

The disappearance of the Syrian Agricultural Village in the Occupied Golan Heights

Al Marsad

-Arab Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Golan Heights-

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-Aerial shot for the village of Squfiyah before destruction by the occupational forces-

Introduction:

Agriculture has played a leading role in the emergence of human civilisation across ancient eras BC, where it moved humans from a life of movement and travel, foraging for food, to a state of permanent stability in different regions around the world, and thus agriculture has laid the foundations of human civilisations, and formed the cornerstone of human evolution, and it still has a special importance in human life, being a major source of food supply and providing the basic ingredients for humans.

All countries mainly rely on agriculture for their food; whether they are a developing or developed nation, for a stable agricultural sector guarantees food security for countries. Achieving food security, which is important for human security, creates the basic requirement for every country, and that is due to its contribution to preventing malnutrition, reducing famine, reducing poverty, and achieving sustainable rural development, especially in developing countries, where the agricultural sector represents the backbone of the economy of the countries, and the only source of income for the majority of the rural population. In addition to that, agriculture is an important factor for the development of any country, as well as the provision of foodstuffs, agriculture is considered an essential source for raw materials that are utilised in various industries.

1.0 – Agricultural Village

The origin of the agricultural village, as one of the forms of permanent and productive human settlements, dates back to the 8th millennium BCE (the Neolithic period). During this time, humans gradually began to abandon their complete reliance on a subsistence economy (hunting and gathering) and shifted toward a productive economy (agriculture and animal domestication). However, this shift to a productive economy required humans to give up their nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place, and replace it with a settled way of life based on stability and remaining in one location.

According to archaeological discoveries, the earliest agriculture emerged in the Levant (Bilad Al-Sham) and then spread to other parts of the world, and it was wheat and barley which were the first crops cultivated by humans.

This created the transition from a consumer economy (hunting) to a productive economy (agriculture) – the most important turning point in human history. Since this transition, agricultural villages have held a significant position in human life, as they provide the basic necessities for life.

After humans discovered the importance of stability and our connection with the land, which provides us with food security, we began building dwellings (huts) nearby water springs and where wild plants grew. Humans began to adapt to the natural conditions surrounding them, to ensure their long-term survival. Thus, this stage

constituted the beginning of the emergence and development of the first agricultural villages in the Neolithic era. Archaeological discoveries provided evidence that the Levant (Bilad Al-Sham) witnessed this new era of architectural formation and since then, agricultural villages began to emerge as population centres and sources of production.

These population centres were set up near water sources to utilise them for drinking as well as for irrigating crops and livestock. This settled life and the practice of growing crops pushed humans to build more villages, and construct dams and water canals to irrigate more agricultural lands. Agriculture has also led to the development of a range of professions and industries linked to economic activities and their associated fields, and has contributed to increased communication and interaction with all other related industries within the country. It is believed that a country is a socially and politically united nation, and economically self-sufficient if it is agriculturally stable.

2.0 – The emergence of Arab agricultural villages in the Golan Heights

The Arab agricultural village in the Golan Heights emerged a while before the arrival of Islam. It is derived from sources that the Arab agricultural village in the Golan Heights was formed in the era of the Ghassanid Rule (Ghassanid Kingdom) which reigned from the year 220 AD to 630 AD. It is believed that the extension of the Ghassanid ruling from the Golan Heights to Horan, occurred before the fourth century AD, where Busra was initially their capital. Later, the Ghassanid Kingdom made Jabiyah as the centre of their authority and main camp, which is located east of Wadi Al Raqqad, within the borders of the former Golan Heights, and at the eastern borders of the current Golan Heights.¹

In general, the Ghassanids focused on agriculture and agricultural life, and exploited the natural resources surrounding them in the best way, where they transported water to different villages and then utilised the dams to collect the water. By doing this, the Ghassanids were able to enjoy a flourishing agricultural life.

Sources and archaeological discoveries indicate that the Ghassanid Kingdom was prosperous in agricultural villages and cities. *“It is stated that the “eastern and western slopes of the Ghassanite Horan were populated with approximately 300 cities and villages”.*²

And from the villages of the Golan, which were inhabited by the Ghassanids and remained prosperous until their occupation in 1967, were the villages of: Moomsiya, Bab Al-Hawa, Zu’oor, Al-Ramthaniya, Khasfyn, Al-Yaqussa, Al-Dabusya, Al-Butmiya, Al-Firj, Surman, Jowayza, and other villages. Some of these villages existed before the

¹ Mohammed Mabrook Nafii: the era before Islam, 2018, Hindawi Institute.

² Ibid., page 129.

