

# Housing Transformation within Urbanized Communities: The Arab Palestinians in Israel

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*This paper discusses the residential transformation process within the Arab Palestinian community in Israel as a result of urbanization. It highlights the variety of housing models applicable to sub-groups of the Arab population according to geographical distribution, ethno-religious affiliation, and type of locality where different urbanization trends and social and physical rural environments are key characteristics. The most common residential model for this population group is the self-built house. The self-built house is common for upper-middle class Israeli Jews, while it remains the model of choice of lower-middle class Arab Israelis. This paper also considers the critical changes and processes of housing supply and demand as a result of the urbanization process, examining the planning, social and political factors, as well as the obstacles that have a direct impact on the Arab housing market.*

**Keywords:** *Urbanization, Arabs, Israel, urban village, latent urbanization, self-built housing.*

Arab Palestinian (henceforth Arab) localities and communities in Israel have changed dramatically in recent decades. They have shifted from the small traditional-village type communities to a more modern hybrid rural-urban type, that is, an “urbanized village,” through a process that is both general and unique to their environmental circumstances (Khamaisi, 2012). This urbanization process has led to incremental changes in physical, socio-economic, and socio-cultural environments within Arab communities and in turn has affected the behavioral patterns of Arab residents.

The physical and environmental characteristics of the Arab housing market constitute a major factor in differentiating rural and urban localities. This paper argues that false and latent urbanization<sup>2</sup> have had a direct impact on the housing patterns of Arabs and that the housing market is now situated at an intermediate stage between the traditional rural self-built housing, on the one hand, and the modern urban housing pattern of apartments offered by developers and contractors, on the other.

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The approach taken here, one that is critical in terms of national Israeli government policy towards the Arab community, analyzes the complexity and duality of the housing market within the national Arab minority and discusses the issues this minority faces as it attempts to preserve the community's rural identity and nature. The paper compares Arab and Jewish communities living in similar types of localities that share common housing characteristics. The purpose of this comparison is to enhance understanding of local habits and the impact of governmental policies on housing transformation in the Arab communities of Israel.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section sets up a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between urbanization and housing transformation. It includes a glance at international experience in order to create a framework for comparing the characteristics of urbanization and housing transformation between the Arab communities and other communities. The second section briefly describes the process of urbanization of Arab communities, particularly in the Triangle and Galilee regions of central and northern Israel. The third section illustrates housing transformation related to different factors and characteristics comparing Arab and Jewish communities, and sub-groups of the Arab community. The fourth section discusses the factors affecting housing transformation, critical internal and external policies, and obstacles that have contributed to shaping the housing characteristics of urbanization and housing transformation among the Arab communities of Israel. Final remarks are in section five.

Different methodological approaches based on several sources have been utilized: a review of relevant international and local literature; data collected from official statistical sources and surveys; and the "researcher as player," namely the author's work preparing plans for Arab localities, as well as his being a member of the Arab community; and as a first-hand observer of its narratives, discourses, and transformations. I am well aware of the research issues related to being a participant observer. This paper reports on the results of a series of informal and unstructured interviews with a variety of householders as well as stakeholders.

## **URBANIZATION AND HOUSING - GENERAL OVERVIEW**

Rapid urbanization, an international trend which accelerated during the twentieth century (Abu-Lughod, 1996; Pugh, 1995), results in the transformation of villages to towns or leads to an expansion of existing urban settlements to include neighboring villages as part of urban sprawl (Bourne, 2001). Urbanization creates challenges. How can residents from traditional rural settlements respond to the physical and cultural transformations associated with urbanization? (Berry, 1976; Mai and Shamsuddin, 2008) How will planners and policymakers address these transformation-related issues in planning and developing new cities? (AbuSada and Thawaba, 2011; Kafkoulas, 2009; Khamaisi, 1996).

The two most important factors responsible for urbanization are population growth and immigration. States, regions, and localities differ in the intensity and nature of migration streams and in the level and nature of urbanization. The urbanization process, together with economic changes which affect patterns in community life and the rate of investments in public and private services, is accompanied by changes in employment and housing demands (Kafkoulas, 2009; Khamaisi, 1996; 2009). Moreover, rapid population growth and the need to provide increasing numbers of housing units to respond to the demands by new families lead to a transformation in housing provision methods, housing and residential density, residential characteristics and conditions, as well as land and housing allocation.

Historically, traditional rural and peasant communities developed in villages where housing provision was based on organic and limited demands for new housing. The traditional residential patterns in the villages were affected by a number of factors such as primitive construction technology and small-scale housing production, limited availability of building materials, and traditional community customs and aesthetic values (Akbar, 1988; Al-Hathlol, 1994; Cannana, 1933; Elsheshtawy, 2008). Urbanization (which requires mass production and sales to address population growth) transforms villages into towns, which are sometimes incorporated into cities.<sup>3</sup> Rapid population growth and population concentration in urban areas lead to a high demand for housing, which in turn creates housing shortages (Song et al., 2008). Additional housing challenges in developing countries include (1) the deterioration in the quality of existing housing, (2) continued reliance on informal (squatter) housing, and (3) growing slums around and inside cities. Rapid urbanization has led to inadequate housing and infrastructure, and the inability of governments to meet the rising expectations of low-income families for decent homes (Aluko, 2010; Mai and Rahman, 2010; Sheuya, 2007).

