

## **Identity Labels of Palestinians in Israel: Navigating the Complexities of Israelization**

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### **Abstract**

The identity of Palestinian Arabs in Israel is closely linked to socio-political developments and shaped by factors such as ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Identity labels reflect the unique reality of the ongoing conflict and serve the purposes of two main groups: those promoted by the Israeli establishment and those adopted by Palestinian Arabs. The labels of the Israeli establishment aim to define the Palestinian Arabs according to the interests of the Jewish Zionist state, while the Palestinian Arabs see themselves as an integral part of their homeland and engage in resistance to protect their original identity. Israeli designations serve as symbolic tools to assimilate Palestinian Arabs into an 'Arab-Israeli' identity, while Palestinian Arabs use alternative designations to express their authentic identity. Some segments of Israeli society are adopting Palestinian designations, signaling modest progress in recognizing Palestinian Arabs.

The key challenge is to find a balance between national identity (Palestinian Arab) and civic identity (Israeli), especially amid security tensions. Palestinian Arabs, as such, are expected to support the Palestinian cause, while Jewish Israelis often expect them to distance themselves from the Palestinian issue. This challenge will continue until the issue is resolved, which requires a delicate balance.

**Keywords:** labels, identity, Palestinian, Israeli, Israelization.

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## **Introduction: Conflicting identities**

The geopolitical changes experienced by the Palestinian people, particularly ‘the Nakba’ (catastrophe), the dispersion of Palestinians across various regions of the world, including Arab countries, and within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, have made the Palestinian Arabs a significant "numerical minority" in their ancestral homeland of Palestine, now called ‘the State of Israel.’ This situation has had a profound impact on their identity, their perception of themselves, and their perception of the other, whether that be Israelis or other Arabs in Arab countries. The question of identity is not merely symbolic but has implications for the concept of citizenship and the relationship to the Israeli Other, and it affects the understanding of individual and collective rights.

David Grossman, the Israeli novelist, calls the Palestinian Arabs inside Israel ‘present absentees’ (1992). That is, they are physically present in the state, but absent from consciousness and deprived of active participation in the public sphere. Anton Shammas (1995), the Palestinian novelist, claims that the holder of the hegemonic discourse determines the boundaries of the subject and that the Palestinian Arab is a passive element in the national fabric of Israel.

Palestinian-Jewish relations in Israel are marred by conflict. Crocker, Hampson, & Aall (2005) define the Palestinian-Jewish conflict within the state of Israel as intractable and frozen. It is intractable because it is deeply rooted and self-perpetuating. It is also a result of profoundly entrenched hostility. This means that it is a continuous conflict, making it extremely difficult to reach a compromise (Smootha, 1999). As for being frozen, this is because violent conflict is postponed, while the polarization between the two parties continues and remains unresolved by political channels. Moreover, the Palestinian-Jewish conflict overlaps with other conflicts: the wider Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East and the rise of the conflict between the West and both the Muslim and the Arab worlds following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Furthermore,

the Palestinians, citizens of Israel, while officially offered full rights as citizens, have chronically been treated as a putatively hostile minority with little political representation and a debilitated social, economic, and educational infrastructure (Bekerman & Maoz, 2005).

The identity repertoire of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel is extremely complex because they are caught in the midst of a national and religious conflict. However, scholars tend to over-simplify the discussion of their identity by focusing mainly on the tension between their Israeli civil identity and their Palestinian and or Arab national identity. Only in the last two decades have some scholars paid attention to the increasing role of political Islam in shaping the Palestinian Arab identity repertoire.

Most studies have tended to formulate a dichotomous model, in which civil and national identities are usually described as excluding each other, pushing Palestinian Arabs in Israel to either nationalization as Palestinians or Arabs or Israelization (See Peres & Yuval-Davis, 1969; Hoffman, 1977; Rekhess, 1989).

Almost all scholars believe that the Israeli civil identity remains relevant in one way or another to Palestinian Arabs in Israel, while increasingly they emotionally identify with alternative aspects of their identity repertoire (see Smootha 1988, 1992; Bishara, 1996).

Amara and Kabha (1996) propose an integrative approach, suggesting that the binary choice is superficial. Paradoxically, the intifada strengthened both their Palestinian and Israeli identities. The main source of the modernization of Palestinian Arabs is Israeli society. At the same time, Palestine represents their desire to preserve their identity. While their convergence with Israeli society allows them to achieve some of their aspirations in daily life as citizens with certain civil rights, their connection to the culture of their Palestinian brethren satisfies their desire for national identity and cultural unity.

