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A "JEWISH STATE" OR A "STATE FOR ALL ITS CITIZENS?": PALESTINIAN DEMANDS FOR REDEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE ISRAELI NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE JEWISH RESPONSE *

Z. Aslı ELİTSOY

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey
Doktora Adayı, Siyaset Bilimi Bölümü, Bilkent Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0786-0460>
<aslielitsoy@bilkent.edu.tr>

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Abstract: The "Basic Law of Human Dignity and Liberty," which functions as the country's *de facto* constitution, has defined Israel as a "Jewish state," thus putting the equal rights of all non-Jewish citizens within the Israeli polity into question. As a consequence of the Jewish nature of the state, the Jews have been elevated, whether they were citizens or not, into a privileged position over others and governments gave institutional and legal preference to the Jewish majority particularly in the realms of immigration laws, land allocation, and military service. By the 1990s, however, Israel's citizens of Palestinian descent seemed to find a balance between their Palestinian and Israeli identities and this tendency was accompanied by a growing emphasis on their status as a "national minority in its historical homeland" and a political struggle for collective rights. Challenging the Jewish hegemony, they have persistently claimed to transform the Jewish state into a "state for all its citizens," and, hence, the recognition of their status as a national minority entitled to collective rights, including the right to self-government and equal representation in the governing bodies. What has been the

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Israeli state response to these demands? Using qualitative data derived from several in-depth interviews with the members of the Israeli political elite conducted in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa between December 2018 and January 2020, this study argued that Israeli policy makers continued to pursue a “security-oriented” policy towards Israeli Palestinians due to their trans-border ethnic relations. As a consequence, the Palestinian demand for establishing a “state for all its citizens,” which challenged the Jewish nature of the state, has been seen as a denial of Israel’s right to exist, or to put in discussion the Jews’ right to statehood.

Keywords: Ethnic Minorities, National Identity, Exclusion, Palestinian Citizens, Israel

“YAHUDİ DEVLETİ” Mİ “İSRAİL’İN TÜM VATANDAŞLARININ DEVLETİ” Mİ?: İSRAİL MİLLİ KİMLİĞİNİ YENİDEN TANIMLAMAYA YÖNELİK FİLİSTİN TALEPLERİ VE BUNA YÖNELİK TEPKİLER

Öz: Devletin fiili anayasası yerine geçen “İnsan Onuru ve Özgürlüğü” temel yasasının İsrail’i bir “Yahudi devleti” olarak tanımlaması, ülkedeki tüm diğer Yahudi olmayanların eşit vatandaşlık haklarının sorgulanmasına yol açıyor. Devletin Yahudi doğası gereği vatandaş olsun ya da olmasın tüm Yahudiler diğerlerine göre daha ayrıcalıklı bir konuma yükseltiyor ve hükümetler özellikle göçmenlik yasaları, arazi tahsisi ve askerlik hizmeti gibi konularda Yahudi çoğunluğa kurumsal ve yasal imtiyazlar sağlıyorlar. Fakat 1990’lı yıllardan itibaren İsrail’in Filistin kökenli vatandaşları Filistinli ve İsraili kimlikleri arasında bir denge sağlayarak, “tarihsel anavatanındaki ulusal bir azınlık” statüsü ve bu statüye bağlı olarak kolektif hak taleplerinde buldukları bir siyasi mücadele yürütüyorlar. Yahudi hegemonyasına meydan okuyarak “Yahudi” olarak tanımlanan devleti “İsrail’in tüm vatandaşlarının devleti”ne dönüştürmeyi böylece özyönetim ve eşit temsil hakkı da dâhil olmak üzere kolektif haklara sahip bir ulusal azınlık olarak tanınmasını sürekli savunuyorlar. İsrail devletinin bu taleplere yanıtı ne oldu? Bu çalışma, Aralık 2018 ve Ocak 2020 tarihleri arasında Tel Aviv, Kudüs ve Hayfa’da 12 İsraili politika yapıcı ile derinlemesine nitel görüşmeler kullanarak İsraili politika yapıcıların sınır ötesi etnik ilişkileri nedeniyle İsraili Filistinlilere yönelik “güvenlik odaklı” bir politika izlemeye devam ettiğini savundu. Sonuç olarak, devletin Yahudi doğasına meydan okuyan “tüm vatandaşları için bir devlet” kurma Filistinli talebi, İsrail’in var olma hakkının inkar edilmesi veya Yahudilerin devlet olma hakkının tartışılması olarak görüldü.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etnik Azınlıklar, Ulus Kimlik, Dışlama, Vatandaş Filistinliler, İsrail