The preceding raises a number of questions: How should national governments provide for increased demand for housing, in which locations, and through which types of housing? How can planners take into account an individual family's capacity to purchase housing and to maintain their homes, and how can they identify the role of the government versus the private sector in responding to housing needs? (Stephens, 2010)

The traditional rural-urban dichotomy has eroded as a result of the urbanization of villages, changes in community economic structure and growth, and new building technologies, building styles, and architecture—all a part of globalization (Champion and Hugo, 2004; Henderson and Wang, 2005; Khamaisi, 2012). Although numerous villages around the world have become urbanized, typically they still operate according to traditional patterns, best considered "urban villages" (Wang et al., 2009). In the urban village, housing demands are met through mass production and these urban-rural places are characterized by limited migration and strong attachment to place (EbenSaleh, 2002; Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). The preceding describes the case of the Arab population in Israel (Khamaisi, 2005).

## URBANIZATION AMONG THE ARAB COMMUNITIES OF ISRAEL

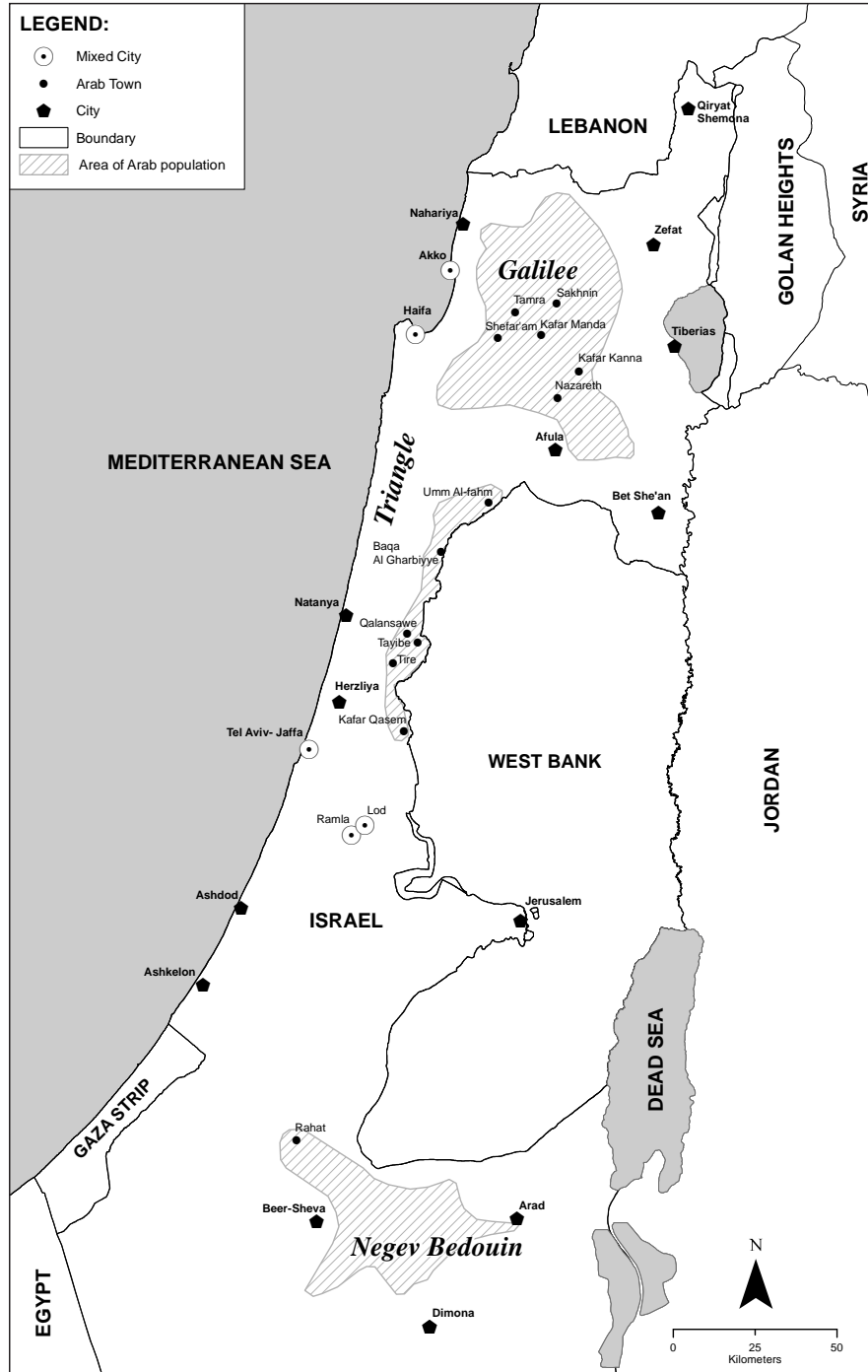
Arab citizens in Israel are commonly defined as a separate socio-cultural group, despite the fact that they consist of a variety of ethno-religious and regional groups. For the most part, they live separately, spatially, and ethno-culturally from the majority of Israeli Jews (Al-Haj, 1995). Israeli Arabs became a minority after the establishment of Israel in 1948, resemble an indigenous minority, and mostly reside in small rural localities. During and after the 1948 war, many Arabs living in the urban centers were exiled. A key implication of the war and the establishment of the State of Israel was a truncated urbanization process whereby urban Arabs lost their dominant position in the developing urban centers of Jaffa, Haifa, and Beer-Sheva.

The remaining Arab Israeli minority amounted to approximately 158,000 in 1949, constituting about 15 percent of the entire Israeli population. With a natural annual growth rate of 3 percent, the Arab population today stands at 1.3 million constituting approximately 17 percent of the entire population of Israel (CBS, 2011). The Arab population in Israel is divided into three religious groups: Muslim, 82.5 percent; Christian, 9 percent; and Druze, 8.5 percent. The median age of the Arab population in 2010 was 21.5 years, compared to 32.6 years for the Jewish population of Israel (CBS, 2011). There are important differences in demographic characteristics and natural growth rates among the different Arab communities which affect their housing conditions. For instance, the median age among the Muslim community of Israel in 2010 was 20.4 years, whereas the median age in the Christian, Druze, and Bedouin (Muslim) communities registered at 31.4, 25.6, and 15.3 years, respectively (CBS, 2011). These demographic characteristics reflect a traditional and patriarchal community undergoing urbanization, transformation, and modernization processes.