Suleiman (1999) emphasises Palestinian Arab double marginality in respect to both their Israeli and Palestinian milieus, thus explaining their use of compartmentalisation strategies for their survival.

Rouhana's (1997) theory-laden model distinguishes among three levels of Arab identity in Israel: (a) an instrumental level in the polity defined by Israeli identity, (b) an intermediate value level which shares both Israeli and new Palestinian identity, and (c) a deeply sentimental and loyal feeling of common fate, which is monopolised by the Palestinian identity. In his search for a 'super organic' collective identity, Rouhana regards this complexity in terms of an incomplete identity.

We deal with identity labels in an adversative reality. I assume that one of the variables that affect the 'stubborn persistence' of ethnic and national conflicts is the conceptual system that gives rise to human perception of reality (Lakoff, 2004).

Palestinian-Arab society in Israel has been given numerous labels that define its identity, which raises a number of questions: Why are there so many labels? Whom do these labels serve? Does the establishment use the labels to make contact with Palestinian society, or are they a means of exclusion? How has the identity of the Palestinian citizens of the state been shaped and defined in the Israeli context? These are the questions I will try to answer. In the subsequent section, prior to delving into these inquiries, I will furnish background on the concept of identity, and this will be followed by another section exploring how Palestinians self-identify.

### **Identity: Theoretical Background**

Human identity is defined by Lakoff (2006, p. 142) as "a continual work in progress, constructed and altered by the totality of life experience. While much of the work in support of this belief concentrates on the larger aspects of identity

– especially gender, ethnicity, and sexual preferences – in fact human identity involves many other categories. Identity is constructed in complex ways, more or less consciously and overtly.”

Tajfel and Turner (1985, 2004) explain that, in addition to our individual identity, we have a social identity that includes the knowledge of our membership in a specific social group and the concomitant emotional values and meanings. This process, based on Tajfel and Turner’s theory, is a mental one by which people divide, categorize, and arrange their social milieu. It also allows them to adopt different patterns of social activity and specify their location in the social texture, grants them a unique social identity, and provides them with a social identification of themselves. These methods of identification include comparisons that enable people to gauge the extent to which they are similar to or different from others and the extent to which they consider themselves to be better or worse than individuals from other social groups. Social categorization is deemed to be the basis of both the preference to belong to a certain social group and discrimination against other, different groups. The theory of social identity is based on a motivational component which, according to Tajfel and Turner (1985), explains the universal tendency of people to compare themselves with the in-group and diminish the value of the out-group. Based on the social identity theory, these processes are built on prejudices, stereotypes, and negative discrimination between groups.

The social identity theory explains that conflicting situations between groups encourage the erasure of individual identity, which then leads one to deal with other people as representing a unified social category, as opposed to existing as distinct individuals. When the social system is characterized by hierarchy and an inequitable division of resources, the social situation is characterized by ethnocentrism and antagonism between groups. Tajfel and Turner (1985) claim

that ethnocentrism is often directed one-way – from the high-status group to the low-status group, with the latter often possessing a positive view of the former.

Low-status groups often tend to internalize the prevailing social evaluation of their inferiority and reproduce it, thereby reducing their self-worth. The social identity theory claims that the members of the low-status group will not embrace conflict until their culture is challenged. This means that, on one hand, whenever the social system is perceived as legitimate and the boundaries between the groups are permeable, the members of the low-status groups tend to adopt an individual strategy based on assimilating into the prevalent culture, as a means of ensuring their social promotion as individuals. On the other hand, when the social situation is not perceived as legitimate, members of the low-status groups frequently adopt group strategies. They reject a social status quo that perpetuates their inferiority and endeavour to alter their social status. Social identity is thus related to patterns of behavior and action (Le Page et al., 1985).

In the aftermath of the discourse on multiculturalism, Sarup (1996) developed a theory that perceives social identity as a cluster of sub-identities in consistent movement without necessarily bearing on or clashing with each other. These sub-identities reflect multiple meanings developing globally among individuals, in relation to diverse psychological, political, economic, and social contexts. Individuals crystallize their identity independently through a reflexive process in which they combine their past memories with current schemas in order to create a unified narrative. In this manner, each individual builds his or her own unique identity and abolishes the need to resemble others or to be stigmatized as the ‘other’. This identity is considered stable if each of its components within the complex texture can move freely to the centre of the identity arena and feed back into daily practices, just as other components are free to leave the centre. This theory supposes the existence of a consistent movement of identity components

in order to create harmony with a dynamic reality and posits that wide social changes are associated with identity change.