Introduction

Led by Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), the Jewish nationalist Zionist movement, which emerged in late nineteenth century Europe, was an organized political movement dedicated to found a Jewish state and thus turn the Jewish diaspora into a sovereign nation. For the Zionist movement, the creation of a Jewish state would be possible through Jewish migration to Palestine, which, at the time, had been perceived by many Zionists as a “land without a people” (Shapira 1992). Consequently, between 1882 and 1948, there were six subsequent waves of Jewish immigrants, known as *Aliyah*, who founded various proto-state institutions in Palestine that were to become the main structural foundations for the future Jewish state (Rivlin, 2011). Large-scale Jewish migration to Palestine, however, led to the eruption of violent clashes between the Jewish immigrants and the native Arab population in Palestine (Segev, 2000). The British government turned the matter over to the United Nations (UN) which offered a plan to divide Palestine into small autonomous Jewish and Arab states with Jerusalem under UN administration. Neither Arabs nor Jews were satisfied with the plan (Golani, 2009). On May 14, 1948, one day before the withdrawal of the British forces, the Jewish community led by David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973) declared independence. Almost simultaneously, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, called by the Jews the War of Independence (*Milhemet Ha'Atzmaut*), and by the Palestinians the disaster (*al-Naqba*), broke out. The 1948 War resulted in a 50 per cent expansion of Jewish-controlled territory and large number of Palestinian refugees, almost two-thirds of the population, to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.¹ The war also marked a transition from a local Zionist-Arab confrontation to a regional Arab-Israeli conflict (Naor, 2013).

Apart from those who became refugees, about 150.000 Palestinians remained within the boundaries of the newly established state and were granted Israeli citizenship.² Although the Israeli Declaration of Independence promised complete “equality of social and political rights for all citizens regardless of race, religion, and sex,”³ the definition of Israel as a Jewish state

¹ According to Palestinian sources approximately 850,000 Palestinians became refugees between 1947 and 1949. According to Israeli government sources, the number was around 520,000. See E. Zureik, "Palestinian Refugees and Peace", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 24 (1), 1994

² Currently, there are 1.7 million Israeli citizens of Palestinian descent within the 1967 borders of Israel, comprising 21 percent of the population. See, World Population Review, *Israel Population 2020*, available from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/israel-population/>

³ Provisional Government of Israel, *The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel* (Official Gazette: Tel Aviv, 1948), available from https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm

by the same declaration excluded Palestinian citizens from the nation culturally and politically (Rekness, 2014). As a consequence of the Jewish nature of the state, the Jews have been elevated, whether they were citizens or not, into a privileged position over others and governments gave institutional and legal preference to the Jewish majority particularly in the realms of immigration laws, land allocation, and military service. Politically, the Arab parties have been excluded from government coalitions and not received same budget allocations and governmental investments. In addition to that, the perception of Palestinian citizens as part of the “enemy” led to a “security-oriented” state policy towards them.

By the 1990s, Israel’s citizens of Palestinian descent seemed to find a balance between their Palestinian and Israeli identities and this tendency was accompanied by a growing emphasis on their status as a “national minority in its historical homeland” and a political struggle for collective rights. Seeking equal treatment with the Jewish majority, their demands included establishing a binational state that would offer power-sharing to both Jewish and Palestinian citizens and a more inclusive political system. In the 2000s, these demands were manifested in three documents, which were collectively known as the “Future Vision” documents, published by Palestinian intellectual and political elites. Challenging the Jewish hegemony, citizen Palestinians have persistently claimed to transform the Jewish state into a “state for all its citizens,” and, hence, the recognition of their status as a national minority entitled to collective rights, including the right to self-government and equal representation in the governing bodies.

In order to address the question of how has the Jewish state elite responded to the Palestinian demands for equal treatment and a more pluralistic political system, this study has focused on elite interviews as a key method of data collection. Twelve elite interviews were conducted with Israeli policy makers, such as members of parliament, former ministers, political party representatives, diplomats and national security bureaucrats in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa between December 2018 and January 2020. Interviews initially were organized through personal contacts then a snowball sampling strategy has been applied as each interviewee was being asked to suggest and refer another potential participant. Based on the data derived from the elite interviews, this study argued that Israeli policy makers continued to pursue a “security-oriented” policy towards Israeli Palestinians due to their trans-border ethnic relations. As a consequence, the Palestinian demand for establishing a “state for all its citizens,” which challenged the Jewish nature of the state, has been seen as a denial of Israel’s right to exist, or to put in discussion the Jews’ right to statehood.