A disproportionately large segment of the Arab population lives in the Galilee region in the north with 54.6 percent of the total. The remainder lives either in the Triangle in the central region of Israel (23.5 percent), the Negev region in the south, (home for the Bedouin population, 13.5 percent), and 8.4 percent in mixed Jewish-Arab cities (Figure 1).

According to 2010 statistics, the Arab population lives in 134 towns and villages. About 44 percent of them live in towns (compared to 81 percent of the Jewish population); 48 percent live in villages with local councils (compared to 9 percent of the Jewish population). Four percent of the Arab citizens live in small villages with regional councils, while the rest live in unrecognized villages (the proportion is much higher, 31 percent in the Negev). Unrecognized villages are not entitled to government housing services such as building permits, adequate housing conditions, and basic infrastructure (Khamaisi, 2009). This geographic pattern evolved following the 1948 war and continues today because of limited rural-urban migration among the Arabs who primarily live in villages and rural communities.

Figure 1: Regions of Arab population in Israel



Despite the foregoing broad generalization regarding the rural to city movement, the Israeli Arab population is, in fact, undergoing an urbanization process accompanied by population growth, an increase in formal education (the median years spent at school in 1961 was approximately 1.5 years, rising in 2010 to approximately 12.5 years), and changes in the economic participation from agricultural to non-agricultural activities (the proportion involved in agriculture dropped from 60 percent in 1961 to 4 percent in 2010). During the same period, there was an increase in the number of commuters to workplaces in Jewish localities where most job opportunities are located.

The urbanization process in the Arab communities of Israel, however, has had only limited impact. Arab localities and communities still tend to be rural and traditional (Champion and Hugo, 2004; Khamaisi, 2004). During the period of 1948-1966, Arabs were under military rule, which implemented a matrix of control. This matrix was applied through Israel's governmental agencies to control the traditions and patriarchal socio-cultural norms, common social structures, and both spatial and social mobility Arabs. This urbanization has not, however, ended the role of traditional institutions in Arab communities.

The above described patterns and changes occurred while Arabs continue to live primarily in separate urban-village localities and in separate neighborhoods located in mixed cities, such as Haifa, Lod, and Jaffa. As described below, recent socio-political and economic changes have enhanced the already strong attachment between the Arab minority's socio-culturally traditional lifestyle, and the land, homes, and housing in their localities.

Due to external and internal political forces, together with cultural ones and their impact on majority-minority relations in Israel, the Arab rural to urban migration rate has been modest. Instead, Arab society "imports" the city into their communities (Hlhel, 2011). Population growth in Arab towns, resulting from high natural increase rates, is accompanied by increasing housing demand, limited housing market size, and poor purchasing power. Some towns undergo urbanization without changing their municipal status to that of "city." In such cases, the town develops a form of "*in situ* urbanization" that is characterized primarily by the entry of urban functions into a rural space (Khamaisi, 2004; Kipnis, 1976; Meir-Brodnitz, 1986a,b). In other cases, when towns grow sufficiently to qualify for city status, they develop an "urban-village" pattern that is common to developing countries. This pattern gives rise to contradictory land uses, traditional rural life styles and cultural, commercial, industrial, and residential patterns. When different forms of land use develop in proximity, yet lack municipal sanction, tensions arise between neighboring land owners. This conflict may lead to damage to one or more of the neighboring properties. Internal contradictions in a complex physical structure constitute the *in situ* urbanization or urban-village mosaics, which inevitably give rise to conflicts between various segments of its diverse population. Often, Arab towns require additional land for residential development, public buildings, commercial

developments, environmental infrastructure, and public parks, but this land is not available in sufficient quantities to meet their needs. Add to this the fact that Arab communities are unwilling to adopt and implement planning principles including zoning (Khamaisi, 2010; Ozacky-Lazar and Ghanem, 2003; Yiftachel, 1992).

The conflict between the Israeli Jewish majority and the Arab minority has revolved partly around Arab traditional socio-cultural norms. This has had a direct impact on housing and land attachment among the Arabs. The reality of conflict and contradiction between state ideology and hegemonic policies on the one hand, and the sentiments of the traditional local native Arab community on the other hand, severely curtails the Arabs' sense of belonging within the state system (Kretzmer, 2002), which tries to protect itself and to continue asserting its claims for culturally-oriented planning that considers and relates to its internal codes of behavior.

### ***What's Behind the Contribution of Limited Migration to Rural Urbanization?***

Israeli Arabs have usually been faced with limited housing mobility opportunities and constraints on territory. Such limitations mean that most Arabs are born and die in the same locality and, in some cases, in the same neighborhood. This leads to latent urbanization in Arab localities, where there is high population growth, limited economic expansion, but with little enlargement of municipal functions (Khamaisi, 2005; Kipnis 1976; Meir-Brodnitz, 1986a,b). Latent urbanization leads to the construction of new housing that had not been pre-planned and/or provided by the municipal authorities in the localities.

The main internal socio-cultural factor responsible for the limited rural to city movement relates to the strong sense of belonging and attachment to family and kinship, known as the "*hamula*" in traditional patriarchal Arab communities (El-Taji, 2007). The *hamula* is not only a framework of biological kinship relations, it functions as a political and socio-economic unit *vis-à-vis* other *hamulas* and other communities as well. Currently in Israel, where Arab identification with the central government is extremely low (El Taji, 2008), the development of civil society remains limited, and Arabs are effectively excluded from participation, shaping and producing public space at the state and regional levels. This sense of alienation has a direct impact on developing and preserving public space, roads, and land for public building in Arab localities. Instead, *hamulas* provide people with an important sense of safety and belonging. Arabs, therefore, prefer to continue living within the traditional social structure of their localities rather than migrate to urban centers separated from their families and *hamula* in the villages.

