

Changes and Transformation

Arab Families in the 1948 Territories



By Baker Awawdy

The Arab-Palestinian community in the 1948 territories accounts for 17.3 percent of the population of Israel, excluding the population of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. The number is estimated to be close to 1.5 million people, with over 300,000 families, of which nearly 51 percent live in northern Israel and the

Galilee.ⁱ

Anyone who closely monitors developments in the Arab family in Israel will note that major changes are taking place, stemming mainly from technological, economic, scientific, and even political influences. As the model of the modern nuclear family has become dominant, it has replaced the extended family that has thus lost some of its historical centrality. There is no doubt that modern global influences, such as increasing individualism and democratization within the family, have shifted the historical and traditional roles of father and mother, and changes in the patterns that govern relations between parents and children have furthermore altered the structure of the family both in form and substance. These changes are clearly reflected in the observable demographic changes in society, such as the decline in the average family size, the increase in women's labor-force participation, the increasing trend towards delayed marriage, the high rate of divorce, changing patterns of expenditure, and shifting priorities within the family and in other areas of life. In our Palestinian reality, there is a steady trend of decline in the number of children. Among the Arab population in Israel, the number of children under age 14 has fallen by nearly 6 percent in the last decade, while the percentage of people aged 65 and over has risen by over a third since 2007.

The decline in the size of the Arab family provides the greatest evidence that changes have taken place within the Arab family over the past few decades. In 1960, the average size of the Arab family was nine persons, but over the course of time this number has decreased, due to several factors, to an average of five persons by 2017. This indicates a significant change, implying a huge economic and social shift that directly impacts the role of the nuclear family and the roles within the family. There is no doubt that the economic dimensions of living and the high rate of female university graduates are important factors that influence the size of the family. An additional factor that is often overlooked is the lack of land available for housing construction for young couples; most families do not have land to build homes for their children. According to the available data, 59.5 percent of families will need residential units over the next five years, but 46.4

Artwork by Nabil Anani entitled *Al-Raffoul Family 1943*, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 115 x 122 cm. Photo courtesy of Zawyeh Gallery, Ramallah.



More than 50 percent of Arab households in Israel live below the poverty line.

percent of these families either don't have land to build on or lack the resources to purchase a residential unit.ⁱⁱ Statistics show that more than 100,000 housing units are needed in the next five years.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, the shrinking family size is also related to the family's earning potential to provide for their children in such areas as education, academic qualifications, construction, marriage, etc. When parents lack earning potential, and the ability to help their children is limited,



Children of Arab Bedouins in the Negev. Photo by Ruth Oratz.

smaller-sized families are taken for granted, in light of the fact that most families live below the poverty line. In this regard, one cannot ignore the role of various government policies that have impacted the size of the family, such as the end of child insurance benefits and the opening up of opportunities to educate and facilitate the participation of women in various sectors of society, especially those women who live in the Naqab (Negev). But the real issue is that there is no effective policy for addressing poverty within Arab society.

I have already mentioned the rising number of women participating in the labor force alongside men, which is the beginning of the emergence of a middle-class society in which women play an equal role in areas of work, education, and sustaining the family. Paradoxically, despite the increasing participation of women in the labor force, statistics and data indicate that more than 50 percent of Arab families live below the poverty line and their incomes do not meet their living needs. Various data show that the income of the average Arab family is 30 percent lower than that of the average Jewish family. This percentage was the same more than ten years ago. The data show that in 2007 the average monthly income of an Arab family amounted to two-thirds of the average income of a Jewish

family: NIS 6,500 compared to NIS 10,000. In 2017, the rate of income increased; however, the gap remained the same: the average Arab family income was NIS 10,000, whereas the average Jewish family income was NIS 15,000.^{iv} This is significant because women's participation in the labor force has doubled yet doesn't seem to be enough to bridge the gap. If we consider that the cost of utilities such as water, electricity, transportation, communications, and food are the same for both Arab and Jewish families, we can understand the shortage caused by this income gap and the priorities of the Arab family. It is not surprising that over 30 percent of Arab families are currently repaying bank loans that are unrelated to housing loans.^v

As for sources of income in Arab households, we can see how society, over time, has transformed from an agricultural society to a professional labor force society engaged in various areas of work. Nearly 57 percent of Palestinian households in the 1948 territories depend on wages and salaries as the source of their basic income. In 2007, the number of households relying on the Arab private sector as their main source of income increased, whereas the number of households relying on the Israeli sector declined. In total, 73.4 percent of Palestinian households depend on

work as a source of income, while 20.8 percent depend on government allocations and 4.4 percent on retirement.

Despite the economic conditions and the challenges of living, it is important to mention one of the most important developments in Arab families, namely investment in the education of their children. This priority is evident in the increasing rate of expenditure on education in general compared to previous years, as well as the 2 percent rise of those who received a bachelor's degree within the last ten years and the high proportion of women enrolled in higher learning institutions. Arab families recognize that education is one of the ingredients of survival and necessary in order to live a decent life in a changing and unstable world.

Baker Awawdy is the director general of the Galilee Society – The Arab National Association for Research and Health Services. The association aims to improve the health and environmental conditions of the Arab population in Israel and promotes

Around 50 percent of Arab households in Israel either don't have land to build on or lack the resources to purchase a residential unit.

initiatives and actions to change policies in these areas. In addition, the Galilee Society operates Rikaz data bank, the largest and most comprehensive socio-demographic database about Palestinians in Israel. Mr. Awawdy has served as director of the Center against Racism and initiated the creation of the Racism Index. In 2009, he received the Green Globe Award in recognition of his work for environmental concerns; in 2013, he initiated and led one of the largest initiatives of Arab society to assist the Syrian refugees in Jordan.

ⁱ This paper is based on the recent survey titled "The Palestinians in Israel: The 5th Socio-Economic Survey 2017," conducted by The Galilee Society for Health Research and Services, available at goo.gl/pZkB9G; as well as other official data and articles.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, pp. 177–188.

ⁱⁱⁱ Emtans Shehadeh, "The Housing Crisis in Arab Towns" (in Arabic), Arab 48, available at goo.gl/R2rpfp; and "The Housing Crisis in Arab Society: Causes and Solutions" (in Arabic), available at www.arab48.com, 14/8/2018.

^{iv} Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Household Income and Expenditure Data from the 2015 Household Expenditure Survey – General Summary, available at goo.gl/uGUdSL.

^v "Palestinians in Israel 2017," p. 31.

Arab citizens of Israel are facing a severe housing crisis.