1. Palestinian Political Mobilization in Israel and Demands for Equality

Following the declaration of the State of Israel, Palestinian citizens were eventually placed under a military government regime that was lasted until 1966 and a continuous state of emergency has been declared. The military government and its emergency power had facilitated the state's control over the Palestinian population, mainly through forced displacement, land confiscation, and its further isolation (Lustick, 1980). Consequently, as Jamal (2007) argued, Palestinian politics in Israel have been deeply influenced by the "trauma of being transformed from a majority in its homeland to a minority in an alien state." Moreover, finding themselves defeated in the 1948 War, they were devastated and lack of organization and material resources. For this reason, Rekhess (2007) described the period between 1948 and 1967 as "accommodation" for the Palestinian citizens.

In the 1960s, Palestinian political mobilization gradually developed from within the organizational structure of the Jewish leftist movement.⁴ During the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s, two major political groupings had dominated the Palestinian political scene in Israel. The first group, called as the "moderate" camp, consisted of those who were associated with the Zionist parties, mostly concerned with the daily needs of the community, such as health and education (Shoughry, 2012). The second group was the "national" camp which was comprised of those who identified with the Israeli Communist Party (*HaMiflega HaKomunistit HaYisraelit-Maki*), which took an anti-Zionist stance and supported the establishment of a Palestinian state as recommended by the UN partition resolution in 1947. The 1960s was a decade of important developments for the Palestinian citizens as they entered the process of "Palestinization." First, the leftist movement moved towards an ideological split between its Palestinian and Jewish factions as a result of internal political struggles, which led to the formation of pro-Jewish Maki and the first authentic Palestinian political representation at the national level, the Rakah. Second, the military government was abolished in 1966 following heated parliamentary debates (Degani, 2015). Lastly, following the Six-Day War in 1967,⁵ Palestinian citizens of Israel reconnected with their fellow co-

⁴ For a detailed historical account of the Jewish leftist movement see, Z. Lockman, "The Left in Israel: Zionism Vs. Socialism", *MERIP Reports* (49), 1976

⁵ In June 1967, the mobilization of combined armed forces of the neighbouring Egypt, Jordan and Syria culminated in an Israeli attack on Egypt. Following the war which lasted for six days, Israeli military forces had occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. See, A. Shlaim and W. R. Louis, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, Cambridge ; New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012

ethnics in the West Bank and Gaza (Jamal, 2017) and, hence, the consolidation of the Palestinian identity as a national alternative to the Israeli had started, a process which came to be known as “Palestinization” (Rekheess, 2007). Therefore, political activism among the Palestinian citizens increased (Rouhana, 1989) as they saw themselves as part of the broader Palestinian nation (Rekheess, 2014).

The Palestinian political mobilization on national grounds continued throughout the 1980s and manifested in various occasions, most notably the strike and protest over the Sabra and Shatila massacre⁶ in 1982 and protests to show solidarity and support with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza during the first *Intifada* (Sa’di, 2017). Palestinians also begun to use other channels to challenge Jewish hegemony in the state, such as representation in the Knesset and the media (Rubin, 2019). Moreover, the “state for all its citizens,” as a legal-political term, had its roots in the 1980s with a change proposed by the pro-Palestinian Progressive List for Peace (PLP)⁷ to the amendment to the Basic Law adopted on 31 July 1985.⁸ The proposal was either to drop the phrase referring Israel as “state of the Jewish people” or to add to it “and its Arab citizens.”

The “Palestinization” of the Palestinians lasted until the Oslo Process in 1993, which has had an extensive impact on Palestinians’ political and ideological orientation (Rekheess, 2008). The Palestinian recognition of Israel as the Jewish state and the PLO acceptance of a two state solution in the Oslo Accords paved the way for the “Israelization” of Palestinian citizens (Smootha, 1989) and the “localization of the national struggle” (Rubin, 2019), accompanied by a shift in Israel’s policy towards them from a security-based to a civil approach (Hitman, 2019). Consequently, the political discourse of the Palestinian minority mainly focused on a more inclusive political vision, dominated by three models: a state for all its citizens, autonomy, and binational state (Rekheess, 2008). Therefore, the 1990s was marked by the Palestinians’ self-perception as a national minority deserved collective rights (Rekheess, 2014) and their assertiveness in demanding equal treatment under the law and full access to political power (Peleg, 2004). This increasing assertiveness was reflected in the formation and activities of the National

⁶ In September 1982, Christian Phalangist militias in Lebanon killed about three thousand Palestinian civilians in Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in revenge of Bashir Jumayil’s death.

