

# Hatred and Racism between Jews and the Arab Palestinian Minority in Israel: Characteristics, Consequences, and Coping Strategies

Ephraim Lavie, Meir Elran, and Muhammed Abu Nasra

The relations between the State of Israel and its Jewish majority and the Arab Palestinian citizens directly affect national security, in the wider sense of the term. As such, these relations require consistent and responsible government policy, based on the interests of the state and all its citizens. However, it appears that the policy implemented over the years does not adequately reflect this need. Although over time the awareness by Israeli governments of the need to narrow the deep social and economic gaps between the Jewish majority and Arab Palestinian minority has increased, in practice most of the recommendations of the Or Commission, established in the wake of the bloodshed of October 2000,<sup>1</sup> have not been implemented. The overall reality of extreme inequality has changed only slightly. Relations between Jews and Arabs have deteriorated: alongside the increased integration of Arabs in the Israeli work force and economy, ultra-nationalist and fundamentalist religious streams in both communities have strengthened, and serve to deepen, the schism between them. In practice, the Or Commission's vision of "existing together in mutual respect" has become harder to fulfill. Senior government leaders have occasionally made offensive statements that could be understood as incitement against Arab citizens,<sup>2</sup> and Arab leaders have made harsh statements that have fanned the flames against the state and cast it as an enemy.<sup>3</sup>

The policy of Israeli governments toward the Arab population in recent years suffers from a deep internal contradiction. On the one hand, the state invests significant budgets in developing the Arab community and integrating it into the national economy, out of awareness that this policy (as with respect to the ultra-Orthodox sector) contributes to Israel's economic growth. This understanding is shared by senior government officials as well as experts on the national economy. On the other hand, those same governments take steps whose clear implication is exclusion of the Arab population from Israel's political, cultural, and social arenas, in part through legislation that reduces the civil rights of the Arab minority (for example, the laws on admissions committees, the electoral threshold, and the suspension of Knesset members).<sup>4</sup> In this way, the state contributes directly to the deepening of Arabs' subjective feelings of alienation, as individuals and as a community.

### **Expressions of Hatred between Jews and Arabs**

Recent years have seen recurring examples of blatant racism and raw hatred, as well as offensive actions, by Jews toward Arabs.<sup>5</sup> Extremist groups exploit the porous borders of free speech to spread incitement, chauvinism, and exclusion, which encourages young people to carry out ultra-nationalist violent crimes and terrorism while receiving support from religious leaders.<sup>6</sup> Dangerous "price tag" attacks have been carried out against Arab citizens of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

The chant "death to Arabs" against Arabs in Israel has been heard at nationalist events and at mass demonstrations and public disturbances, sometimes accompanied by graffiti and actual acts of violence. This chant is especially common at soccer games and is directed toward Arab teams or toward Arab players on Jewish teams. The chant is an act of incitement to racism and as such is prohibited by law. The late Justice Edmund Levy said that "it is regretful that real steps to prevent this unacceptable practice have not yet been taken at a level that would enable its elimination."<sup>8</sup> Israeli President Reuven ("Ruviv") Rivlin has taken it upon himself to denounce expressions of hatred and racism at soccer stadiums.

Discussions of political events on the social media are connected to racist discourse toward Arabs in Israel. For example, upon submission of the Begin-Praver Bill on the Arrangement of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev

to be read in the Knesset (November 2013), Arab news websites raged, the Arab public went out to demonstrate in various places around the country and an anti-Arab discourse arose online that combined political opinions with racist rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> A report by Buzzilla on the nature of the discourse online during Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014 showed that conversations including racist statements and incitement accounted for nearly half of all online discourse on the situation. This discourse connected Arabs with leftists and did not differentiate between political statements and racist statements, or between Arab residents of Gaza and Arab residents of Israel.<sup>10</sup>