Ghassanid rule, however during their rule, construction and development of these villages occurred on a large scale.³

The Ghassanid villages relied on agricultural crops, depending on their geographical location. The main crops in the Golan Heights were olives, alongside grapes, legumes and grains. In addition to this, herding livestock was widespread and played an important role in the lives of the inhabitants of the Golan villages.

2.1 – The agricultural village in the Golan before the occupation.

Agriculture and livestock, since the Ghassanid rule until the occupation of the Golan in 1967, remained the backbone of the Golan community's economy and the villages' inhabitants relied on the mixed agricultural culture which focused on seasonal crops (grains, legumes, vegetables), rainfed crops, as well as tree crops (such as apples, apricots, pears, bananas, etc.), and through this the inhabitants of the Golan were able to cover their nutritional needs and achieve a great degree of nutritional security, and even export the surplus of these food to nearby governorates.

The Golan Heights' climatic characteristics and rich water sources placed it in second place on the map (before its occupation) in terms of agricultural and livestock production in Syria.

Prior to the occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967, the agricultural village was unique in shaping the social morphological structure of the Golan Heights, dominating the residential landscape and urban fabric. Of the 346 residential communities in the occupied part of the Golan Heights, there was only one (small) city, namely Quneitra.

The agricultural and livestock sectors constituted the main sources of livelihood for the population, with 64%⁴ of the workforce in Quneitra Governorate employed in these two sectors. It is worth noting that a large segment of Quneitra's population also depended on agriculture for their livelihood.

³ (The erasure of the Golan Heights) <https://survey.antiquities.org.il/#/Golan>

⁴ - Uri Davis: THE GOLAN HEIGHTS under ISRAELI OCCUPATION 1967-1981, P. 4

The utilisation of agricultural lands in the Golan Heights – Quneitra Governate (1966)

(Area (1) (Dunam) (Dunam = 1,000 square meters 1)	Agricultural Product	Production Amount (2) (Tons)	Tree Amount (3)
190,000	Grains	116,000	
110,000	Legumes	8,000	
10,000	Vegetables	13,000	
10,000	Industrial crops	1,000	
10,000	Olives	1,000	88,000
20,000	Grapes	12,000	2,158,000
10,000	Apples	6,100	233,000
10,000	Figs	2,000	54,000
249	Tobacco	17	

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(1) Data taken from the book:

Uri Davis: (1983) The Golan Heights under Israeli Occupation 1967-1981. See pages 15 and following. Uri Davis notes that the statistics included in his book were taken from the files of the Syrian Statistical Department, which were found by the occupying army in the city of Quneitra.

(2) Data taken from the book:

Ali Badwan: The Golan Heights, The Road to Peace - The Road to War, Arab Union Publications, 2004. See pages 103, 104.

(3) Data taken from the book: Uri Davis, see page 15.

Note: There are differences between the data provided in Uri Davis's book, and the data provided in Ali Badwan's book. For example, according to Davis, grain production reached 16,000 tons, whereas according to Badwan the grain production reached 116,000 tons. In addition to this, according to Davis, vegetable production reached only 5,000 tons, whereas according to Badwan, vegetable production reached 13,000 tons. The writer here has relied upon data contained in Ali Badwan's book, as it is more consistent with size of the agricultural area.

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As for the livestock sector, it had a prominent presence in the economy of the Golan Heights, with data indicating that the Golan Heights possesses significant livestock wealth.

Livestock wealth in the Golan Heights before occupation	
Category	Quantity
Goats and sheep	2 million
Cows	37,000
Camels	480
Bulls/Buffalos	7,000
Horses	1,000
Mules	1,000
Donkeys	7,000
Poultry	200,000
Beehives	8,000
Production Quantity	
Milk	13,400 tons (ca. 13 million litres)
Cheese	tons 419
Ghee	tons 325
Butter	tons 77
Sheep Wool	(tons (cleaned 67
Goat Hair	tons 22
Honey	tons 16
Poultry eggs	million eggs 18
Prepared by: Dr. Nazeh Brik :Sources	

- **Ali Badwan:** The Golan Heights, the Road to Peace...the Road to War..

- **Uri Davis: 1983:** THE GOLAN HEIGHTS under ISRAELI OCCUPATION

Note: It is worth noting the discrepancy in data between the two sources. In Badwan's book, it is provided that the quantity of buffalo reaches **200**, the production quantity of eggs reached **18 million**, and the cow quantity reached **37,000**. Whereas in Davis's book, buffalo quantity reached **7,000**, egg production reached **10.4 million**, and cow quantity, as provided on page 5, reached **3,700**, whereas on page 16 it mentions **22,000**.