⁷ The PLP established in 1984 as a Jewish-Palestinian political partnership and headed by Muhammad Mi’ari and Matti Peled.

⁸ Amendment No 9 of the Basic Law: the Knesset states that a list may not participate in the elections if there is in its goals or actions a denial of the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, a denial of the democratic nature of the state, or incitement to racism.

Democratic Assembly (*Brit Leumit Democratit*-Balad) founded in 1995 by a group of left-wing Arab activists, both Christian and Muslim, under the leadership of Azmi Bishara. Promoting an Arab-Palestinian national line, Balad advocated to transform Israel into “a state for all its citizens” to replace the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state and demanded that Israel recognize its Palestinian population, including the Druze, as a national minority with national collective rights and full equality, and grant them cultural and institutional autonomy (Hitman, 2016).

In the 2000s, the “Israelization” of the Palestinian citizens and their demands for equal treatment were manifested in three documents, which were collectively known as the “Future Vision” documents, published by Palestinian intellectual and political elites: Mada al-Carmel’s “Haifa Declaration,” the “Future Vision,” developed under the auspices of the Committee of Arab Mayors in Israel, and the “Democratic Constitution” issued by Adalah—The Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. Emphasizing the Palestinian foundation of their identity that anchored in their Israeli experience, according to Reiter (2009), these documents signified a “landmark in the development of Israeli Arabs as a national minority that challenges Israel’s legitimacy to exist as a Jewish and Zionist state.” The first document, the “Future Vision” that was published in 2006, described Israel as an extension of the colonial west in the Middle East, and argued that, “Israel cannot be defined as a democratic state, but as an ‘ethnocratic’ state such as Turkey, Sri Lanka, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia,” a definition resulted in the “hegemony of the majority and marginalizing the minority.”⁹ The document also proposed that the state should be based on “consensual democracy,” comprising the presence of the Jews and the Palestinians and guaranteeing full resource, leadership, and decision-making participation. The second document, the “Democratic Constitution” that was issued in 2007 in the context of the efforts of the Knesset to draft a constitution, was a constitutional proposal, calling for a “democratic, bilingual, and multicultural state.” It also called upon the state of Israel to be a democratic state based on equality, to recognize the Palestinian population as a “homeland minority”¹⁰ with collective rights, to adopt principles of restorative justice for past injustices, and to withdraw from all of the territories occupied in

⁹ The National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel* (2006), available from <https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/newsletter/eng/dec06/tasawor-mostaqbali.pdf>

¹⁰ The term “homeland minority” refers to a community who represented the majority in the past but became a non-dominant minority due to a traumatic historical event in a geographic area that they collectively perceived as their homeland. J. R. M. Cobo, *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations* (New York: United Nations, 1987)

1967 and recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.¹¹ The third document, "Haifa Declaration" published in May 2007, on the other hand, called for the recognition of the Palestinians as a national group and, accordingly, implementing collective national rights, including the effective participation of the Palestinians in government and decision-making, the right of veto in all matters concerning their status and rights, and a cultural autonomy, which included the rights to develop policies for and to administer their own cultural and educational affairs and distributing resources in accordance with the principles of distributive and corrective justice.¹² In short, all documents represented a strong rejection of the Jewish nature of the state and suggested in its place a Jewish-Palestinian binational state based on the principles of consensual democracy, power sharing, and equal resource allocation.

2. The State Response to the Palestinian Demands Which Challenged the Jewish Character of the State

Contrary to the Palestinian expectations, the general Jewish response to the Future Vision documents was defensive; a reaction resulted in further restrictions on equal exercise of political and civil liberties, and free and fair contestation for political power (Rubin, 2019). Branding the Palestinian citizens as "enemies declaring war against the state," these demands have been perceived by the Jewish majority as a "contradiction to the basic Zionist ethos of the state" (Avnery, 1999), a "provocative attempt to delegitimize the Jewish people's right of self-determination" (Smootha, 2009), and even signs of "separatist intentions" (Rekheess, 2008).