Social media has contributed to the rise and quick organization of groups with ultra-nationalist and racist motivations. During Operation Protective Edge, a number of Facebook groups were created with the goal of identifying people who expressed opposition to the war and harming them in various ways. The pages included “Not in our school,” “Boycott the Israel haters,” and “Concentration of enemies of Israel.” They gathered information on people who opposed the operation and called for their ouster. Each of these pages received tens of thousands of likes. Another example is organizations such as Lahava (“for the prevention of assimilation in the Holy Land”) and Lions of the Shadow,<sup>11</sup> which brought people together for demonstrations throughout the country during Operation Protective Edge and influenced the nature of online discourse. During the operation, Facebook removed Lahava’s page a number of times due to user complaints that it was used for incitement, and a number of indictments were filed against its activists.<sup>12</sup> The Lions of the Shadow, led by the rap singer Yoav Eliasi (known as “the Shadow”), blurred the line between protest and racism, and their declared goal was “to stand up in force against the real enemy among us, the radical left.” This turned into violent behavior against leftist activists and Arabs in Israel who expressed solidarity with the residents of the Gaza Strip.<sup>13</sup> Here too, it seems that the lines between political protest and racism were blurred.

It therefore appears that in recent years, racism has become widespread and is growing among various groups, including young adults and teenagers, especially among the extreme right. They make statements and take actions against Arabs, feeling that “the government is with them.” They make use of social media to spread their extreme opinions against Arabs, and these seep into the center of the public discourse in Israel. As during Protective

Edge, this rhetoric often does not differentiate between Arab residents of the Palestinian Authority and Arab citizens of Israel, or between them and left wing Jews. Activists in these groups do not distinguish between political, socio-cultural, and racist actions. In their view, there is one enemy and one front. Thus, “price tag” attacks, whose original goal was to cause the government to reconsider the evacuation of outposts in the West Bank, have also, in the view of their perpetrators, served the goal of maintaining the Jewish character of the state or silencing political opposition. The same activists who engage in political incitement on one occasion are prone to perpetrate racist acts toward Arabs in Israel on other occasions.<sup>14</sup>

Recent years have likewise seen expressions of hatred and incitement on the part of Arabs in Israel toward the Jewish public. “Death to Jews” was spray-painted on synagogues in Safed,<sup>15</sup> and Jewish soccer teams playing in Arab towns and Jewish soccer players on Arab teams have encountered Arab fans who openly expressed their hatred of Jews.<sup>16</sup> The leaders of the Islamic Movement have voiced incitement, including demonization of Jews.<sup>17</sup> As part of their political and civil protest, Arab Knesset members and other Arab leaders have made provocative declarations toward the state and society, and have taken steps that contributed to deepened tension, anxiety, and mistrust between Jews and Arabs.<sup>18</sup>

### **Addressing Hatred and Racism**

Although these are serious and worrying processes, they have thus far not received an adequate critical response in the public discourse, and in particular have not received the proper response required from the state leadership and the Arab leadership. Governments have ignored the illegal and harmful phenomena of incitement and racism; there has been minimal activity by law enforcement agencies; and there has been unwillingness by the state to deal effectively with the problem. All these tendencies have enabled, and perhaps even encouraged, the growth of the expressions of hatred and racism.

There are laws criminalizing racism. The past decade has witnessed increased willingness to fight against expressions of racism and exclusion of the “other.”<sup>19</sup> In April 2003, a program called “Kicking racism and violence off the fields” was initiated with the goal of exposing and uprooting expressions

of racism and incitement at the National League and the Israeli Premier League soccer stadiums.<sup>20</sup> This activity facilitated Israel's inclusion in 2006 in the organization Football against Racism in Europe (FARE). The trend of denouncing expressions of racism and violence was given legal force on July 30, 2008, when the Knesset passed the Prohibition of Violence in Sports Law, 5768-2008. The law determined that the punishment for racist statements at soccer stadiums was up to two years in prison.<sup>21</sup> In 2013, the Israel Police and the Israel Football Association declared an all-out war against all expressions of racism at soccer stadiums, in the wake of media and political pressure and international pressure. Within this framework, dozens of fans have been arrested and interrogated by the police; some of them have been banned from stadiums, and some fans from certain teams (Beitar Jerusalem, Maccabi Umm al-Fahm, and others) have faced indictments for racism.<sup>22</sup>

In 2013, the Justice and Education Ministries put together a joint curriculum called Preventing Racism, Violence, and Incitement. It observed the International Week of Tolerance, and aimed "to instill a discourse based on the values of love, acceptance of others, tolerance, and mutual support."<sup>23</sup> The Ministry of Education implemented the program in 2013-2014 as part of a curriculum plan called "from tolerance to prevention of racism and living together." The program was launched among all sectors and age groups in Israel's education system and their educational staff. However, the curriculum did not address the Arab-Jewish schism as an issue of national importance. Lesson plans did include content on "Bedouin heritage" or "tolerance in Islam," but they were intended for Arab educational institutions, not Jewish schools. Thus the right idea was neutralized of its core content.