While the above two theories differ, they concur that in the event of a group struggle or threat to the group, the tendency to adopt collective strategies will increase, whereas in the absence of threat, there is a tendency to adopt individualistic strategies.

To conclude, ethnic relations and tolerance towards other identities are related to the degree of security a group enjoys and the way the members of the group perceive their identity. The more secure the members of the group feel, the more positive they will feel towards their identity and the more tolerant they will be towards other groups.

### **How do Palestinian Arabs in Israel define themselves?**

The 2000s witnessed a reaffirmation of Palestinian Arab identity as a native or homeland identity. In the preamble of the democratic constitution issued by the 'Adalah' organization in 2007, it was defined as follows:

Palestinian Arabs are citizens of the State of Israel who have been living in their homeland since ancient times. Here, they were born, and here their historical roots have grown, and here their national and cultural life has developed and flourished as active contributors to the development of civilization and human history, as an extension of the Arab nation and Islamic civilization, and as an integral part of the Palestinian people.

Due to the changing political status of Palestinian citizens, even against their will, to a minority in their homeland, and since minority national rights should include, among other things, the rights that should have been preserved and developed had they not become a minority in their homeland, the legal starting point of this

proposed constitution is that Arab citizens in the State of Israel are a national minority." (p. 4)

In a study on language education policy conducted by Amara (2022)<sup>2</sup>, a multiplicity of Palestinian Arab identities were observed in Israel (listed in Table 1).

**Table 1. Self-reported identities among the Palestinian Arab community in Israel (2022).**

Identity	Frequency	Percentage
Arab	32	13.6
Palestinian Arab	29	12.3
Palestinian	28	11.9
Palestinian Muslim Arab living in Israel	27	11.5
Arab Muslim Palestinian	22	9.4

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<sup>2</sup> These data are taken from a comprehensive research study on language education policy among the Palestinian Arab community in Israel, which is still in preparation. The survey was conducted with 235 respondents in the months of February and March 2022. It is not a representative sample of the Palestinian Arab community, but it covers various demographic factors. The ages of the respondents ranged from 19 to 67 years old (with an average age of 34). They fell into three categories: 102 students, 80 teachers, and 53 lecturers. There were 87 men and 148 women. The profile of their educational qualifications was 98 (41.7%) with a bachelor's degree, 84 (35.7%) with a master's degree, and 53 (22.6%) with a doctoral degree. They belonged to four geographic regions: 90 (38.3%) were from the Little Triangle, 101 (43%) from the Galilee, 26 (11.1%) from the Negev, and 18 (7.7%) from mixed cities. Among the respondents, there were 171 (72.8%) Muslims, 38 (16.2%) Christians, and 26 (11.1%) Druze. Regarding their religious status, 4 (1.7%) were very religious, 20 (8.5%) were religious, 115 (48%) were observant, 87 (37%) were not religious, and 9 (3.8%) were secular.



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<b>Identity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Israeli Arab	18	7.7
Israeli Arab Muslim	15	6.4
Palestinian Muslim	10	4.3
Israeli Druze	10	4.3
Muslim Arab Palestinian	9	3.8
Israeli Christian Arab	7	3.0
Israeli	6	2.6
Israeli Palestinian	6	2.6
Muslim Palestinian	4	1.7
Druze	4	1.7
Muslim Arab	3	1.3
Israeli Christian	2	.9
Human Being	1	.4
Israeli Druze Arab	1	.4
Israeli Muslim	1	.4

Table 1 shows an abundance of identity labels, which, on one hand, reflect the complexity of Palestinian Arab identity and, on the other, demonstrate the dynamism of identity. It also highlights multiple circles of identity: Arab, Palestinian, religious, and Israeli. It is worth noting that the respondents did not identify themselves by their town names or tribes, even though these identities have a significant presence in the daily life of the Palestinian Arab community.

These results reflect a diversity of identities among the population surveyed, with a significant number of identities rooted in Palestinian heritage and Arab ethnicity. The data highlight the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of identity among the survey respondents.

## **Identity Labels of Arab Palestinians in Israel**

The complex and intricate relationships among Palestinian Arabs, citizens of Israel, and the Jewish population have always been closely linked to language. The terms used by the Jewish majority to describe the Palestinian Arab minority clearly reflect a different perspective on Palestinian Arabs. The Jewish majority does not view Palestinian Arabs through an equalizing lens but rather with a condescending gaze, considering any Palestinian Arab, no matter their status, to be a citizen with diminished rights. To linguistically understand and deconstruct this identity, I will analyse the identity labels used to describe Palestinian Arabs and how they have evolved over time, both before and after the establishment of the state.