Arab residential patterns are also typical of traditional rural societies with demand for housing focused primarily on family compounds within specific localities and in neighborhoods based on *hamula* and religious affiliation. Customs within the Arab family enhance parental expectations that children live close by, but at the same time commit parents to provide the housing and land required to meet their children's needs. The children benefit from this family commitment and support

through which they are able to obtain their own homes. In addition, the low propensity to move away from the locality is due to the social, cultural, and financial costs involved. Furthermore, Arab localities still maintain the traditional social and economic support system for residents who fear losing specific benefits. For example, *hamula* members assist in constructing new houses. Young people who migrate to the city to acquire a higher education in college or university must be willing to give up these benefits (Masry-Herzalla et.al., 2011).

The main reason for the limited migration between Arab localities is the social isolationist tradition of Arab villages.<sup>4</sup> Typically, migration between villages is not associated with an improvement in the standard of living, but rather with suffering. Even in the case of closely neighboring localities, such as Sakhnin, Arraba, and Dir-Hanna, there is no desire for inter-village migration and each locality grows only as a result of natural increase; newcomers are made to feel like “strangers,” and, therefore, inferior to locals (Said, 1991).

The migration of small numbers of Arabs to “mixed Arab cities,” though limited, results in their settling down in concentrated, segregated and often lower class neighborhoods (Hliheli, 2011; Khamaisi, 2008; Masry-Herzalla et.al., 2011). Consequently family compounds in these destinations are often clustered and condensed, allowing internal intimacy on the one hand, while barring external intrusion on the other. Street and alley locations help in achieving cultural goals at the neighborhood level. Public areas are created in a way that renders them part of the domain of a particular clan or religious group. Small clusters of commerce and services, and particularly places of religious worship, are scattered throughout residential areas in a manner that accommodates the clan’s religious needs (Khamaisi, 2008).

A second main factor relates to Jewish-Arab relations. For most Arabs, migration to Jewish towns is unthinkable. Some Jewish residents in such towns make concerted efforts to prevent Arabs from moving in. In many cases, Arabs and Jews are alienated from one another and continue to live in segregated localities. The mutual sense of fear and alienation implies that though many Arabs and Jews may actually work in the same workplaces, they prefer to reside in separate neighborhoods. One may add State discrimination with regard to allocation of land for housing developments for Arab households.

Over the last decade, a limited number of Arab Muslim families have started to look for housing in Jewish neighborhoods and localities including the Upper Nazareth areas. Often, such moves have been met with resistance by Jewish residents. Migration to Jewish neighborhoods has also proven difficult due to lack of suitable cultural community services in the new environments. Overall, however, Arab citizens’ strong attachment to their own community, land, and home has been the most important factor promoting segregation, but as indicated above, segregation involves both voluntary and involuntary causes. Thus, despite rising standards of living and ongoing urbanization (including the urbanization of Arab communi-



ties), rural-urban migration among Arabs remains limited. This preserves the regional geographic distribution of Arabs, which in turn helps maintain Arab culture's peripheral position.

The minor increase in Arab rural-city migration of the past decade has not altered either Arab behavior or Arab-Jewish discourse. The limited migration reflects a renewed sense of localism, an emphasis on preserving kinship territory (*h'ema*) and securing ethno-national and religious homogeneity, and efforts to prevent outsiders from entering their traditional rural environment. In general, the limited and involuntary nature of migration among Arabs in Israel is part of a culture of housing and home and place attachment, to which the Jewish-Arab political conflict has contributed mightily. In this respect, culturally sensitive housing provision has not been taken into consideration by Israeli planners.

### *Housing Characteristics of the Arab Urban-village Localities*

One of the social customs among Israeli Arabs, strongly affected by Muslim religious and cultural norms, is for the groom to secure a house as a pre-condition for marriage. For this reason, nuclear families are committed to assist their children with home ownership. In the past village homes tended to be small (about 50 square meters) and usually consisted of one floor. This traditional housing pattern also created a multi-purpose room, known as the *a'ked* that can be used for various family functions. In one key respect, the construction of homes takes into consideration the sustainability of the environment, using local materials and traditional construction technology (Cannana, 1933). A typical village home belongs to the nuclear family; however, the extended family and *hamula* members live in adjacent houses, which together form a small neighborhood, or *hosh* (Akbar, 1988).

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a slow urbanization process and other emerging patterns of housing. A new pattern of housing construction emerged known as the *elya*. The *elya* is built of concrete and raised to two floors within a separate section of the private family land. This pattern, which has begun to spread, involves the functional division of the house for its use by individual family members. By mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, this modern home structure began to grow within the latently urbanized villages. Today most of new housing in the Arab localities replicates a modern style of private houses or villas (Figure 2).

Most houses consist of two or three floors particularly in large localities such as Tira, Tayibe, and Tamra. The building limitation (i.e. up to four floors) is not just due to housing demand, which is based mostly on the self-building method and the absence of public housing, it is also because the houses are located within the jurisdiction of municipal councils, which are required by planning law to follow the zoning plans of urban-villages. Planning law limits the number of floors, therefore, to four per house.

The increasing size of houses in recent decades is related to two main factors: hefty housing demand due to population growth and the desire of households to improve their housing conditions. For example, the Arab village of Kafar Kanna had a population of 3,000 in 1955. Its population grew to 19,200 in 2010 (an increase of 540 percent) (CBS, 2011). The built area expanded from about 300 dunams (30 hectares) in 1955 to about 3600 dunams in 2010 (a growth rate of 730 percent). The density is now about 5333 persons per square kilometer (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2:** Examples of transformation of the house types from *a'ked* around hosh (a) and *elya* style (b), to *villas* (c-d) in the transformation and renewal core of Turan locality in 2012.