In their paper "Education toward Democratic Values and the Struggle against Racism through Education," Prof. Mordechai Kremnitzer and Dr. Amir Fuchs stated that there has been a steady erosion of the universal view of the equality of human value for all people, and the view of the state's Arab citizens as deserving equal rights. They argue that a special effort is required to remedy the situation, given the contents of the education system, which at all grade levels emphasizes the Jewish character of the state in curricula, ceremonies, and holiday celebrations. Depending on the educators and the

material learned, this may take on aspects of extreme particularism, ultra-nationalism, condescension, and hostility toward the “other.”<sup>24</sup>

It appears that condemnations of hatred and racism by leaders and public figures, both Jewish and Arab, have thus far been too weak. The law enforcement system and the education system have not managed to reduce hatred, violence, and racism significantly in society in general, and toward Arabs in particular. Adar Cohen, former coordinator of civics at the Ministry of Education, wrote an article entitled “What Else Do We Need to Do to Fight Extremism and Racism in the Education System?” In the article he writes that the severe incidents in Jewish-Arab relations are an expression of the wider phenomenon of hatred and fear of the “other” (ultra-Orthodox, immigrants from Ethiopia, gays, refugees, migrant laborers). This is expressed in acts of violence, provocation, flagrant statements, and destruction of property, all resulting from racist motivations. These types of incidents are sometimes called hate crimes. Incidents of severe violence have also occurred among youth and even at schools, resulting from hatred of the “other.” One of the most shocking and severe incidents was the murder of Muhammad Abu Khdeir of East Jerusalem in 2014.<sup>25</sup>

Cohen stated that civics teachers and educators throughout the country expressed frustration and helplessness at the intensity of expressions of hatred and racism in the classroom. Many reported that they had almost stopped discussing controversial topics in class, especially the Jewish-Arab issue, due to their inability to cope with the extremism and racism of some students, and with the emotional storm aroused by the issue. In his opinion, civics educational activity does not provide a true response to one of the main problems threatening society and the education system. Cohen noted that in the 2013-2014 school year, the theme “the other is me” was incorporated into the curriculum, which purported to address the fight against racism, but did not focus on it. Cohen offered possible solutions within the educational system for addressing the problem of extremism and racism, including incorporating the topic of racism into the annual work plans of the Ministry of Education.<sup>26</sup>

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Or Commission ascribed responsibility to the state leadership and the Arab leadership for the existing state of relations between Jews and Arabs. However, the committee's recommendations have barely been implemented; to this day Israel's leadership and institutions do not have an agreed-upon strategy or clear aims on this issue, and there is insufficient dialogue between them.

It seems that Jewish and Arab leaders and public figures have failed in the critical task of condemning hatred and racism, as have the legal system and the education system, which have not significantly reduced these harmful phenomena in society in general, and toward Arabs in particular. Furthermore, the addition to the political and cultural exclusion of the Arab community, reflected in legislative initiatives intended to limit the civil rights of Arabs, as well as expressions of racism and hatred toward them, deepen feelings of alienation on the part of Arabs, individually and collectively.

Despite the damage caused by the worsening state of relations with the Arab community over the past decade, the weight of processes integrating Arabs in Israeli society remains the dominant and most influential component shaping the status and performance of this sector within the state. In recent years, these processes have deepened and expanded in various aspects (economic, social, cultural), and they contribute to the existence of normative relationships in many areas and to routine management based on mutual interests. As these processes are challenged regularly among both sides by tendencies to exclusion and racism, it is imperative that society cultivate the positive trends and reduce the influence of destructive phenomena.