The Palestinian Arab community in Israel has been assigned numerous names to define its identity. This raises several questions: Why are there so many labels? Whom do these labels serve? Do these labels aim to engage with the Palestinian Arab community or are they a means of exclusion? How has the identity of Palestinian Arabs been constructed within the Israeli context? These are questions I will attempt to address in some detail.

Hassib Shahada notes that Palestinian Arabs in Israel have been "crowned" with 33 names, which he collected from various sources (Shahada, 1996: 45-46), without explaining or commenting on them. I have expanded upon this list by including an additional 12 names, bringing the total to 45. These names are commonly used in everyday discourse or referred to in academic research, with some even serving as titles for books or studies.

In order to understand the meanings of these labels and the political contexts of their significance, I have divided them into eight categories<sup>3</sup> that share common linguistic and political elements. These are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Frame #1: Labels that mention geographical boundaries**

The 'Arab sector' ( <i>Hamigzar Ha'arvi</i> )
The Arabs of this country
The Arabs of the Green Line
The Arabs of 1948

These labels point to the existence of Arabs, with no further elaboration of their identity as Arabs living within their ethnic collective inside the state of Israel. The labels also invoke political concepts, such as 'the Arabs of 1948,' those who remained in the land after the war, and the 'Arabs of the Green Line' (the Armistice Line of 1949), referring to the border that separated them from the Palestinians in the West Bank. These labels are usually used by Palestinian Arabs, citizens of Israel, Arabs outside the country, and Arabs from the Arab world when referring to the Palestinian citizens of Israel. They are also the dominant terms used in the Arab media.

The term 'the Arab sector' (Hebrew: *Hamigzar Ha'arvi*) is used by the Israeli establishment and Jews to refer to the Palestinian citizens of Israel. The word here is a translation of the Hebrew *migzar*, derived from a verb meaning 'to cut', that is, 'to cut apart from the whole,' turning that part into a minority. 'The sector' is the officially and socially acceptable name applied to Israel's Palestinians. There are other 'sectors' in the state (such as ultra-Orthodox Jews, Russian immigrants, members of kibbutzim, women, and more), but the term

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<sup>3</sup> For more details see Amara and Mar'i (2011), and on the concept of framing, refer to Amara (2016).

‘the sector,’ with no further elaboration, is often used to refer to Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

The labels in Table 2 are indicative of place. On one hand, they have the objective of separating Palestinian Arabs from Jews, while on the other hand, they attempt to distinguish the Palestinians and detach them geographically (with respect to place) from the Palestinian people. These labels determine the ‘bounds of place’, which Israelis apply to attribute a distinctive identity to the Palestinians, and which are derived from the specific place where they reside.

**Table 3. Frame #2: Identity labels given by the establishment and containing both of the words *Arab* and *Israel***

Israeli Arabs
The Arabs of Israel
The Arabs of the Land of Israel
The Arab citizens of Israel
The Arab inhabitants of Israel
Arabs despite being Israelis
Israelified Arabs
The Israeli Arabs in the country

Following its independence, Israel at first tried to impose an Israeli identity on all its citizens, including the Palestinian Arabs.

Does this mean that the establishment wanted the Palestinian Arabs to become integrated into Israeli society and become a natural part of the state? Certainly not. The implicit intention was to tear the Palestinian Arabs away from their roots and deprive them of their Palestinian Arab identity. The use of the two words ‘Arab’ and ‘Israel’ expressed this policy (see Table 3). In other words, the state wished to ‘tame’ the Arabs and push them to the margins of Israeli life (Jerries, 1966).

The State uses these concepts to deny the Palestinian Arabs recognition as a national minority. The terms are misleading, since at first glance they give the impression that, like the other ethnic groups in the country, the Palestinian Arabs are part of the Israeli nation and do not suffer from national oppression. The phrase ‘the Arabs of Israel’ gives those from outside the country the impression that the situation of the Arabs is similar to that of Israelis of Russian or Ethiopian extraction. However, in a wider sense, they are a large minority, like minorities that live in other countries, such as the ‘American Jews’, who live in the United States of America, and others.

In fact, the motivations for the use of these labels are even more profound than we have so far indicated. It is a politically motivated usage intended to detach the Palestinian Arabs from their ties to their land and their homeland, Palestine. As noted above, it associates the Palestinian Arabs with Israel and indicates that Israel is the fundamental place where the Palestinian Arabs are to be found. In other words, what we have here is a serious attempt to erase the Palestinian identity.