In parallel to the public response, the participants of this study made a clear distinction between individual and collective rights, and almost all of them, including the left-wing Labor Party members, fiercely opposed the idea of granting the later to the Palestinian minority. The Secretary General of the Labor Party said, "I believe there is a difference between individual and national rights. I do not recognize national rights even though of course I support and wish equal civil rights."¹³ Furthermore, some participants harshly condemned the Palestinian Future Vision Documents, which challenged the Jewish character of the state and introduced a collective position on the nature of the state for the Palestinian minority by establishing a binational state.

¹¹ Adalah, *The Democratic Constitution* Shafa'amr, 2007), available from https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/Public/files/democratic_constitution-english.pdf

¹² Mada-al-Carmel, *The Haifa Declaration* 2007), available from <https://mada-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/watheeqat-haifa-english.pdf>

¹³ Secretary General of the Israeli Labor Party, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy, Modi'in (Modi'in: 2019)

Calling them as the "so-called documents of vision," a former Likud minister stated that the basis of his rejection of the documents was that they attacked the very foundation of the State of Israel.¹⁴

Although a number of participants, including a former security and intelligence officer who worked for many years for the Israeli General Security Service (*Sherut Habitachon Haklali*, commonly known as Shabak or Shin Bet), acknowledged that the Palestinian citizens of Israel have been loyal to the state in the sense of not taking part in terrorist activities, this was not implied that they have not been perceived as a "security threat" by the state elite along with the majority of the Jewish public. On the contrary, they have been seen as "usual suspects,"¹⁵ "potential enemy,"¹⁶ "potential danger,"¹⁷ "enemies within,"¹⁸ "future bomb,"¹⁹ and "a problem that should be covered by the security service."²⁰ In addition to the dominant state perception of the Palestinian minority, the majority of the Jewish public also perceived them as a threat. According to a survey, two-thirds of Jews were reluctant to enter Palestinian villages and towns out of fear while a majority felt threatened by the Palestinian political struggle against the Jewish character of the state and mass Palestinian rebellion and collaboration with the enemy (Smoocha, 2010).

Palestinians comprised a stateless national group inhabiting territories spanning across the borders of several states: Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.²¹ The perception of Palestinian citizens as a security threat to the state generally stemmed from their cultural, linguistic and national ties, not to mention family ties, with the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as well as the wider Arab world, which has been generally seen as an existential threat to the Jewish presence in the region. Consequently, the citizens of Palestinian descent have been "suspicious" because "Arabs were

¹⁴ Former Likud Minister and Member of the Knesset, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy (Jerusalem: 2018)

¹⁵ Former Israeli Justice Minister and Labor Party Member of the Knesset, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy, Tel Aviv (Tel Aviv: 2018)

¹⁶ Former Ambassador and Director General of the Foreign Ministry of Israel, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy (Mevaseret Zion: 2018)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Israeli Retired Brigadier General and Deputy National Security Advisor, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy, Tel Aviv (Tel Aviv: 2018)

¹⁹ Former Senior Intelligence Officer from the Mossad and Arab Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy (Ramat Hasharon: 2019)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ In addition to the Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, around three million Palestinian refugees currently live in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

Israel's enemies,"²² whose ultimate aim was to "throw the Jews out of the region," a former Labor Party member of the Knesset argued:

The fundamental Arab idea about Israel is that Israel is temporary. The presence of sovereign Jews in the region is temporary. This is what informs the conflict and ideology. Israel's Arab citizens are part of that. They are part of the Arab world. They are not a separate nation, or a separate people. They are clearly part of the Arab world, which means that they also have this view that the Jewish right to self-determination is nonsense and foreign.²³

The Israeli elite perception of that the Palestinian citizens, as part of the Arab nation which fought against Israel since its inception, were opposed the idea of Jewish right to self-determination in Palestine, was one of the reasons why they viewed Palestinian political demands with suspicion and considered accommodating minority rights as replacing Israel with an another Arab state (Grigoriadis & Elitsoy, 2021). For this reason, they supposed that as long as the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, in particular, and the Arab world, in general, remained unresolved, it would have far-reaching implications for Jewish-Palestinian relations within Israel,²⁴ because, a former senior Israeli intelligence officer argued, "there will always be Arabs in Israel who support the Palestinian side."²⁵

For most of the participants of this study, trans-border cultural and social relations of Israel's Palestinian citizens have led to their identification with their ethnic kin across the border and thus shaped the state's domestic policies on the assumption that they might cooperate with the "enemy." A former brigadier general and Deputy National Security Advisor of Israel described the domestic implications of these relations for the state's minority policies as a "dilemma:"