Source: The author, April 2012.

Urbanization has led to changes in the housing market of the Arab urban-villages as well. In 2008, 92.9 percent of the Arab households owned their houses, compared to 65.8 percent of the Jewish households (CBS, 2010). According to a survey of Arab households in 2010, only 4.8 percent of the Arab households lived in rented houses compared to 26.4 percent of the Jewish ones (Rikaz, 2011). According to another survey of 3270 Arab households conducted in 2005, only 24.2 percent of the respondents reported living in apartment buildings, the rest of the respondents lived in private houses (Galilee Society, 2008; Khamaisi, 2009). Another survey by the Galilee Society in 2010 shows that 26.8 percent of the Arab households live in apartments and 66.8 percent live in private homes (villas or houses), with the rest, about 6.4 percent, living in an independent one-room home within a house, in tin shacks or tents (Galilee Society, 2008).

**Figure 3:** Housing in built-up urbanized area: Kafar Kanna, 2012

Sources: Author, April 2012

The high rate of Arab home ownership reflects the preferred housing method of housing production, self-built homes, primarily on family-owned private land. This leads to housing searches within housing market in the Arab localities. The preferred choice also reflects the impacts of population growth with limited rural-city migration and limited availability of housing for rent and sale. As in America, the high rate of home ownership reflects the belief that owning promotes psychological and socio-economic stability and economic capacity. The availability of social and economic assistance from the extended family facilitates ownership.

A comparison of the average house or apartment area between Arab and Jewish households shows that in urban Arab localities (of more than 2,000 inhabitants), the average housing unit area is about 112 square meters compared to 92 square meters in Jewish localities (Sikkuy, 2009). The findings of the 2011 survey by Rikaz show that 41.6 percent of Arab households live in housing units that have an area of 120 to 159 square meters, 7.7 percent live in housing units that have an area of less than 80 square meters; and 11.1 percent reside in housing units of an area more than 200 square meters. A somewhat surprising conclusion emerges; most of the Arab families belong to the lower-middle socio-economic class, but live in housing units with sizes resembling those of the Jewish upper middle classes.

The latent urbanization in the Arab localities and the high demand for housing, as well as economic growth and prosperity, has led Arab families to invest in their homes. In Arab localities, the relatively large area size of housing units is affected by the self-housing method of home building, which stands in sharp contrast to the reliance on private buildings in the Jewish sector of the housing market as well as the availability of apartments for rent or purchase in the latter. Moreover, Arab households are large, making it possible to host relatives and friends.

A fundamental precondition for sustaining the tradition of self-built homes is the family's ownership of a piece of land; this is an integral part of traditional rural culture and behavior (Despres, 1991). The Arabic term, *bayt*, the word for home, has a cultural and emotional dimension meaning connection and belonging to a place. Although many families continue to use this word to refer to their homes, the planning system refers to this living concept as "apartments-*shakaa*" and "housing units" when the State assesses housing needs, and then carries out land and housing allocations.

The Israeli planning system assumes that Arab localities conduct themselves just as Jewish ones do (Khamaisi, 2012), and that Arab households exhibit the same housing patterns as urban Jewish households. In reality, most Arabs build one home per household on one land parcel, whereas the government planning system assumes that this amount of land can support more than four apartments or four households. Furthermore, Israeli planners are not aware of, or if they are, they ignore the differences in housing patterns between the two communities that are shaped by differences in cultural background.

This contrast between the communities is not merely semantic, but rather reflects fundamental differences between traditional and modern cultures of housing. The Arab family initiates the process of building a home and finances it mostly from its own resources. Thus Arab housing provision is part of a social process that reflects a high level of social capital, whereby members of the extended family physically help each other to build homes. The "downside" is that building a home can sometimes take a generation to complete. Typically, houses contain two floors, and two more may be added later for the children. In some cases, extended families build houses with four or six apartments to accommodate brothers in one family building. These practices are almost non-existent among Israeli Jews.

The relationship between traditional housing and socio-cultural norms can be summarized as follows:

- It is the husband's responsibility to provide a home as part of his role in the traditional patriarchal community.
- The pattern of residence that locates the house inevitably within the family-*hamula* of the husband is a direct consequence of the patri-local attachment to a specific location and the strong tendency to live within a specific socio-cultural area and land ownership boundaries.
- Most of the male children remain in the same locality of their birth, and in

many cases in the same building or area within the *hamula* space, while female children eventually move to their husband's home.

- The readiness and willingness to reside in the same apartment building with unfamiliar neighbors is very limited. In general, Arab households prefer to live in a separate building and even within the *hamula's* neighborhood or within the extended family area. Even young, educated people who lived for a specific period of time in close proximity to "strangers" in the city when they were students prefer this traditional home structure once they return to their organic locality for settling down.
- Building a home based on the self-built house method implies that the entire extended family shares the process of building. This family participation reflects high social capital, but also highlights social values such as dignity and respect for the family that proudly provides a home for its male children. Besides, this method is also relatively cheap and flexible with respect to both time and cost.

The focus on traditional housing described above has a number of negative consequences, however. First, it restricts the creation and maintenance of a free housing market and limits homes to four floors. Second, limited migration and a lack of willingness to reside in proximity to strangers create obstacles in developing public housing projects or homes/apartment buildings for sale or rent. Finally, reliance on the self-building method requires a lot of land at a time when land is at a premium.