Behind these labels lies the intention to remove the sense of belonging and of identity. Their use constitutes an attempt to answer the question of the identity of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel from the perspective of the state on the one hand, and from the perspective of the Zionist project, which denies Palestinian Arabs any political or collective rights over the land, on the other. They deny the Palestinians in Israel their national identity and their link to the land.

**Table 4: Frame #3: Labels associated with civil and political rights, in which the word *minority* is used.**

The minorities (Hebrew: <i>Me'utim</i> ) in Israel
Members of the minorities: Muslims, Christians, and Druze
The 'Arab minority' (Hebrew: <i>Me'ut Aravi</i> ) in Israel
The Palestinian national minority in Israel
The 'trapped minority' <sup>4</sup>
The 'quietest minority' in the world

The establishment believes that treating the Palestinians, as a unified political collective would constitute the recognition of them as a national group with collective political rights. With this in mind the state strives to transform the Palestinian identity and fragment it into a number of sects and identities, including by religious affiliation. The system of Arab sects was established in the following manner (Sultan & Salama 2002, p. 158):

- A. Enrollment of Druze into the Israeli Defense Forces and the Border Guards, in accordance with the Compulsory Conscription Law.<sup>5</sup>
- B. Employment of Bedouins in civil defense and tracking units. They are still treated as a distinct social group, separate from the Arabs, as proven also by

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of a 'trapped minority' was coined by Israeli sociologist Dan Rabinowitz (2001: 64–85) of Tel Aviv University.

<sup>5</sup> Conscription has the aim of detaching the Druze from the Palestinian Arabs inside Israel, just as the Druze school curriculum was detached from that of the Palestinian Arabs. In reaction to this, a Druze Arab Initiative Committee was established to provide support for youth who refuse to serve in the military and to promote a stronger sense of belonging to the Arab nation.

the recent creation of a special Bedouin section in the Ministry of Education and Culture (Luwir, 2001).

- C. Stressing the religious affiliation of Christian Palestinians, in order to detach them from their Muslim brethren, with the objective of depriving the Arab minority of its national character and treating it as made up of sects, in accordance with the *millet* system inherited from the Ottoman and British regimes.
- D. Disbanding most Islamic organisations, such as the Supreme Islamic Council, and appropriating most Islamic endowments, in addition to establishing Arab departments, whose responsibility it is to solve Arabs' problems and supervise them.<sup>6</sup> One of the labels associated with civil and political rights in Table 4 is 'the quietest minority in the world'. The state took over the lands of Palestinian Arab inhabitants and gave them to Jews. The Palestinian Arabs accepted this as a fact and demonstrated only limited resistance, unlike other national minorities around the world. Moreover, the state created a group of Palestinian Arab loyalists, who supervised the execution of the state's policies towards Palestinian Arabs.<sup>7</sup> Here is what Jammal (2010: 7) has to say about this 'silent minority':

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<sup>6</sup> Note that after independence the Israeli government set up a Ministry of Minorities to deal with the Palestinian citizens who remained in their homeland and to supervise the property of those who had been displaced in the years 1948-1949.

<sup>7</sup> With the establishment of the state, Jews of oriental extraction oversaw the fulfillment of the vital needs of the Palestinian citizenry, with assistance from sympathetic Palestinians. As time passed, Palestinians and Jewish intellectuals came to criticize this policy and demanded that these posts be given to Palestinians. The establishment agreed to this demand at the end of the 1970s. For example, the Ministry of Education appointed a head of the Arab Education system, but emptied the post of all content, since it also appointed a Jewish deputy with broad authority to implement government

[The] [s]tate's ideological instruments, the Office of the Prime Minister's Information Center, the Government Information Bureau, and the Government Information Agency worked in coordination with the military government in an attempt to shape the awareness of the Arab society that remained within the borders of the Jewish state and developed what Shmuel Toledano, who held the post of Prime Minister's Advisor on Arab Affairs in the years 1965-1977, called 'peaceful Arabs'. This policy was aimed at attempting to penetrate and dominate Palestinian society under the auspices of the military government that had been imposed on the Palestinian citizens after 1948.

As for the expression 'the trapped minority', it is a multi-dimensional term that implies great restrictions on the freedom of political expression and activity, despite the state's pride in its democracy. Palestinian Arabs are under constant watch, like birds in a cage. As for the Palestinian people's national aspirations and their sense of belonging, they are caught between the hammer of the authorities and the anvil of their national feelings (Cohen 2006; Rabinowitz, 2001, pp. 64–85).