It is essential that policymakers and decision makers recognize the centrality of the integration and acclimatization processes undergone by the Arab community within Jewish society. A consistent, long term policy shaped in accordance with this recognition can enhance the Israeli civic identity of Arabs without harming their unique identity, and at the same time serve the interests of the State of Israel. The December 2015 five-year plan for the Arab sector is a major step in this critical direction. Consistency and perseverance are required in complete and unconditional fulfillment of the plan in order to advance substantial Israeli interests and to convey an important message to Israel's Arab citizens, that the State of Israel is also

theirs, as declared by the Prime Minister in Tamra at the opening of the 2016-2017 school year.

This policy requires mobilizing law enforcement and the education system to address incitement and racism thoroughly and comprehensively, as well as conduct a responsible public debate on the issue. The country's leadership must renounce populist racist attitudes, such as support for the transfer of Arabs and limitations on their political rights as citizens. For its part, the Arab leadership must renounce statements that have undertones of Islamic or Arab ultra-nationalist racism, and facilitate the advancement of critical integration processes.

## Notes

- 1 The full name: The State Commission of Inquiry into the Clashes between Security Forces and Israeli Citizens in October 2000, known as the Or Commission.
- 2 See, for example, the Prime Minister's statement on March 17, 2015, when elections for the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset were held: "The right wing government is in danger. Arab voters are coming out in droves to the polls. Left wing organizations are busing them out." Also by the Prime Minister, after the terrorist attack in Tel Aviv in January 2016: "We will increase law enforcement dramatically in the Arab sector. We will not accept a state within a state. We will not accept a state in which there is Islamist incitement and an abundance of illegal weapons, where people shoot at celebrations and in criminal incidents. We will dramatically increase law enforcement in the Arab sector. We will enforce the law in every part of the country – in the Galilee, in the Negev, in the triangle, everywhere. We will open new police stations and we will demand loyalty to the country's laws from everyone."
- 3 This was reflected especially in the Islamic Movement, whose Northern Faction was outlawed, as well as in the Balad party, which was on the verge of being disqualified.
- 4 On this legislation, see Ephraim Lavie, *Integrating the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israeli Society: Time for a Strategic Change* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies and Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, 2016), pp. 149-72.
- 5 For example, racism emerged at Hapoel Hadera's soccer school, when due to pressure from parents, activities for Jewish and Arab children were separated. See the following articles on the issue: Raz Zehavi, "The Parents Pressured: Jews and Arabs were Separated in Hadera," October 15, 2016, <http://www.sport5.co.il/HTML/Articles/Article.4440.227176.html>; Raz Zehavi, "The Segregation in Hadera is a Stain on Israeli Society," October 16, 2016, <http://www.sport5.co.il/articles.aspx?FolderID=4440&docID=227239&lang=HE>.

- 6 On Lehava's activities, see for example, Lavie, *Integrating the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israeli Society*, pp. 173-83.
- 7 Gideon Aran, "Between Hooliganism and Avant-Garde: The Hilltop Youth Revolution," *Haaretz*, May 12, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/the-edge/premium-1.2327822>.
- 8 See Criminal Appeal Authority 1252/06, "Tahan vs. the State of Israel," April 23, 2006, <http://elyon1.court.gov.il/files/06/520/012/O04/06012520.o04.htm>.
- 9 Examples: Television personality Avri Gilad's statement that "there must be one law for all citizens of Israel – for Jews who close balconies and for Bedouins who fence off 5 dunams with a fence stolen from Omer." Also, a Jewish worker at a sports club in Haifa wrote that Arabs are a "genetic defect" and Arab businesses should not be supported. These kinds of statements caused uproars on social media and led in turn to expressions of racism. Avri Gilad on the Bedouins: "We Need to Reconquer the Negev," *Globes*, April 28, 2013, [www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000839387](http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000839387). See also Nasar Porat, "Uproar at Sports Club Due to Offensive Status," *Mako*, December 5, 2013, [www.mako.co.il/news-israel/local/Article-6f442c12533c241004.htm?sCh=31750a2610f26110&Partner=facebook\\_share](http://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/local/Article-6f442c12533c241004.htm?sCh=31750a2610f26110&Partner=facebook_share).
- 10 Buzzilla, "Violent Discourse on the Internet, July 11-14, 2014," from the website of the Coalition against Racism, <http://www.fightracism.org/Article.asp?aid=465&kw=%D7%91%D7%90%D7%96%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%94>.
- 11 About this group, see: "Who Are You, the 'Lions' of the 'Shadow,'" *Mako*, [www.mako.co.il/special-mako-news/Article-882d859b27f2741006.htm](http://www.mako.co.il/special-mako-news/Article-882d859b27f2741006.htm).
- 12 Nadav Neuman, "Fighting against Incitement: Facebook Removes Lehava's Page," *Feeder*, July 23, 2014, [www.feeder.co.il/article-facebook-shuts-racist-pages-1000957383](http://www.feeder.co.il/article-facebook-shuts-racist-pages-1000957383).
- 13 Yarden Skop, "Right Wing Activists Beat Left Wing Activists at Rally in Tel Aviv," *Haaretz*, [www.haaretz.co.il/news/local/1.2374629](http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/local/1.2374629).
- 14 See, for example, Yoav Eliasi's thank you letter on the Facebook page of Lions of the Shadow after a rally in Tel Aviv on July 12, 2014, in which he wrote: "Thank you to Lehava for coming, thank you Beitar Jerusalem folks, and thank you Maccabi Tel Aviv folks, thank you to the al-Yahud gang, and thank you Kahane Chai folks."
- 15 Maor Buchnik, "'Death to Jews' Spray-Painted on 4 Synagogues in Safed," *Ynet*, October 12, 2011; Kobi David, "Wave of Vandalism at Jewish and Muslim Holy Sites Continues: 'Death to Jews' Spray-Painted on Four Synagogues and a Car in Safed," *Walla News*, October 12, 2011. Two residents of the Achbara neighborhood of Safed confessed, explaining that they did it in retaliation for the arson attack by Jews on a mosque in Tuba-Zangariyye. See Adi Hashamonai, "Two Residents of Safed Confess to Graffiti on Synagogues," *NRG*, October 12, 2011.

