the Israeli Cabinet's decision in October 2001 not to allow the Ikrit and Bir'am refugees to return to their homes (contrary to former recommendations). To justify that decision, it was argued that in spite of the special circustances of those refugees, their return would set a precedent, strengthening the demands of return voiced by the rest of the 150,000 Internal Refugees all over the country.

The failure of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians at Camp David (in 2000), which was explained in the official Israeli political discourse as stemming from Palestinian obstinacy over "the Right of Return," only increased Israeli opposition to any concessions for the Internal Refugees. The reasoning for that approach varies between explanations regarding security and a declared wish to maintain the Jewish-Zionist character of the state.

Naturally, the Internal Refugee committees are conscious of the fears of the Jewish public and the Israeli establishment concerning their demands, and are aware that there is little hope of achieving a return to the pre-1948 situation. Therefore, in general, they are not demanding the return of all their land, but only the parts of it which are not worked or settled. According to their initial surveys, a substantial part of the lands in many abandoned villages is deserted. It is those lands that they demand to get back. However, even limiting their demands did not yield a change in the state's position. Most of the committees' activities are therefore directed at present toward internal organizational work and raising the subject of the Internal Refugees in the overall Israeli political discourse.

To conclude, one could establish that during the last decade the internal refugees have undergone two major political developments. The first was re-establishing their collective refugee identity (including its positive component) as a tool of activity, and the second was coming to terms with their status as Israeli citizens, hence defining their struggle as a civic rather than a national one. To their dismay, they have not witnessed any significant change in the attitude of the Israeli government toward their demands. Furthermore, the current crisis in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship in general, and between Israel and its Arab citizens in particular, led Israel to harden even further its position regarding their problem. It seems at the moment that only a process of reconciliation between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Palestinian citizens of Israel might enable a change in the Israeli point of view on this matter. Without such a change, the problem of the Internal Refugees will remain unsolved.

Notes

1. Only 20 per cent of the Palestinian population in the area to become the state of Israel have remained within the borders of the state. Eighty per cent were uprooted and settled down mainly in Jordan (including the area to be annexed by it in 1950, the "West Bank"), in Gaza Strip, in Lebanon and in Syria.
2. "Report of the Activities of the Military Government in Nazareth and Region, 17 July 1948 to 17 October 1948," Israel State Archives [hereinafter ISA], Foreign Office files, 2564/11.
3. For further material on the expulsion and evacuation of Internal Refugees during and after the war, see the author's *The Present Absentees: Palestinian Refugees in Israel since 1948* (Jerusalem: the Center for Research on Arab Society in Israel, 2000): 37–41 (in Hebrew).
4. This figure is only for urban and rural refugees and does not include the Bedouin in the Negev, many of whom were forced to leave their places of residence for areas determined by the IDF. The sources are a report to the Ministry of Labor, 29 June 1952, ISA, Ministry of Labor files, 6178/2924, and also a Jewish National Fund census for 1949–50, dated 15 February 1950, from the Central Zionist Archives [hereinafter CZA], file KKL 5/18875.
5. Thus the Committee of western Galilee settlements demanded that "all abandoned land north of the Acre-Safed road will be available for dividing up between western Galilee Jewish settlements." It claimed that plans for resettling refugees on these lands would damage the development possibilities of their settlements. See their letter to the Ministry of Agriculture and others in ISA, Ministry of Agriculture files, 581/2180 and the reply of the Ministry of Agriculture, which did not wholly accept their position.
6. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1991): 28–30 (in Hebrew).
7. See Hillel Cohen, "On One Expulsion Which Was Prevented," *Mitsad Sheni* (May 1999): 28–30 (in Hebrew). The article deals with an initiative which arose in January 1949 to expel the refugees of Kweikat since they removed the Israeli flag from the gate of kibbutz Beit Ha'emek.
8. "Minutes of the Third Sitting of the Transfer Committee," March 1949, ISA, Ministry of Minorities files, 1322/22. The evacuation of small villages from the the Triangle continued for two years after the war; see the meeting of the Committee for Refugee Affairs 11.1.1950, IDF Archives, file 721/2-843 and also the Communist daily *Al Ittihad*, 10 February 1951 (in Arabic).
9. *Divrey Haknesset* [The Israeli Parliament's Minutes] 1 (1949): 1634.