The two terms 'the Arab minority' in Israel and 'the Palestinian national minority' in Israel (Table 4) are not in use at all by the establishment in Israel, since they conflict with the Jewish conception of the Hebrew state, which recognises the collective rights of only one group, the Jews. Since the establishment of Israel, the state has striven to fragment the Palestinian minority into a number of different groups, and it uses all means at its disposal to thwart

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policies. As a result, it is the Arab head of the department who is blamed for the implementation of Ministry policies, rather than those who made the policies or those who worked behind the scenes to carry them out.



the defining of the Palestinians as a national minority, for fear that Israel will become a bi-national state, putting an end to its existence as a Jewish state. Among Palestinians in Israel, the use of these two terms is growing, since they evoke individual and collective rights. The recognition of the Palestinians as a national minority would mean that they have a right to autonomy, something that Israel does not want.

The labels in Table 4 have to do with civil and political rights, derived from the fact that labeling the Arabs in accordance with the concept of nationality is linked to the rights which they are granted. Thus, the Palestinian Arabs are divided discursively into religious minorities, with the intention of denying them a national character, and this in turn is reflected in the rights that they are granted. In contrast, those who call the Palestinians a ‘national minority’ assume that they deserve collective national rights.

**Table 5. Frame #4: Labels referring to non-Jews**

Non-Jewish citizens
Gentiles
Non-Jews
Unknown
Unknown Arabic-speakers in Israel
Jewish Arabs

Israeli Jewish society insists that Palestinian Arabs differ from Jews, a view reflected in the first three labels in Table 5.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, these are among the worst labels given to Palestinian Arabs, portraying them in a negative light as people with no existence except in contradistinction to the Jews. In other words, they

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<sup>8</sup> These labels are attached to anyone not of Jewish origin and not only to the Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

are not recognized as a group in their own right, and all their political rights are derived from those who are presumed to be legitimate, the Jews.

It is not by chance that the Palestinian Arabs are labeled ‘unknown’ by Israel and the Arab world. In the case of the latter, it is very clear that many did not recognise officially the existence of the Palestinians who remained in their homeland, who were acknowledged only after the war of 1967 and Land Day in 1976, when bridges began to connect them with Arabs everywhere.

These labels are derived from a view of Jewish identity that rejects the Other. They connote membership in the Jewish collective, which stands in contrast to the status of non-Jews. This is one method by which the establishment and Jews define themselves by negating the Other. Thus, the Other becomes part of one's identity. Such labels were common in the statistical reports issued by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics and by other government agencies. The statistics relating to the Palestinians were not listed under ‘Arab citizens’ but rather under ‘non-Jews’, proof of the ideological nature of these statistics.

**Table 6. Frame #5: Labels expressing the civil status of Arabs in Israel**

Arab citizens
Present absent
Refugees in their homeland
Tenants (second-class residents)
The forgotten Arabs

These labels listed in Table 6 testify to the complete marginalisation of the Palestinian citizens of the state, who from one moment to the next were transformed from the majority owners of the land to a secondary minority with respect to both the populace and to the land they own (they are now tenants instead of landlords). They are present in the body, but marginalised in all domains of life, especially with respect to decision-making in the state

(Benziman & Mansur, 1992). Furthermore, a significant number of Palestinians were displaced from their homes to other towns inside the country and came to be known as ‘the refugees of the inside’ or ‘the displaced’,<sup>9</sup> in contrast to the Palestinian refugees in the diaspora.

The objective of these labels is to deny the presence of the Palestinian Arabs and to obliterate their identity. Similarly, there are a number of places called ‘unrecognised villages’ which, although they were established before the creation of the state, do not appear on the map, so their inhabitants are deprived of basic services. The aim of this policy is to empty the Negev region of its indigenous inhabitants by confiscating their lands and concentrating them in a small area, while at the same time expanding the Jewish presence in the Negev. In other words, this is a project designed to erase the identity of the inhabitants of the Negev.

**Table 7: Frame #6: Labels that contain the word ‘inside’ as a basic component**

The Arabs of the inside
The Arabs of the inside of the inside
The Palestinians of the inside
The Palestinian inside

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<sup>9</sup> The internal refugees’ or ‘refugees in their homeland’ are labels given to Arabs who were displaced from their homes after 1948 and were settled in nearby villages and towns or in other regions within Israel (al-Haj, 1988). Their number is estimated at 30,000, that is, about 25% of the Palestinians who remained in Israel after the 1948 War. See [www.ajras.org/?page=show\\_details&Id=2235&CatId=23&table=articles](http://www.ajras.org/?page=show_details&Id=2235&CatId=23&table=articles).