- 16 Moshe Scheinman, "The Decision to Renew the Games Tomorrow," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 12, 2009; Gidi Lipkin, "No Soccer this Weekend," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 6, 2009.
- 17 See for example Itamar Inbari, "'You are Gambling on the Future of your Nation': In Venomous Sermon, Sheikh Raed Salah Attacks Israel and Warns: Jerusalem will be an Islamic Capital," *NRG, Maariv*, February 16, 2007, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/545/008.html>.
- 18 On MK Haneen Zoabi's statement equating the reality in Israel today with 1930s Germany, see for example Eric Bender, "Zoabi at Kristallnacht Ceremony: Israel is Reminiscent of 1930s Germany," *NRG, Maariv*, November 8, 2015, <http://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/Article-511904>. Actions such as the participation of Arab MKs in flotillas to break the Gaza blockade, support for an international boycott of Israel, meeting with families of terrorists and standing at attention in their memory, and opposition to declaring Hezbollah as a terrorist organization have been seen by the Jewish public as explicit support for terrorism, and have aroused anger. In this context, see Gidi Weiss and Jacky Khoury, "Balad MKs have no Regrets," *Haaretz*, March 10, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/.premium-1.2878308>.
- 19 See details in Lavie, *Integrating the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israeli Society*, pp. 180-81.
- 20 See on the website of the New Israel Fund: <http://nif.org.il/programs/football/about>.
- 21 See <http://www.knesset.gov.il/Laws/Data/law/2182/2182.pdf>.
- 22 See in the 2013 racism report of the Coalition against Racism, <http://www.fightracism.org/print.asp?aid=390>.
- 23 See Ministry of Education, [edu.gov.il/owlHeb/CHativa/YozmutHinochyotVRefurmot/other-one/Pages/Tolerance-week.aspx](http://edu.gov.il/owlHeb/CHativa/YozmutHinochyotVRefurmot/other-one/Pages/Tolerance-week.aspx).
- 24 See in Lavie, *Integrating the Arab-Palestinian Minority in Israeli Society*, p. 181.
- 25 Adar Cohen, "What Else Do We Need to Do to Fight Extremism and Racism in the Education System?" *Education Policy for Democracy*, The Israel Democracy Institute and the Open University (as part of the Dov Lautman conference on education policy, June 2, 2015), pp. 54-58, [http://www.idi.org.il/media/4055584/lautman\\_conference\\_book.pdf](http://www.idi.org.il/media/4055584/lautman_conference_book.pdf).
- 26 Ibid.