

The hidden Palestinian displacement: internal displacement in Israel

by Nihad Boqai'

Over a quarter of a million Palestinian citizens of Israel, 25% of the country's Palestinian Arab population, are internally displaced.

Israel has destroyed, demolished and confiscated housing and land and denied IDPs the right to return to their homes. As Israel becomes more politically unstable, a significant percentage of the country's Arab minority are threatened with state-sponsored or -tolerated forced eviction from their homes.

Palestinian IDPs belong to the larger group of Palestinians displaced/expelled in 1948. After Israel's establishment some 150,000 Palestinians remained within the borders of the new state. Displacement did not end in 1948. Under the system of military rule which continued until 1966, Palestinian Israelis were forcibly relocated from areas zoned for Israeli Jews. Depopulated Palestinian villages were either replaced with Jewish settlements or razed to become part of state forests which today hide evidence of previous Palestinian settlement. In the southern Negev desert, the Israeli military forced the Bedouin to abandon their traditional nomadic lifestyle and herded them into designated zones. Military regulations were used to override decisions of the Israeli High Court supporting IDPs' rights to return to places of origin.

Some IDPs were relocated to new housing units in designated 'shelter villages' where they remain today. As a condition of being given new housing units, IDPs were required to formally forfeit housing and property rights in their villages of origin. A small number did so, many of whom were ostracised by other IDPs and Palestinian political movements. Israel does not recognise the existence of IDPs nor the right of international organisation to focus on their plight

More than 50 years after their displacement, the experience of displacement and dispossession has a visible impact on the socio-economic

status of Israel's IDPs. Peasants have been transformed into marginalised unskilled workers in the Israeli economy. Many have had problems in rebuilding their lives in the villages that provided shelter in 1948. As Palestinian citizens of Israel, they face overt discrimination in employment and state provision of health, education, housing and other services. In shelter villages, Palestinian Israeli cities or in Arab neighbourhoods of mixed Arab-Jewish cities, IDPs are spatially segregated in neighbourhoods which often take the name of villages of origin. IDPs are poorer than their non-IDP neighbours. Those IDP entrepreneurs who have succeeded in establishing businesses mostly depend on an IDP clientele.

While the relationship between the generation who witnessed the *Nakba* (cataclysm) of 1948 and the village of origin was a connection of remembrance, among the second and third generations the connection to the village of origin with the second and the third generation is more romantic - at times the village of origin becomes a 'shelter' from the shelter village. However, the refugee identity of IDPs inside Israel remains as strong as it has been since 1948.

Driven by the experience of displacement, IDPs have always been more politically active at the national level in Israeli politics than other sectors of Palestinian society in Israel. This is particularly true of second and third generation IDPs. Some members of non-Zionist parties in the Knesset are IDPs. Over the last decade the campaign to highlight IDP rights has assumed new proportions as both IDPs and refugees throughout the Palestinian diaspora have felt shut out by the Oslo peace process. The exclusion of refugee rights from the negotiation process and the crisis of



representation at the Palestinian national level have engendered increased interest and awareness about Palestinian refugees and IDPs. The Association for the Defence of the Rights of Internally Displaced Palestinians (ADRID) is now recognised by Palestinians as the representative forum of IDPs inside Israel. ADRID annually commemorates the *Nakba* on the anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel and organises conferences which have generated new support for the right of return of both IDPs and refugees.

IDPs in Israel are challenging not only Israel's persistent refusal to recognise their existence or their right to return but also the social structures of shelter villages where the relationship between locals and IDPs remains one of estrangement. Palestinian IDPs remain a minority within a minority but have taken their place within the broad and increasingly vocal right to return movement.

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