The term 'the inside' was initially invented by the Israeli establishment to distinguish the Arabs of Israel from the Arabs 'on the outside', as if to say, 'You, the Arabs of Israel, are completely different from the Arab world.' In other words, 'You are outside the Arab world and have no connection to it'. The establishment solidified this tendency by compulsorily isolating the Palestinian Arabs from the Arab world until 1967. Contact with the Arabs of the 'outside' could take place only through the Mandelbaum Gate in Jerusalem. In reality, the geopolitical borders separating the Palestinians from the rest of their people could not quell their affinity towards their fellow Palestinians. As a result, the Arabs inside the state of Israel gave themselves the label 'Arabs of the inside' to emphasize their connection to the Palestinian people; at the same time, this name creates a parallel between themselves and the Palestinian Arabs in the diaspora outside the homeland. It also distinguishes the Palestinians of Israel from the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The label is relatively new, having arisen in the aftermath of the War of 1967. 'The Palestinian inside' is the term used by the Islamic movement inside Israel to denote its Palestinian citizens. In recent years, the movement has succeeded in introducing the term to the general Arab public by using it in statements, articles, and newspapers and in its leaders' speeches. In fact, the movement's official name includes this label: 'The Islamic Movement in the Palestinian Inside' (Mustafa, 2013). At the same time, 'the Palestinians of the inside' is the common label used by the Palestinians in the West Bank, in addition to the abovementioned 'Arabs of 48'. The label 'the Palestinians of the inside' is used to distinguish the Palestinians inside the Green Line from those in the West Bank.

**Table 8: Frame #7: Nativist labels that use the word *Palestinian* as a fundamental element in defining the components of identity**

The country's Palestinians
The Palestinian (Arab) community in Israel
Palestinian Arabs resident in Israel
Palestinians in (the State of) Israel
The Palestinian Arab nation in Israel
The Palestinians of '48
Palestinian Israelis

In the first three decades of Israel's existence, the word *Palestine* was not used by the establishment, and as a matter of fact, was not even used by Palestinian Arabs themselves. The state believes that if the Arabs define themselves as Palestinians, they will feel more closely attached to the Palestinian people and this in turn would increase their hatred for and hostility towards the Israeli state. In the past, any Palestinian Arab who self-identified as a 'Palestinian,' who waved a Palestinian flag, or who had contact with Palestinians abroad would be accused and prosecuted for having committed an act of hostility against the state.

This situation changed as time passed, due to political advances towards political settlement with the Palestinians in the first half of the 1990s and the appearance of Palestinian Arab politicians and academics in Israel who produced a new discourse concerning the collective identity and the status of the Palestinians within the state. Today, Palestinian Arabs are proud of their identity and use the word *Palestine* as a fundamental element in the definition of their identity. The abovementioned labels are used by Palestinian Arabs, mainly intellectuals and nationalist political parties, with confidence and pride, whereas Islamists use the label 'the Palestinian inside', which does not contain any mention of Israel. Palestinian Arab nationalists, leftists, and intellectuals often

use some of the labels mentioned above in which national identity (expressed by the word *Palestine*) is combined with the location of the homeland (*in Israel*). Documents outlining a future vision of Arabs in Israel, which appeared in the years 2006-2007, used these concepts in reference to the Arab citizens of Israel.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the first paragraph of ‘A Preamble to the Future Vision’ states,

We are the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, the indigenous peoples, the residents of the State of Israel, and an integral part of the Palestinian People and the Arab and Muslim and human nation (p. 5).

In the ‘Haifa Document’, published by an Arab research centre in Israel, the language is very patriotic. The document begins as follows:

We, the sons and daughters of the Palestinian Arab people, who remained in our homeland despite the defeat, and who have been unwillingly transformed into a minority in the State of Israel after its establishment in the year 1948 on the larger part of the Palestinian homeland ...’ (Haifa Document 2007: 7)

As for the Israeli political establishment, which denied the very existence of a Palestinian people, a sentiment overtly expressed by the former Prime Minister Golda Meir, it has undergone a certain change. Some Jews today, especially left-leaning and moderate ones, accept this definition and speak about

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<sup>10</sup> These include *The Future Vision for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, published in December 2006 by the National Committee of Arab Mayors in Israel; *An Equal Constitution for All*, published in November 2006 by the Mossawa–Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel; *The Democratic Constitution*, published in March 2007 by Adalah–The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; and *The Haifa Declaration*, published in May 2007 by Mada al-Carmel–The Arab Center for Applied Social Research in Haifa.

the Palestinian identity of the state's Arab citizens. This is not the case with those on the political right, who interpret this trend as hostile to the state.