A key difference between urban and rural areas is housing density. Different density measures are affected by the household's size, area of the house/apartment, standard of living and economic circumstances. In 2010, the housing density was 0.83 persons per room among Jews, as compared to 1.48 among Arabs. There are also variations in this regard within the Arab community. For instance, housing density among Muslims is 1.56 persons per room compared to 1.16 for the Christians population, and 1.34 persons among the Druze (CBS, 2011).

A key factor affecting variations in housing density is household size. In 2010, the average household size among Jews was 3.11 persons compared to 4.74 among Arabs (CBS, 2011). As for the number of rooms per housing unit in the Arab community, the 2011 Rikaz survey shows that in 2010 the ratio was 3.9 compared to 4.0 in 2007. Compared geographically, the average housing density is 1.13 persons per room in the Northern District, 1.11 in the Haifa District, 1.29 in the Central District, and 1.31 in the Southern District (Rikaz, 2011). In 2009, the average housing density in the Palestinian territories as a whole (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), to whom the Arabs in Israel belong ethno-nationally, was 1.6 persons per room, and the average number of rooms in a housing unit was 3.6 rooms (PCBS, 2010). There is a notable difference based on housing density between urban and rural communities in the Arab localities. In 2010, the housing density in urban localities was 1.48 persons per room, the corresponding figure for rural localities was 1.65 (CBS, 2011).

The urbanization of Arab localities has taken place with limited provision for public housing or mass housing built and sold by the State. Until the beginning of the 1970s, less than 2 percent of national public resources were invested in housing construction for the Arab population. Between the years 2001 and 2005, the percentage of apartments built under governmental initiative in localities serving populations exceeding 10,000 residents stood at 3.3 percent for the Arab population compared to 24.2 percent for the Jewish population (CBS, 2005; Werczberger, 1995).

Until recently, public mass housing initiatives were limited to a few individual cases (Schnell and Faris, 1996). It is worth noting that since 1975 around 337,000 housing units were built in Israel with public funds and involvement of the Ministry of Construction and Housing in general (Rosenhek, 1996). However, since the establishment of the State, only about 1,000 housing units have been built with public funding in Arab localities. Between 2002 and 2004, 20,510 public housing units were built in Jewish localities compared to 224 units in Arab localities (Tzfadia, 2006). This small number of public residential construction initiatives for Arab localities partly reflects government viewing Arab localities as rural and consequently lacking any need for social housing (Levin, 2007). However, it should be noted that this governmental position is partly attributable to the lack of demand for public housing in the Arab localities which, as noted above, is related to the Arab community's preference for self-building.

Furthermore, most Arab families prefer not to rely on mortgages. Between 2001 and 2005, approximately 122,005 homes (or 68.4 percent of the total homes built) were mortgaged in Israel as a whole, whereas only 5756 homes (or 4.7 percent of the total homes built) were bought by Arab households through mortgages. The fact that the mortgage market is less popular in Arab localities is the result of a number of factors, including the availability of family financial assistance, fear or the inability to commit oneself to meet mortgage conditions (e.g. having official registration of land ownership, obtaining a building permit, obtaining the required collateral), and religious and cultural barriers which prohibit Muslims from paying interest on loans. Additional factors are, once again, the propensity to self-build even if such a process is highly time consuming, and the willingness to reside in an incomplete or partially-constructed home.

It appears that the development of urban-villages has compensated for the lack of involvement of the State in the provision of affordable housing for the Arab community. Nevertheless, the limited government involvement highlights inequalities between Arab and Jewish localities (Rosenhek, 1996). Governmental involvement focuses solely on land use planning including some small land allocations for private or public housing, and restricted housing expansion. Limited housing expansion leads to housing distress because of the lack of land to meet natural population growth.

## LAND COMPLEXITY IN PROVIDING HOUSING

The land ownership system in Arab communities is affected by internal factors related to socio-cultural norms and external factors attributable to the government's land system and planning policies. These two factors create complexities in planning for the provision of housing. Most land allocated for development in plans for Arab localities is privately owned. Constraints on land availability pressure land owners to preserve the land for housing for their family—their sons, nephews, and grandsons. Furthermore, the limited land market causes land owners to strongly resist expropriation of a portion of their land for public needs including new roads or road improvements.

Moreover, the local practices of land inheritance, which are based on socio-cultural norms and rules according to Islamic law, lead to fragmentation of the land and create additional obstacles and barriers on planning and/or use of the land for building new houses and/or expanding or renovating buildings on existing land. In many cases, the conflicts of interest arising between land owners belonging to an elderly generation and their younger inheritors about materialization of land ownership and inheritance rights has a direct impact on decisions with regard to where and when to build a home (Suleiman, 2011).

### *Government Land System and Planning Policy for Restricting Arab Housing Space*

The limited land available for housing in Arab localities reflects the political and socio-cultural complexity of Israel. As a result of Israel's land system, only 7 percent of the land is private, including 3.5 percent owned by Arabs and the rest (i.e. 3.5 percent) owned by Jews. About 93 percent of the land is State land which can be allocated for housing and other uses. Today, only a small percentage is allocated for public housing projects in the Arab localities. Allocating land for public housing projects could theoretically meet demands for land, reduce the price of available land for housing in convenient locations, reduce prices throughout, and create land proration for allocation to the Arab population. The government allocates public land for building new towns and neighborhoods for the Jewish population. Hence, the land under governmental control is a mechanism for spatial organization management of the urban system and thus for providing housing. However, it is important to remind the reader that public housing is currently not a viable option for the Arab population because of the strong desire for home ownership.