2.2 – The disappearance of the Arab agricultural village in the occupied Golan Heights.

The agricultural villages make up small and stable residential communities, where their inhabitants practice agriculture and herding livestock. Before 1967, the population of the occupied Golan Heights was approximately 150,000, spread across 346 residential communities (this includes the city of Quneitra, the administrative capital of the Golan, with a population of approximately 30,000).⁵

These population clusters were distributed across the Golan Heights, from the slopes of Mount Hermon in the North, up to the Yarmouk River in the South, and water sources played a major role in the geographical positioning of the villages.

2.2.1 – The Displacement and Destruction of the Villages

The occupation of the Golan Heights dealt a devastating blow to the agricultural villages in the Golan Heights. The Occupation Forces worked to destroy the residential landscape. Over a period of weeks, during and after the war, it emptied the villages of their inhabitants, expelling approximately **142,000 people**, equivalent to 95% of the population of the occupied area, and proceeded to completely destroy these villages.

⁵- **Nazih Brik:** Residential communities demolished by Israel ..., 1967, Al-Marsad - Arab Center for Human Rights in the Golan. <https://golan-marsad.org/ar/46502-2/>

The destruction of these villages continued for several months, and regarding this destruction, Yigal Volk, an engineering army officer from the 602nd Battalion, stated:

"Our mission was to clear the plateau. We went and destroyed dozens of villages. Wherever the bulldozers could enter, they entered and destroyed, and wherever they couldn't enter, we blew up the houses." He continued his testimony, stating, ***"Sometimes a big enough mine was enough. You place a 20 kg anti-tank mine in the middle of the house, on a table, and you lift the house"***. He continued: ***"We went from one town to another and destroyed all the homes. And this was a core part of our work for six months..., and we would sometimes enter into the abandoned city of Quneitra and would take all sorts of items from shops that had been broken into and robbed. And after a few months, it was over, and we were released"***. And in regard to the goal of this destruction, he said: ***"You do not want them to return"***.⁶

As for Major General Avishai Katz (Avishai Kah) from the 602nd Engineering Battalion, he said:

"As part of the orders we received from the battalion – destruction of all the Syrian villages..., after the third day [11 June 1967] ... I received various orders. One of these orders, and the most important of them, was to destroy the Golan Heights..., I was summoned by the Command in Hatmar 3 [a logistical support division], where I was ordered to destroy the entire Golan Heights – immediately". He continued: ***"Military teams went out every day to pick up mines and destroy the villages, there was absolute destruction. We did not leave a single house standing" ... , "I received an order to destroy the Golan, leaving no stone unturned. This was also a written order"***. Regarding the army practices he mentioned, he said: ***"They destroyed a house with its inhabitant inside. They were supposed to get the inhabitants out, but they destroyed the house with them inside. I do not know how many people were there. It was a war crime"***.⁷

And on the goal to destroy the villages, he said:

"For Syrians not to return there", he continued, ***"the destruction of villages has ugly aspects, but looking back, the Golan Heights became with no Syrian inhabitants. I think the consideration was correct, despite this operation containing things that should not have happened"*** [referring to the demolition of homes with their inhabitants inside].⁸

As for Elad Peled, commander of the 36th Division that occupied the southern Golan Heights, in his testimony to the Yitzhak Rabin Centre for the Study of Israel, in response to the question: ***"This week, while you were in the Golan Heights, didn't you have a problem with the residents? Don't you remember the expulsion?"*** His answer was: ***"I***

⁶– Testimonies of engineering battalion commanders: lay mines, block roads, destroy villages (Hebrew). <https://shorturl.at/EHo4E>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Interview with Avishai Katz, Commander of the Engineering Battalion 602. (Hebrew). <https://shorturl.at/w0h7v>

*remember the decision to bulldoze the villages so that there would be no place to return to."*⁹

The operation to destroy finished within a few months, and the result was the disappearance of **340 agricultural villages** from the Golan morphological landscape. Some of these villages dated all the way back to the Ghassanid era, some 1600 years back, and their execution at the hands of the occupation forces constituted a destruction of the memory of an ancient historical era.