For many Israeli Jews there is no distinction. Israeli Arabs and Palestinian Arabs are the same. They are enemies outside and enemies within who cooperate to destroy us. After the abolishment of the military regime, Arab citizens, theoretically, became like any other Israeli citizens without any limitations. But, practically, there have always been limitations. Why? Because they are Arabs; they belong to a people who for long years fought against Israel. They were the enemy. You have a minority ethnically belong to the same people of your enemies. But Israel is a democracy and you cannot look

²² An Israeli Ambassador, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy (Modi'in: 2019)

²³ Former Labor Party Member of the Knesset, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy, Tel Aviv (Tel Aviv: 2019)

²⁴ Former Ambassador of Israel, "Interview," ed. Z. Asli Elitsoy, Tel Aviv (Tel Aviv: 2019)

²⁵ Former Senior Intelligence Officer from the Mossad and Arab Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister, "Interview,"

at your citizens as a security threat, like the enemies of the other side. How do you deal with this?²⁶

The perception of the Palestinian citizens as a security threat has manifested in several discriminatory practices and inequalities on the structural level, especially matters concerning the national security, and specifically the state's domestic policies of surveillance, control (Frisch, 2011), and policing the Palestinian minority (Boulos, 2020). For instance, a special department in the Israeli internal security service Shin Bet, which was described by one of the participants as “quite effective,”²⁷ has been responsible for monitoring and gathering intelligence on Palestinian citizens only. Moreover, since the early 2000s, a series of discriminatory laws affecting the Palestinian citizens' political participation, right of expression, economic status, and family life have been enacted as part of a national security policy that perpetuated the perceived threat posed to the hegemony of the Jewish identity by the Palestinian minority (Olesker, 2014). In 2002, the Knesset passed amendments that empowered the Central Elections Committee to prohibit individuals and political parties from running for the elections for “rejecting Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state” (Rouhana & Sultany, 2003). In July 2003, the Knesset suspended the Family Unification Law that provides citizenship or permanent residency to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza who marry an Israeli citizen. In 2010, the government voted in favor of an amendment to the Citizenship Act which will obligate new non-Jewish citizens to pledge allegiance to the “Jewish and democratic state.” Furthermore, an amendment of the “Basic Law: Israel the Nation State of the Jewish People”²⁸, also known as the “Nation-State Bill,” was adopted by the Knesset in July 2018 as the legal justification for the exclusion of non-Jewish citizens since the law granted the right of national self-determination exclusively only to the Jewish people. These discriminatory laws and policies, especially those related to the national security, proved that the state continued to view its Palestinian citizens as a hostile security threat due to their trans-border cultural and national ties. Consequently, the collective demands of the Palestinian minority, including equality with the Jews in Israel, cultural autonomy, and the establishment of a democratic, binational state, have been seen as inconsistent with the Jewish right to self-determination and even further as a plot for bringing about the end of the Jewish state.

²⁶ Israeli Retired Brigadier General and Deputy National Security Advisor, "Interview,"

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The Knesset, *Basic Law: Israel - the Nation State of the Jewish People* (2018), available from <https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/BasicLawNationState.pdf>

Concluding Remarks

The state of Israel was founded as an exclusive Jewish state based on the Zionist ideology, which was “a combined political, economic, and social approach to creating a territorial base for a Jewish polity” (Kimmerling, 2008). Consequently, Israel’s Palestinian citizens, those who remained inside the area of the Jewish state and eventually became citizens, have been excluded from the nation culturally and politically. Since the 1990s, when their process of “Israelization” has started, the Palestinian citizens have constantly challenged the Jewish hegemony and persistently claimed to transform the Jewish state into a “state for all its citizens.” Their demands included to be recognized as a national minority with collective rights and self-governance in matters of Palestinian life in Israel, such as education, communication, planning, control over resources, social welfare and development. Due to their trans-border cultural and national ties with the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and with the wider Arab nation, however, Israel’s Palestinian citizens continued to be designated as the “enemy within,” which was resulted in a “security-oriented” state policy towards them. Consequently, their equal rights demands have been perceived by the Israeli policy makers as a challenge to the ethno-nationalist basis of the state, undermining Israel’s founding principle as an essentially Jewish state. Considering the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in historical Palestine and in the broader Middle East, establishing a binational state, that would offer power-sharing to the two peoples, or a “state for all its citizens” continued to be seen as a denial of Israel’s right to exist, or to put in discussion the Jews’ right to statehood.

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