



APARTHEID FROM WITHIN? THE PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL

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Key figures in the international arena have described the situation in the West Bank as apartheid, citing such characteristics of segregation as settler-only roads, fortified settlements, and the separation wall. More recently, prominent voices have applied the term to the situation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Although the Palestinians who remained within the state of Israel after 1948 were given Israeli citizenship, citizenship is not a mechanism of inclusion. This is because in Israel, unlike in most countries, citizenship and nationality are distinct terms and categories. Because the state defines itself constitutionally as Jewish, those with Jewish nationality trump the non-Jewish (mostly Palestinian) population.

Most Palestinian citizens of Israel live in Arab-only villages and towns, which suffer from severe overcrowding. Not a single new Arab town or village has been built since 1948, and if Palestinians leave their towns and villages of origin, they are restricted from purchasing or leasing land.

Within the 1948 borders the state attempts to subdue Palestinians through a segregated education system. Jewish Israeli schools are given autonomy in regard to their curriculum, while the Ministry of Education devises Palestinian schools' curriculum. This curriculum focuses almost entirely on Jewish history, "values," and culture, with no reference to Palestinian/Arab history. The narrative of the Nakba is absent – and in fact outlawed.

Though Palestinian political participation in the Knesset is often cited as an example of the state's plurality and democracy, since 1948 no Arab party has been included in a ruling coalition, and only a few Palestinian citizens have been appointed to ministerial positions.

The Nakba divided the Palestinian people into three fragments: the Palestinian citizens of Israel, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinians in exile. This fragmentation is the main method through which Israel imposes apartheid on the Palestinian people. It is therefore important to generate strategies for using the apartheid analysis and challenging such fragmentation.

Policy recommendations

- For those working in international law and policy analysis, pursuing Palestinian rights within the framework of military occupation, particularly the recognition of the Green Line, should not be forsaken. However, Palestinian policymakers and civil society actors must also emphasize that Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian refugees are not separate from the overall Palestinian struggle.

- Palestinian leaders must build on the work already underway by various NGOs that mainly focuses on bringing Palestinian youth from the fragmented communities together.
- The Future Vision Documents, published in 2006-2007 and emerging from a collective Palestinian effort, laid out the social and political demands of the Palestinian community in Israel. Expanding this vision across the Green Line and beyond, and transforming it into a demand to end apartheid and enforced fragmentation, must take a central role in the Palestinian liberation struggle.