Table 8 shows a list of labels that evoke a sense of identity in defining the collective identity of Palestinians, in order to distinguish between Palestinian and Israeli identities. They are usually used by Palestinians, both in Israel and abroad, as an affirmation of the Palestinian component in the identity of Israel's Arabs. Of the seven labels in the list, five employ both Palestine and Israel as constituent elements.

**Table 9: Frame #8: Labels confirming the native dimension of the Arabs**

Arabs (or people) of the homeland
The Palestinians of the homeland
The country's owners
The country's original inhabitants

The discourse on identity in Israel rejects the recognition of Palestinian identity. Israel has used numerous labels to depict the Palestinians on the 'inside' but now believes that it has exhausted its store of labels and is no longer capable of either promoting certain old labels or creating new ones. This is due to an ever-growing political awareness among Palestinians since the beginning of the 1990s and their refusal to consume what the state dictates to them, including in the semantic domain, especially regarding labels. This growing awareness is driving Palestinian Arabs to express their identity openly in many ways. Thus, in the last two decades, a new element has appeared in Palestinian discourse, represented by the growing use of the four labels in Table 9, to describe their identity (Amara & Mustafa, 2013). The use of the first-nation element in the definition of the Arabs since the middle of the 1990s reflects the presence of nativist thought in the political discourse of Israel's Palestinians, who are adopting the idea that the minority's first-nation rights should drive the discourse on Palestinian rights in Israel.

Note that these labels emphasize the word *homeland*, which was appropriated by the Hebrew state. This new approach strives to define the Palestinians as a native national minority rather than an immigrant minority, as it is the Jews who immigrated to this country, not the Arabs. These labels convey a sense of belonging to the Arab nation and to Palestine and highlight the fact that they are the indigenous inhabitants and owners of the land.

### **Conclusion**

In the emerging new reality, Palestinian Arabs in Israel are struggling to change the prevailing identity of the state. This effort forms a reasonable basis for the creation of a shared, common identity for all the citizens of the state, without exception. Whether this is possible or not in the foreseeable future is a different issue. However, the fact is that the structure of Palestinian Arab identity is multifaceted, and various identities play significant roles within it, including national, religious, and civil roles.

The Palestinian Arab identity repertoire in Israel is dynamic and linked to social and political challenges and contexts. It is influenced by ethnic and religious affiliations, political allegiances, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the nature of the relationships between the Arab community on one hand, and by the Israeli establishment and Jewish society on the other, at any given time. It is also affected by social and political changes occurring within the Arab community.

Identity labels came to reflect a specific reality, whose conflicts play a fundamental role in shaping them. The labels reflect the nature of the relationship between Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of the state. There are two main groups of people who use these labels: (a) the Israeli establishment and the wider Israeli public and (b) the Palestinian Arabs. The labels created and used by the Israeli establishment and the broader Israeli public aim to define the boundaries



of Palestinian Arabs within the country. By shaping the awareness of the Palestinian Arab community that remains within the borders of the state, they act to bring it into line with the vision and interests of the Jewish Zionist state. In contrast, the Palestinian Arabs see themselves as an integral part of the land in which they live and are engaged in a process of resistance to preserve their original identity from erasure or distortion.

These identity labels are nothing more than symbolic tools employed by the Israeli establishment and the wider Jewish public to assimilate Palestinian Arabs and compel them to accept the identity of "Arab-Israeli," which is tailored to fit the Jewish-Zionist state. However, as Amara (2016) points out, Palestinian Arabs have managed to use alternative labels that genuinely reflect and express their identity, rejecting the Israeli labels and deleting them from their mental lexicon. Today, we can see certain segments of Israeli society beginning to adopt the labels used by the Arabs themselves, which in itself is a modest achievement of Palestinian Arab citizens in their struggle for recognition.

In this conflict with the Israelis, Palestinian Arabs in Israel have to navigate the complexities of Israelization. Therefore, their challenge in the Israeli context lies in how to balance their national identity (Palestinian-Arab) with their civil identity (Israeli). This task is not easy, especially when there is security tension between Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinians outside of Israel expect the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel to empathize with the Palestinian cause in all its dimensions, emotionally and materially, even if it contradicts Israeli law. At the same time, Jewish Israeli citizens expect Palestinian Arab citizens to detach themselves from the Palestinian issue and not sympathize with their fellow people, believing that sympathy implies disloyalty to the state of Israel and its laws. This challenge will persist as long as the Palestinian issue remains unresolved. Finding this balance is a complex process that will be akin to walking a tightrope.

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