The government has indeed allocated some state land in Arab localities for housing projects based on the self-built method. This approach follows the prevailing model for providing housing in most of the Arab localities. Yet, the high prices of the land plots, as a result of combining the payment of a land lease for 49 years with plot development and infrastructural costs (roads, sewerage, water, electricity), together with the small supply of such land units, limit the strategy's effectiveness for solving the affordable housing shortage. This approach, while preserving traditional

self-built methods, contributes nonetheless to creating neighborhoods which are not based on *hamula* affiliation. State land is used by the government to implement a policy favoring the Jewish population and reconcentrating and resettling some Arab Bedouin communities (Meir, 2003; Shmueli and Khamaisi, 2011). Allocating state land in Arab localities is further complicated by internal competition between multiple heirs and owners over particular land parcels.

These external and internal barriers contribute to a scarcity of land to meet housing needs in urbanizing localities. As a result of state appropriation of Arab land in the wake of the 1948 war (Forman and Kedar, 2004), subsequent land expropriations for various reasons, and the sale of some Arab land to the Israeli Land Administration (ILA), the Israeli government has become a joint-owner of many parcels within Arab communities. However, due to the fact that there has been no formal spatial division of land between private owners and the government when it comes to development, disputes erupt regularly among private owners and between private owners and the State. Over the last decade, Arab localities have requested that public facilities be developed on government-owned portions of such parcels, while the ILA frequently insists that land for public use be expropriated from private landowners and the government equally. The result has been an impasse.

Besides government land expropriation, the overall policy toward the Arabs of Israel has been to reduce the number of rural communities and villages, to concentrate them in urbanized villages and urban centers, and to minimize the territory allocated for their future development (Khamaisi, 1990). As a result of these territorial policies, Arab-owned land has, as noted above, decreased to less than 3.5 percent of Israel's total land area, despite the fact that Israel's Arab citizens constitute approximately 17 percent of the overall state population. Over the years, the issue of territoriality among the Arabs of Israel has become increasingly critical. Today, it constitutes a fundamental problem compounding the "mental siege" caused by the exclusion of Arab Israelis from public housing space. Consequently, this sense of alienation has reduced Arab Israelis' housing options to their own localities. In this sense, physical planning for the Arabs of Israel has been significantly influenced by the territorial and geo-political conflict, which also dominates other aspects of planning, such as social services and culture.

The Israeli public land system creates fear among Arabs regarding possible future land expropriations, forcing them not only to worry about preserving and securing their private land for themselves, but for future generations. This in turn pressures them to fight proposed housing projects on their land. Management of land within the Arab community is carried out according to local traditions and customs. Land owners feel shame when they sell their land, and they do whatever they can to avoid it (Suleiman, 2011). In contrast, those who buy land gain a sense of dignity and respect from the community. One traditional saying holds that a man will manage his family the same way he manages his land. There are many examples of elders who, in accordance with accepted practices and codes and the symbolic and normative



value of land, have uncompromisingly committed themselves to ensuring that their families inherit their land rather than sell it.

### *The Process of Land Inheritance*

Land owned by Arab families is handed down from one generation to another in accordance with the customary law and the Islamic law of inheritance. The Islamic inheritance law gives male children twice the amount of inheritance that female children are awarded. However, the practice that has developed in traditional Israeli Arab rural communities dictates that families pass down family-owned land only to male children thereby depriving female children of their share in the bequeathed land. Female children are even ashamed to demand their share in the inherited land.

This process of land inheritance among Arabs creates havoc to the planning system, because land is divided into smaller and smaller parcels over time since Arab families are large. The traditional approach has been to divide land informally among the surviving children without formal registration or parcellation. Today, following several generations of informal parcellation a great deal of confusion exists regarding the location of boundaries between individual parcels. This, in turn, has led to an increasing number of land-related disputes within families and extended families. Regarding parcels with known ownership and boundaries, there are often so many heirs that the informal re-parcellation that has taken place creates plots that are simply too small to facilitate development initiatives. As a result, the number of absentee family land owners has increased. Limited land in the free market leads to growing inequities between those who have land (and who can take advantage of rising values) and those who do not. This situation contributes further to housing distress and shortages.

Thus, the dialectic relationship between the government land system, customary law, and socio-cultural traditional norms creates housing distress among families who do not own private land, a lack of land for public development purposes, and uneven development within built-up areas, which increases public infrastructure costs. The status quo arrangement allows most families and *hamulas* to preserve their own spaces within localities.

## TRENDS IN HOUSING DEMAND: CHANGE AND CONSISTENCY

The last two decades have witnessed a number of changes in Arab society and in Israeli government policies. These changes include modernization and urbanization processes as well as more democratization in the planning process from which the Arab community is mostly excluded (Alterman and Stav, 2001; Khamaisi, 2010; Meir, 2003). Limited migration, freeze-up of the land market, increase in absentee land owners (where the parcel is too small to develop), and limited availability of land allocated for public use remain persistent problems.

**Figure 4:** Housing project built planned and developed on privately-leased public land, 2012: (top) Kafar Kanna: “Build your house” project, (bottom) Kafar Manda: “Build your apartment” project



Source: the author, April 2012

The urbanization process has not developed as expected or desired by the Arab community. For example, most Arabs in Nazareth oppose the “*Shmaler* Project,” i.e. 600 apartments in apartment blocks of eight floors. Despite this project, the official governmental policy is to avoid involvement in public housing provision. The current policy is to grant assistance or subsidize developers who are interested in building small housing projects in Arab urban centers. The government also favors public involvement in allocating and planning public land for housing for lease by households following the traditional approach of “build your house” such as in Kafar Kanna, (Figure 4) or according to the new approach “build your apartment” such as in Kafar Manda (Figure 4) (Khamaisi, 2009; Schnell and Fares, 1996;). Additionally, in many Arab localities such as Sachnin, Kafar Kanna and Turan, the ILA plans and allocates land for building new small mixed neighborhoods. Most of the buildings in these new neighborhoods continue to be based on self-housing

methods which accommodate relatives from the same extended family in one house consisting of several floors (see Figure 4).

