



Sadaka Second High-level Forum

*Israeli Apartheid: Developing Ireland's Strategy*

March 2022

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Session 2: Apartheid in practice: ethnic cleansing, population transfer and segregation.

**Dr. Yara Hawari**

**The manifestations of apartheid from the Jordan river to the  
Mediterranean sea.**

Chair: Mona Sabella, Sadaka.

Thank you so much for putting on this conference and thank you to my colleagues who spoke before me and excellently laid out the apartheid framework, both in theory and practice. They explained how this is part and parcel of the Israeli settler- colonial regime and that it is practiced in all of historic Palestine.

What I want to do now is to hone in on some of those manifestations of apartheid but particularly I want to focus on the Palestinian citizens of Israel, also known as Palestinians in the '48 territories. And the reason for this is because often this community of Palestinians is used as an example of why Israel cannot be an apartheid state. I'm sure you've all heard the arguments that there are Arabs in the Knesset, and the judiciary etc. And the Israeli regime also recruits people from this community to argue this, but I want to lay out for you in actual fact that this community of Palestinians was and is the first community to experience Israeli apartheid and they are proof of its existence since 1948.

During Nakba of course 800,000 Palestinians were expelled from the borders of the newly established Israeli regime but 150,000 survived this ethnic cleansing. These Palestinians were placed under martial law for nearly 20 years, a period that was known as the military rule period. It was based on the 1945 Emergency Regulations that were introduced by the British Mandate Authorities, who had previously used it to monitor Palestinians. Now this military rule period limited all aspects of Palestinian life within the new state, including freedom of movement, political expression etc. and this was the genesis of Israeli apartheid. In 1948, not 1967.

Now, importantly during this period we saw mass appropriation of land conducted through the absentee property law which the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, passed in 1950 and this law continues to be the main vehicle through which Israel confiscates land including in east Jerusalem to this day. It allowed the state to seize property from any person who had left their place of residence between November 29<sup>th</sup> 1947 and May 19<sup>th</sup> 1948. This law, and many others, comprised the basic law which serves as Israel's constitution to this day and I mention it because it is important for later in this talk.

Now, the basic law, the constitution codified apartheid into the legal system. And these laws also affirm Israel's foundational doctrine of Jewish dominance in a Jewish state with inequality for all others. Military rule was lifted in 1966 but the Palestinian community remained a demographic and potential threat to the nature of the state. And so that's why the Israeli regime maintained both segregation and marginalisation of this community. Today the Palestinian citizens of Israel number 1.9 million people, about a fifth of the total population. You may have often heard that Palestinians in Israel are second class citizens but unfortunately this phrase doesn't even reflect the reality. In their case, citizenship from the outset has not been used as a mechanism of inclusion and this is because in Israel, unlike in most countries, citizenship and nationality are distinct terms and categories.

I want to stop here for a second and explain this because it is really crucial. While there is such a thing as Israeli citizenship, there is no Israeli nationality for Palestinians. Nationality is actually designated along religious and ethnic lines. Israel actually demarcates 137 possible nationalities, including Jew and Arab, and these are all recorded in the registry databases. So, as the Jewish nation and the state of Israel according to the Israeli basic laws are considered one and the same, the exclusion of the non-Jewish citizens is a consequence. In other words the differentiation between citizenship and nationality allows for this very sophisticated and covert racist system that's not necessarily detectable to the unknowing observer. But I think when it's explained, it's very obvious. The system divides people into these two categories– Jewish nationals and non-Jewish nationals. And this, I think embodies the very definition of apartheid. Palestinian citizens have been designated as Israeli Arabs, a term that's very common in the mainstream media. It's also a term that attempts to negate the Palestinian identity of these citizens. But it also allows Israel to portray itself as this diverse and multicultural state. The reality is quite the opposite.

Both Palestinian citizens and Jewish Israelis have challenged this issue of citizenship and nationality in Israeli courts several times. Palestinians have obviously done so in an attempt to gain full rights within the state, and Jewish Israelis have usually sought to relinquish their religious identities. So far the Supreme Court has rejected all petitions to change the law on the basis that having such a thing as Israeli nationality, would open up inclusion for non-Jewish citizens and would therefore challenge the Zionist underpinning of Israel as a Jewish nation state.