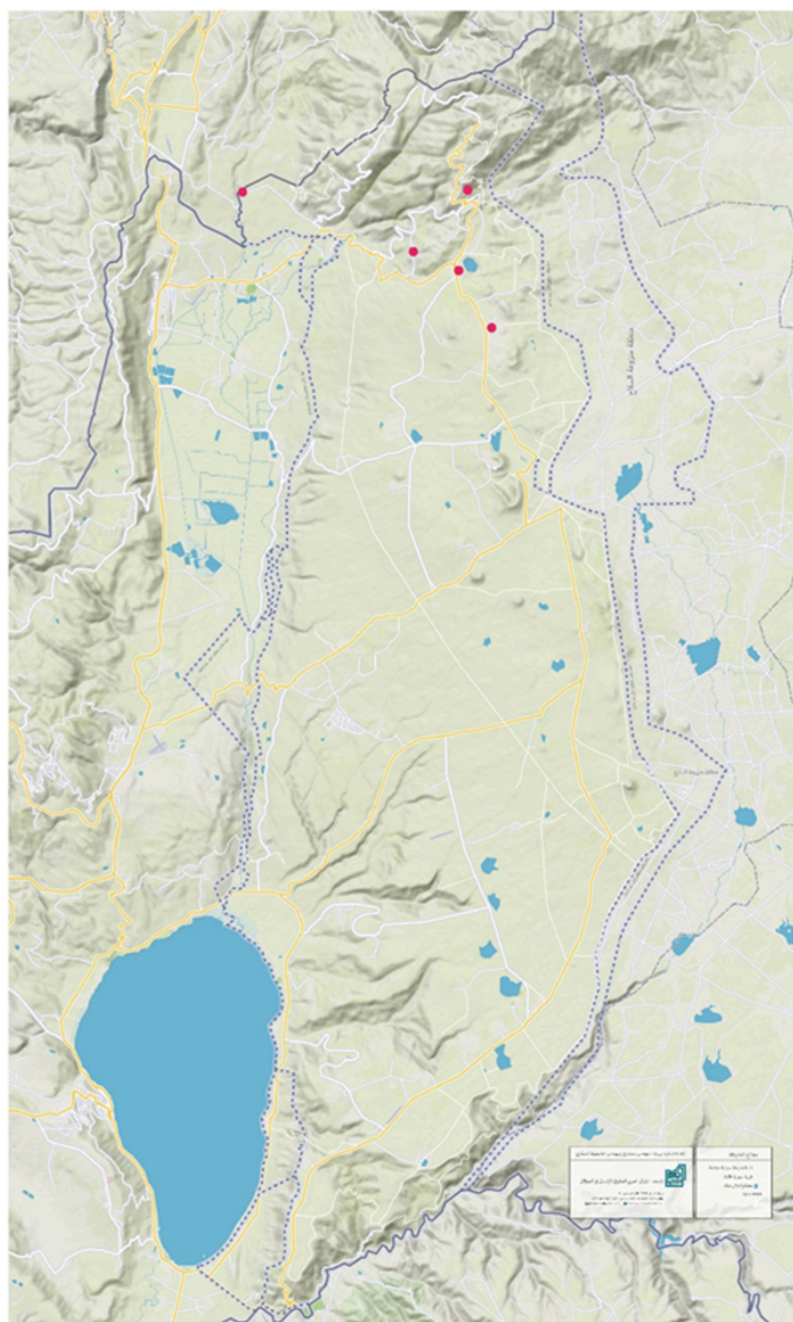
With the completion of the cleansing of the area, achieved by expelling the population and destroying the villages, the occupying state achieved absolute control over the land and its natural resources, especially water resources. To ensure sustainable control, the occupying authorities began to repopulate the area with Jewish settlers. Within months of the beginning of the occupation, they began establishing settlements and all the necessary infrastructure and livelihood sources.

⁹ Displacement in the Plateau: How the Residents of the Syrian Plateau Disappeared in 1967.
<https://www.akevot.org.il/en/article/displacement-in-the-golan/>

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القرى السورية في الجولان بعد الاحتلال • Syrian villages in the Golan after the occupation



2.2.2- Remaining villages in the occupied Golan

The forced displacement of 95% of the Golan's population and the destruction of their villages created a demographic and urban vacuum, particularly in the central and southern sectors of the Golan. Agricultural life came to a standstill, and the livestock sector disappeared after early settlers looted the livestock, which had been previously owned by the inhabitants of the displaced villages.¹⁰

Only 5 villages remained in the occupied Golan Heights (1.5% from the total number of villages), which means that 98.5% of the agricultural villages were destroyed, which had existed before the occupation. The occupying authorities remained on those five villages, for ethno-political reasons.¹¹

These villages – Majdal Shams, Buqa'atha, Masa'ada, Ain Quniya, and Al Ghajar – are located in the far north of the Golan, and the population during the occupation was approximately 6,400.¹²

Like the other villages that were destroyed, agriculture and livestock farming constituted the backbone of the population's economy, with more than 80% of the workforce employed in these sectors.¹³

3.0 – Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector has three pillars: Man, Land, Water. Man is the engine (labour force), land is the body, and water is the vein. Every pillar affects and is affected by the other from the aspect of productivity capacity.