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10. "A Minute of the Sixth Meeting of the Committee for Refugee Affairs," 12 October 1949, IDF Archives [hereinafter IDFA], file 721/2-83.
11. The proposed law is found in the *Divrey Haknesset* [The Israeli Parliament's Minutes] 2 (1950): 921.
12. "Report of the Authority for Settling Arab Refugees," 1 August 1950, CZA, file KKL 5/18875.
13. This does not mean that the subject was not dealt with at various levels, community or family, but these are outside our present study.
14. Hadash, The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, is a Jewish-Arab party based on members of the Israeli communist party and independent activists.
15. In the term "sub-identity," the intention is to indicate identities constituting part of a wider identity, without relating to the degree of importance or centrality of each of these sub-identities for the people belonging to them. Thus, for example, the overall Palestinian identity includes Christian and Muslim Palestinians and also Palestinians in the Diaspora, in the state of Israel, in the areas of the Palestinian Authority, etc.
16. Mahmoud Issa, "Decoding the Silencing Process in Modern Palestinian Historiography" (paper presented at the Conference "Worlds and Visions, Perspectives of the Middle East Today," University of Rhus, Denmark, 5 December 1977).
17. Hasan Musa, "The Geographical Distribution of the Refugees in Their Homeland" (Haifa: M.A. thesis submitted to Haifa University, 1988; in Hebrew). Musa suggests differentiation between a sense of "strangeness" and a sense of being a refugee, finding that among those who reported that they have a sense of being a refugee, there are people who feel like "locals" and others who feel like foreigners. This can be explained when we deconstruct the "refugee identity" into a negative component ("I am not from here") and a positive one ("I am from there").
18. The figure concerning the percentage of Arabs remaining in western Galilee after the war was sent from the offical in charge of the western Galilee in the Ministry of Agriculture, Aharon Dror, to the Executive of the Ministry, September 1949, ISA, Ministry of Agriculture files, 2174/546.
19. On the decision to expel the refugees from Tsipori see "The Transfer of an Arab Population," [the military governor of the Galilee, January 1949], ISA, Ministry of Minorities files, 279/59.
20. The Military Governor in Galilee declared abandoned villages as closed military areas during 1951. IDFA, file 7/54-54.
21. Letter from the Advisor to the Prime Minister on Arab Affairs, Yehoshua Palmon, to the Military Governors, 28 February 1950. ISA, Ministry of Agriculture files, 2181/5821. See also a letter from the Military Governor of the Galilee to the office of the Custodian of Enemy Property, 13 July 1950, IDFA, file 68/55-68.
22. "Summary of the First Meeting of the Regional Galilee Committee", 2 September 1954, ISA, Israeli Police files, 2314/6.
23. Cohen, 86–89.
24. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed., (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 163–86.
25. Head of unit 490 (General Security Service) to the security officer of the Ministry of Education, ISA, police files, 236/17.
26. Majid al-Haj, "Adjustment Patterns of the Arab Refugees in Israel," *International Migration* 24 (1986): 657.
27. Alexander Bligh, "Israel and the Refugee Problem: From Exodus to Resettlement 1948–1952," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (1998): 123–47.
28. Al-Haj, p. 659.
29. Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).
30. Conversations with the activists of the Internal Refugees' committees, Wakim Wakim and Daoud Bader, Nahariya and Sheikh Danoun, July 1996.
31. Arnon Sofer, "The Israeli Arabs and the Peace Process," *Nativ* 51:4 (April 1996): 134 (in Hebrew). According to this concept, strengthening the Palestinian identity of Arab Israeli citizens, like strengthening refugee identity, presents a danger to the Zionist-Jewish identity of the state, and therefore one must continue to struggle against it.

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