So, aside from this issue of citizenship and nationality, social organisation within the '48 territories also demonstrates apartheid really well. Most Palestinian citizens of Israel live in Arab only villages and towns with only a few living in what they call the mixed cities, which are actually cities with both populations but which for the most part remain very segregated. This is not an accident; and it's not a natural residential pattern. The general aim of the Israeli regime (and this happens in the West Bank and Gaza as well) is to squeeze as many Palestinians into as little land as possible. So, within the '48 territories villages that survived the ethnic cleansing in 1948 saw much of their land appropriated and the expansion of these villages hasn't been permitted. So, as a result, these Palestinian villages and towns within the '48 territories suffer from severe overcrowding, and there's no opportunity for relief through development or growth.

Since 1948 not a single new Palestinian Arab town or village has been built in those territories.

If Palestinians do leave their towns and villages of origin they're also restricted from purchasing or leasing land and this is done through two main mechanisms. The first is the admissions committee. These committees are permitted to assess the social suitability of potential residents and this means that Palestinian applicants can be legally rejected from living in a certain area because they're not Jewish, and also through the second mechanism, the Jewish National Fund and the state authorities' discriminatory policies.

So, in general, urban and rural planning and organisation of space maintains the dominance of the Jewish character of the state and supports the Zionist narrative. The goal of the National Masterplan of Israel, which was formulated in 1965, reaffirms this policy. It says the following:

"The plan is to develop spaces in Israel in a way which allows the realisation of the goals of the Israeli society in its varied components, the realisation of its Jewish character, the absorption of Jewish immigrants and maintaining its democratic character."

The fact that Palestinians citizen and Israeli Jews live in segregated spaces also makes it all the much easier for Israel to deprive Palestinians of services that they're officially entitled to because they pay tax.

This ideology and the policies that supported it have had devastating consequences for Palestinians in the '48 territories. For example, in the Galilee, where Palestinians are actually the majority, the Israeli government has made very determined and aggressive attempts to Judaize the area. This includes encircling Palestinian villages with Jewish settlements to prevent geographical contiguity as well as not permitting Palestinians to expand their villages.

This reveals the state's preoccupation with demographics and its fear of the increasing Palestinian population. This fear has also played out in the south, in the Naqab, where there has been a continuous process of displacement and forced relocation of tens of thousands of Palestinian. At the moment we are seeing intensified resistance from the Palestinians in the Naqab in the face of this ongoing ethnic cleansing. There are 90,000 Palestinians in the Naqab who live in what Israel calls "unrecognised villages". This means that Israel considers these villages illegal, and the residents of these villages as trespassers on state land. But the classification of "illegal" actually stems from the fact that many of these villages predate the establishment of Israel and in this way Israel claims this idea of illegality in order to deprive Palestinians of basic services such as water and electricity, and in many cases in

order to demolish villages. So, the way that Israel treats Palestinians in the Naqab (also known in English as the Negev) is the same way that it treats Palestinians in the south Hebron hills in the West Bank just a few kilometres away. For the Israeli regime they serve as the same nuisance to be dealt with in the same way.

Now, I want to turn to look at this argument that is often used that Palestinians serve in the Knesset and can challenge the Israeli system through legal mechanisms. However, the reality is that Palestinian citizens of Israel can make very limited gains within the Israeli legal system through lawsuits or appeals. They are not actually able to seriously challenge the regime, the apartheid regime.

This Palestinian political participation in the Knesset is often cited as an example of the state's plurality and democracy. Actually, candidates to the Knesset may be rejected if they deny the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. So, political participation in the Knesset is actually premised on accepting that the state is for the Jewish people and that Palestinian existence within the state will never be equal to that of their Jewish counterparts.

I've talked at length about this particular fragment of the Palestinian people because I do think it's an important experience of apartheid that is often neglected. I think "the Palestinian people" is usually limited and watered down to just those residing in the West Bank and Gaza and this in itself is a major mechanism of apartheid fragmentation, and many of the human rights organisations' reports that were previously mentioned, including the ESCWA report, argue that fragmentation is the key mechanism through which the Israeli regime manages to maintain apartheid.

And so, this leads me on to the final thing that I want to mention which is the unity uprising that occurred last year. In May 2021 a collective Palestinian uprising against the Israeli regime took place. Sheikh Jarrah, the Palestinian neighbourhood in Jerusalem whose residents faced and continued to face imminent ethnic cleansing, was the catalyst of this mass popular mobilisation. It attracted massive attention locally and internationally and I think one of the reasons for this was because Sheikh Jarrah encapsulates the Palestinian experience of decades of false displacement, of land theft, of incarceration, and of the brutalisation of Palestinian bodies. And so, in other words, Palestinians saw in Sheikh Jarrah their own experiences and that of their parents and of their grandparents, whether they live in Jaffa or Yafa.