With years passing, and the occupation strengthening its control on the Golan Heights, the economy of these villages witnessed radical changes, where the agricultural sector receded to the margins and is no longer the primary driver of the population's lives. As for the livestock sector, it has deteriorated to the point of disappearing from the economic and livelihood landscape. These changes were the result of planning policies intentionally adopted by the occupying authority, most notably **land and water policies**.

¹⁰ **It was fun to take** (Hebrew): <https://shorturl.at/Ayar4>

¹¹ These reasons are linked to a plan devised by Israel, aiming to establish a Druze state on Lebanese and Syrian lands. Sami al-Khatib discusses this topic in his book "In the Eye of the Event."

¹² **Displacement in the Plateau:** How the Residents of the Syrian Plateau Disappeared in 1967. <https://www.akevot.org.il/en/article/displacement-in-the-golan/>

¹³ Nazeh Brik: **Ethnic Planning...**, Al-Marsad - Arab Center for Human Rights in the Golan Heights. <https://shorturl.at/omD8T>

3.1 -The Land

The issue of the land is considered one of the cross-cutting issues that directly affect the enjoyment of human rights, as land is a central element in relation to economic rights. The land is a source of livelihood for many members of society and land is often closely linked to people's identities, and thus to social and cultural rights.

Since its inception, Israel has practiced a policy in which it considers land as a resource that is allocated, almost exclusively, to serve the Jewish community. According to this consideration, the resources of the land are managed and based on this concept, the Israeli authorities continuously work to dispossess the indigenous Arab populations from their lands, and trap them in narrow and overcrowded residential areas. In 2018, this principle was enshrined in Basic Law: Israel – The Nation State of the Jewish People, which states **“the State considers the development of the Jewish settlements to be a national value, and will work to encourage, promote, and consolidate settlements”** (Section 7 of the Law). The most important feature of the “Nation State Law” is its declaration that the right to self-determination in the State of Israel is a right limited to the Jewish people.

The law legislated Jewish supremacy in Israel over all other groups and minorities, and declares Israel as an ethno-national homeland for Jews only. This law came to guarantee and ensure Israel's character as a Jewish religious state, enshrining the concept of Jewish supremacy and apartheid, entrenching racial discrimination against the Arab population, and legitimises exclusion, racism, and inequality among all the population.

Whoever controls the land also controls the natural resources and as such, decides and manages the production process. Since the first years, the occupation governments have been working, and continue to work, on reducing the area of land owned by the Syrian residents of the villages and this is done through confiscation, preventing the use of land under military justifications, as well as converting large areas into nature reserves.

Prior to occupation, the residents of the five villages had approximately 100,000 Dunam of agricultural land and pastures under their control. Today, this area does not exceed more than 47,000 Dunam, of which 21,000 are for agricultural use and the rest are residential and small areas known as industrial zones.¹⁴

In light of planning policies pursued by the occupation authorities, and the failure to cover the needs of the Syrian villages for new urban spaces, the phenomenon of urban encroachments towards agricultural lands has crystallised for years. Thus, the

¹⁴ **Nazeh Brik: Ethnic Planning...**, Al-Marsad - Arab Center for Human Rights in the Golan Heights.
<https://shorturl.at/omD8T>

agricultural sector, with time, lost more and more agricultural land to the urban sector over time.¹⁵

In recent years, the occupying power has resorted to another means of controlling the land and marginalising the agricultural sector, through the establishment of state-affiliated economic projects on the land of agricultural villages. For example, in January 2020, the Government approved the establishment of a project to produce alternative energy from wind (wind turbine project) on agricultural lands owned by indigenous Syrian Golan farmers. In addition to the areas where the wind turbines will be built, these large agricultural areas will be removed from the economic cycle in favor of infrastructure (roads) for the wind turbine project. The land area of the wind turbine project is 3,510 acres.¹⁶

On the surface, this project appears to be economic; however, on the inside, the state aims to control the land which the wind turbines will be built on and as such this project will lead not only to the reduction of agricultural land in the short term but also to its destruction in the long term.

3.2 Water

Before the establishment of the Jewish state on the land of Palestine, the Zionist movement attempted to include the Golan within its borders, but all its attempts failed. It was only after the 1967 war that the occupying power was able to tighten its grip on surface and groundwater resources and employ them in the service of its settlement project in the Golan.¹⁷

The occupation authorities continued refusing, for several years, to provide the Golanis (indigenous Golan residents) with their water needs in the agriculture and livestock sectors. Only after the authorities found underground water in their lands and dug artesian wells did they agree to provide them with water for agricultural use. However, they did not abandon their discrimination policy, as the Jewish farmer in the settlements receives about **800** cubic meters of water per dunam of agriculture, while the Golan farmer receives only **250** cubic meters per dunam, which is equal to a third of the amount that the Jewish farmer gets.