Thus there are internal and external trends that influence the urbanization process and residential transformation among the Arab citizens in Israel. The internal trends can be summarized as follows:

- The demand for housing cannot be met with self-build housing. Rikaz (2011) estimates that in the next ten years 55.2 percent of the Arab households in Israel will need at least one housing unit, but 46.8 percent of these families will not be able to build houses. The problem will worsen if the government continues to avoid direct involvement in construction projects. The lack of land available for housing, a product of the planning system described above, interferes with meeting the large demand for housing. Today about two thirds of the Arab households lack the necessary land for providing housing solutions for the next generation based on the self-build housing method. The traditional family finance support system has begun to decline and younger Arab households have demonstrated a growing interest in home mortgages. Growing numbers of young people are renting rather than owning, living in apartments, building smaller houses, and some in the North are even beginning to relocate to neighboring Jewish localities such as Upper Nazareth and Karmiel (Khoury, 2011).
- By adding additional floors or apartments to existing houses, Arab families are generating higher housing densities. Limited land and limited housing finance resources together with urbanization and globalization create are prompting new discourse within the community, one demanding new and innovative residential solutions in housing.
- External and internal trends are accelerating and influencing each other. The primary external trends are connected to state policies of planning and housing. However, government planning and housing policies directly or indirectly promote housing segregation between Arabs and Jews. Some of these “Jewish” localities have established “selection committees” whose aim is to filter out families (including Arabs) who do not fit into the Jewish majority.
- Only a limited amount of state land is allocated for housing in Arab localities (Khamaisi, 2007; Rosenhek, 1996), leading to further pressure on the housing market of Arab localities. Consequently, latent urbanization accelerates in Arab localities. Because part of the Israeli Jewish population dislikes Arab immigration to their neighborhoods, this adds to Arab-Jewish tensions, increases levels of segregation, and in turn increases demand for housing in Arab urbanized localities. New government policies allocating state land and support for housing projects in Arab localities such as in Nazareth, Sachnin, and Kafar Manda rely on a new housing method based on building a four to eight story apartment building housing the same extended family or perhaps an extended family combined with other families. This innovative new housing model makes a positive contribution to urbanized Arab localities.

## CONCLUSION

This paper argues that the current unique urbanization and demographic situation among the Arabs in Israel has had a limited impact on the private housing market. External and internal obstacles must be removed in order to reduce the housing distress and meet the Arab population's housing needs.

Despite the fact that most Arab citizens of Israel (94 percent) technically live in urban localities as evident from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2011), most live in urban villages in the North that have a definite rural character. By definition, the housing market of the Arab citizens of Israel is based on a self-housing provision, living in private homes, in organic localities, and primarily constructing additional housing units or adding floors to existing ones in order to accommodate the needs of the nuclear or extended family. The rural aspirations of the Arab urbanized localities are the direct outcome of the geo-political and territorial conflict with the State of Israel. This conflict limits social and geographic mobility and shapes local urbanization patterns that occur within the Arab localities.

Changes in residential patterns and housing types, as expressed in the local real estate market, are a direct result of urbanization among Arab communities, particularly in the Triangle and Galilee regions. The trend toward living in apartments rather than a "home/house-villa" is an intermediate step towards living in smaller housing units/apartments in close proximity to strangers (Arab or Jews). These transformations include the adoption of new construction and architectural models of houses, in order to meet changing housing demands. The shift toward mass housing solutions implies a shift from relying on financial assistance from the family to relying on bank loans and governmental support, applying for mortgages, and the shift from building private homes to building or buying smaller apartment units (Khamaisi, 2009).

The value of a "home/house" stems from its territorial location and geographic and socio-economic identity of its dwellers. Living in apartment-style units implies changes in functional and geographical mobility. The urbanization and housing transformation in Arab communities occur in a situation of restrictive state planning and the tendency for both politicians and policymakers to narrowly view the Arab community as rural despite the official statistics (mentioned above which indicate the opposite). Most Arab families still prefer the self-built housing method and living in their historic, now urbanized, villages. However, rapid urbanization-led changes in the housing market are beginning to lead to a transformation including a significant demand for apartment living.

While most Arab families as yet do not prefer apartment housing, it probably will become more popular in the future leading to enhanced migration between localities or from *hamula-type* neighborhoods to mixed apartment buildings in housing projects. It seems reasonable to anticipate a growing acceptance of the mortgaging system. Moreover, Israel is implementing a variety of innovative in-fill planning approaches aimed at restricting sprawl-like development and encouraging more high

density housing areas. These changes will have important implications for the quality of life in Arab localities (Khamaisi, 2012).

The Israeli-Arab geo-political conflict generated truncated urbanization and placed urbanization development under constraints. These restrictions provoked latent and false urbanization processes, whereby villages are physically growing and expanding, housing density is increasing, and more floors are being added to housing structures. The urbanization process occurs at a time when urban-rural villages dominated by Arab culture and religion remain dominant. Balancing the development of a freer housing market while conserving the land and environment, within the context of a tolerant multi-ethnic society, is an urgent challenge for all Israelis, Arab and Jewish.

## NOTES

1. False urbanization refers to a situation where most of the population lives in the city, typically the capital city. Latent urbanization describes the situation where there is virtually no immigration to or from Arab communities. Almost every male born in a town or village seeks housing for himself and his descendants within the same locality, thereby leading to a “pressure cooker” situation.
2. Today, more than half the world’s population lives in urban centers (United Nations, 2008), and currently among the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza Strip, over sixty five percent live in urban areas (AbuSada and Thawaba, 2011).
3. One exception to this phenomenon is individuals suffering from inter-hamula conflicts and rivalries in their own villages and who seek refuge in other villages. There, these newcomers have a lower social standing compared to the host village families.

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