Now, over the months that followed this initial spark in Sheikh Jarrah, Palestinians across colonised Palestine protested in a shared struggle, including Palestinians in the '48 territories in Haifa, Nazareth, all over. These protests and demonstrations were met with incredibly violent repression from the Israeli regime. There were also several days of protest at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound which were also met with violent repression. But the worst violence we saw was when Israel started bombing Gaza, which ultimately killed 250 Palestinians including 66 children.

While Gaza was under attack there was strong grassroots mobilisation across the rest of colonised Palestine. On May 18<sup>th</sup> for example, Palestinians called a general strike which is arguably one of the biggest shows of Palestinian collective unity in years. The strike was organised in response to the attack on Gaza and the ongoing struggle in the streets of Jerusalem and saw widespread participation across colonised Palestine.

But it was particularly important for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who were once again reiterating their connection to and shared struggle with Palestinian citizens of Gaza and Jerusalem. And it was an effective tactic of disruption. The Palestinian citizens of Israel are more than 20% of the population and they constitute a large part of the workforce. As an example, 24% of nurses and 50% of pharmacists within the Israeli state are Palestinian. So, a massive strike like this has potential and did indeed disrupt the Israeli economy, not to mention the fact that the construction sector is basically all Palestinian and so on the day of the strike construction in Israel was completely put on hold.

During these protests something incredibly important was happening. Palestinians were chanting the same chants; they were carrying the same slogans on their banners; Palestinians in the mainstream media were sharing the same talking points; and there was this expression of unity and shared narrative the likes of which I don't think we've seen for several decades. It's something certainly that the Oslo generation hasn't seen and it was this revival, the collective narrative, that asserted we are Palestinians from the river to the sea and our collective struggle is Sheikh Jarrah, it's in Gaza, it's in Yafa, it's wherever Palestinians are living under oppression from the Israeli regime.

This is not the kind of unity narrative concerning the reconciliation discourse that we often hear about between Hamas and Fatah. It's rather a unity discourse that challenges the enforced fragmentation that the Palestinian people have suffered from since the establishment of the Israeli regime. This is why last year has been called the Unity Intifada. It was quite interesting to see that even though the aesthetics and the ideology of this Unity Intifada were clearly being articulated, the international mainstream discourse really failed to recognise this narrative. I want to include a short paragraph from a manifesto that emerged during this Intifada called "The Dignity and Hope Manifesto":

"We are one people and one society throughout Palestine. Zionist mobs have forcefully displaced most of our people, stolen our homes and demolished our villages. Zionism was determined to tear apart those who remained in Palestine, isolate us and section all geographic areas, and transform us into different and dispersed societies so that each group lives in a separate large prison. This is how Zionism controls us, disperses our political will and prevents us from a united struggle against the racist settler colonial system throughout Palestine."

The manifesto goes into detail on all of the various geographic fragments of the Palestinian people, naming the Oslo prison (i.e. the West Bank), the citizenship prison (i.e. the '48 territories), the brutal siege in Gaza, the system of Judaization in Jerusalem, of course those in permanent exile, and the imposition of this colonised structure on Palestine, characterised by concrete walls, checkpoints, gates in settler communities, wired fences and which has left Palestinians living in fragments, separated and isolated from one another as we all know and as Palestinians experience all too well.

And as the manifesto notes, this hasn't happened inadvertently or at random. It's a deliberate policy of divide and conquer which has been implemented by the Zionist regime to undercut a united Palestinian anti-colonial anti-apartheid struggle. This latest uprising demonstrated this effort towards a renewed narrative and efforts to revitalise the Palestinian struggle as one struggle.

And so that's why I think the intifada of last year was so significant, and that's why I wanted to end with it because it pushed the boundaries of what is possible and what it means to be Palestinian. It reclaimed the shared narrative of struggle from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea, and in doing so it highlighted that Palestinians face one single regime of oppression, even though it manifests itself in different ways throughout the different fragmented Palestinian communities.

But I think one of the most important things to be learned from last year (and the uprising reiterated this) is that the people, not the powers and not the leaders but the people, are the locus of power through which Palestinian liberation must and will be achieved. Thank you.