¹⁵ For more on housing and urban space issues in the Golan villages, see:

Nazeh Brik: Ethnic Planning..., <https://shorturl.at/omD8T>

¹⁶ Planning Information Site (Hebrew). <https://mavat.iplan.gov.il/SV4/1/99000907611/310>

¹⁷ **Nazih Brik: The Golan Heights and Water: A Study on the Relationship between Occupation and Water Resources**, 2008. (Arabic).

In addition to this, there is a distinction in the price of water: the Golani farmer pays three times as much as the Jewish farmer pays for each cubic meter of water for agriculture.¹⁸

Water is a core element for food production, and according to international humanitarian law, the right to water is a fundamental social and economic right. Israel, as the occupying power, must guarantee the provision of clean and adequate water to the residents of the occupied territories without discrimination (Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions). In addition, it must, as an occupying power, **protect the resources on the lands it occupies, and not use these resources for the benefit of the people of the occupying power.**¹⁹

Among the most prominent results of this water policy on Golan farmers are:

- Quality and quantity reduction of the Golani farmers, in comparison to Jewish farmers in settlements.
- The inability of the Golani farmer, both financially and commercially, to compete with the Jewish farmer, which pushes the Golani farmer to sell his products for a cheaper price.
- Government support for the Jewish farmer in settlements, which include infrastructure preparation, lower water rates, career guidance, etc, whereas the Golani farmer does not receive this same support.
- The reluctance of a large portion of Golani's to work in the agricultural sector and to work in the Israeli market.

These realities, as well as other challenges such as population growth and the accompanying issue of converting agricultural land to residential areas, have placed the agricultural industry on the margins of economic life in the communities of the Golan villages.

:Livestock Sector 4.0

The land and water policies have affected the livestock sector. In a 1974 report compiled by Rafael Weiss for the Ministry of Agriculture, it was stated: ***"As a result of***

¹⁸ Nazez Brik: Ethnic Planning..., <https://shorturl.at/omD8T>

¹⁹ Although Israel is a member of the United Nations and has acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights since 1991, Despite of it continues to flout all provisions of international humanitarian law and human rights law, and does not respect the documents, treaties, and resolutions of international institutions that guarantee the right to water for residents of the occupied territories.

the seizure of springs or the closure of areas to the Druze herds, there is a shortage of drinking water for the herds of livestock”.²⁰

In 1973, the livestock sector in the five villages had approximately **21,000** goats and cows, while the population in those villages that same year was approximately **10,000**. This means for every person, there were two heads of livestock, which undoubtedly indicated the role that the livestock sector had in that economy. However, today, the livestock sector does not exceed a few hundred cows and goats.²¹

In 1950, the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) enacted the “Plant Protection Law – Goat Damage”, which became known as the “Black Goat Act” (for reference: goats raised in Jewish settlements were white, while Arab goats were black). This law came under the authorities claim that black goats cause environmental damage, so it imposed legal restrictions that made it difficult for the Palestinian population to continue to own and herd black goats. In 1976, the so-called “Green Patrol” was formed, and began to brutally enforce the “Black Goat Act” which has been accompanied by many human rights violations.²²

What the occupation authority began in Palestine, was implemented in the Golan, and practiced all forms of harassment on goat herders in the Golan villages. The implementation went as far as confiscating hers of livestock. A livestock herder from the village of Majdal Shams said:

“On 16.08.1986, the police arrived with members of the ‘Nature Protection Authority’ (the Green Patrol), and with cargo trucks. They confiscated my goat herd, over 180 goats, and transferred them into the trucks, and then arrested five goat herders, and they were sentenced to a month’s imprisonment”.²³

These practices came not only to make it easier for the occupying authorities to control agricultural lands and hit the livestock sector, which was the second source of livelihood for the indigenous residents of the Golani villages, but also to dismantle the Arab’s relationship with their land.

5.0-Targeting the agricultural and livestock sectors in the Golani villages

²⁰ - Druze agriculture in the Golan Heights (Hebrew)
<https://archive.nyu.edu/bitstream/2451/64555/1/0008wi7.pdf>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Rabiea' Ighbariyah: Why does Israel fear thyme and Gundelia? Arab website 48.
<https://shorturl.at/KEtow> .

²³ Interview with a former cattle owner from Majdal Shams village.

While the agricultural and livestock sectors in the Jewish settlements are constantly thriving and developing, and enjoy generous support from the government, the situation in the Golan villages is quite the opposite. In the Golan, the agricultural sector is in continuous decline, and the livestock sector has reached the point of disappearing from the economic cycle.

This deterioration is primarily related to the land and water policy practiced by the occupying power towards the residents of the villages of the Golan. The goal behind these policies is to achieve **soft control** over the Arab, so that this control can be used to provide loyalty to the occupying power.²⁴ This is done by:

5.1 Economic Dependency

The colonial States always strives to have total control over the lives of the indigenous population, and this is through plans and policies aimed at depriving them of the resources that could contribute to economic independence, which in turn gives them a great deal of freedom to shape their social lives and make their own political decisions (political independence). On the other hand, the colonial state works to create a situation of economic dependency, by linking the livelihood of the indigenous population to the labour market of the colonial state, giving it more space to control the political, cultural, and social landscape of the occupied communities.

For example, this dialectical relationship, between economic and political independence in the Golani community became clear in 1982 after the occupying government decided in 1981 to annex the Golan Heights. The indigenous residents of this area declared a complete and general strike, as an expression of their rejection of the annexation of the Golan to the occupying power. Despite the military siege that the occupation army imposed on them and its presence inside the villages, this strike continued for six months.

One of the most important offshoots of the people's steadfastness during that period, despite being cut off from the outside world, was the agricultural sector.

There is no doubt that the availability of these food products inside the homes has failed the operation to siege the villages, and removed the pressure on the population from the equation of submission to the will of the occupying authority.²⁵

²⁴ According to Article 45 of the Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, it is prohibited to compel the population of an occupied territory to pledge allegiance to the hostile power.

²⁵ Later, the occupying authorities forced the Syrian population in the occupied Golan Heights to carry Israeli identity documents in order to integrate them and sever ties with the rest of

Today, more than half a century after the occupation, the situation has completely changed. The policies of the occupying authorities and what resulted from it, from the deterioration of the agricultural sector and the disappearance of the livestock sector, in addition to other reasons, have strengthened their economic dependence on the occupying power as the majority of the labour force of the residents of the five villages has become tied to the Jewish labour market.

5.2 - Judaizing food security

The development of the agricultural sector and livestock is considered crucial in rural communities. Both contribute to increasing food production, reducing the risks of hunger and poverty, and thus play a leading role in providing food security, as well as stimulating and promoting economic growth and job opportunities.

Countries often use food security as a weapon and a blackmail tool against some, and that is in order to obtain concessions in the fields of foreign and domestic policies or for other purposes. Hence, food security is an integral part of human security, and food independence is no less important than political independence, as it protects society from extortion and falling into dependency, freeing it from external pressures.

By marginalising the agricultural sector and eliminating the Arab agricultural village, Israel aims not only to prevent any role for the Arab farmers in the field of food security for their community, but rather works to make sure the food security for the Arab population is under the mercy of the Jewish agricultural sector. In that sense, Judaizing food security, where the Jewish State alone can control food security for the Arab population in both the Golan Heights and Palestine.

5.3 -Weaking the connection to the land and dismantling the collective identity

The inhabitants of the agricultural villages are distinguished from the inhabitants of the city by their strong bond and connection to the land, where the village is the place of work, the source of livelihood, the place of residency and private home, and it is the space in which the daily life of the individual and the collective take place.

Syria. Those who did not hold these documents were denied access to education, health services, and other basic services.

In the village, you not only own the land and the house, you also own and preserve the heritage, customs and traditions, and this is what distinguishes the village from the city – the great social cohesion. This social cohesion prevails amongst its members, and from here we see that the connection of villagers to the village is much stronger than the connection of the people of the city. The residents of the city do not own the land, the majority reside in rental housing, and their social relations revolve in small social circles.

The occupation authority's goal to eliminate the agricultural and livestock sector, also aims to weaken the Arab's attachment to the place, as eliminating the group's economic independence and linking its livelihood to the economy of the occupying state, opens the doors for the group's members to abandon the place and move to the city or to move out of the country in search of a source of livelihood. This enables the authority to push and accelerate the process of forced integration into the Jewish economy and achieve economic Israelization. On the other hand, if the Arab is disconnected from his land and he is transferred to the wage labour market in the Jewish economic sectors, this leads to the breakdown of social cohesion and the dismantling of collective identity (customs and traditions).

In addition to what has been previously mentioned regarding the occupations policies, other realities and facts play an active role in the marginalisation of the agricultural sector that cannot be overlooked, the most important of which are:

- Population Increase:

Despite the decline in the birth rate in Golan families, as a result of the forced shift from working in the agricultural sector to the state economy (services, construction, etc.), the population of the villages has increased since the beginning of the occupation until today – from about **6,000** to around **28,000 people**, an increase more than four and a half times.

One of the reasons for this population growth is **the absence of migration from the village into the city**, as the population increase in the village is usually slow despite the high birth rate and that is because the village is experiencing a continuous migration (particularly in the younger generations) towards the city. However, in the case of the Golan, the occupation of the Golan Heights and its removal from the Syrian State, has led to the absence of migration among the Golan villages. On the other hand, the Jewish city remained out of the accounts of immigration (except in rare individual cases or emigration for a short time) because the Jewish city marginalised the Arab, rejected his identity, and closed the doors of involvement in its space, giving him a sense and feeling of alienation.

- Inheritance System:

There is no doubt that the inheritance system in Arab society plays a big role in the decline of the agricultural sector. In Europe, for example, agricultural land is inherited by the eldest son, and the rest of the family members are compensated for their share with money, while, usually, in the Arab Golani society, the land is divided among the children. This culture (the culture of partition) will lead generation after generation to the fragmentation of agricultural land and turn them into small plots of land that are not agriculturally feasible.

In addition, the absence of a national state makes the possibility of expanding agricultural areas for farmers with programmes and support from the national government, out of question. On the other hand, we see that agricultural areas in the Jewish settlements are constantly being expanded, where the State is always claiming new areas of land it has seized, and placing them under the disposal and control of the settlers.

Therefore, in light of the occupation's settlement policies, in addition to the continuous population growth, and the inability to expand agricultural areas in the village of the Golan, the agricultural sector will remain in a cycle of marginalisation and deterioration, until it becomes a distant memory.

6.0 - The Repercussions of the Destruction of the Agricultural Sector in the villages of the Golan Heights.

Agricultural villages have always played a big role in society, where they have been a fundamental cornerstone in its construction. And like everything else, the agricultural village witnessed developments over time, and many changes occurred, affecting several fields.

In the Golan Heights, you cannot compare the situation of the agricultural village with other places around the world. This is because the occupation has taken it out of the natural trajectory of village development, through to displacement and absolute destruction, which resulted in the destruction of 98.5% of the villages of the Golan.

6.1 Turning villages into overgrown communities.

Cutting off the remaining Syrian villages in the Golan Heights from the Syrian state and their forced integration into the occupation's economy led to many repercussions, the most important of which was the transformation of these villages into densely populated residential communities, and a place for the production of cheap labour linked to the Jewish capitalist market.²⁶

²⁶ According to 2019 statistical data, the average monthly income of a worker in the Golan Heights villages was 6,000 shekels, compared to 10,474 shekels, the average monthly income of Jewish worker. See: **Nazeh Brik, "Ethnic Planning...."** Al-Marsad - The Arab Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Golan Heights.

The Israeli regime imposes extreme restrictions on any development and construction on the few remaining lands in the occupied Golan Heights, denying these villages master plans that meet the needs of the population. Despite this overpopulation, the areas of the administrative areas of influence of the villages remained unchanged, and the areas of urban land in their possession were small. As a result, these villages turned into overcrowded residential areas, whose residents are forced to build without a permit.

International human rights law prohibits racial and ethnic discrimination and protects the right to adequate housing. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Israel has ratified, obliges Israel to ensure policies and laws that guarantee the right to adequate housing for all segments of society. The ICESCR States that *“the enjoyment of this right...shall not be subject to any form of discrimination,” and that “increasing access to land for the landless and poor sectors of society should be a major objective of public policy”*.

In many countries, the countryside maintains its agricultural area and its advantages, because there is continuous migration from it. However, for the villages of the Golan Heights that we are referring to here, it is continuously growing because there is no city to migrate to, gradually becoming a city without urban components, a marginal area for a Jewish population center that rejects them and denies their identity, instead of being linked to an Arab population center (a city), with which they interact economically and socially, and which attracts the movement of immigration from the village.

6.2 Commodification of land

With the marginalization and decline of the agricultural sector, much agricultural land came to be treated as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than serving as a space for production. An example of this is that there are plots of agricultural land that have become used as recreational retreats, so we see agricultural holdings that have transferred from farmers to people who want land for leisure and entertainment.

6.3 - Architectural Identity.

The agricultural village is often distinguished in a single architectural style, the architectural identity is synched with the economic identity, and the geographical identity of the village. In the Golan villages, the population relied on building straight roofs that are appropriate for its economic identity and those roofs play a part in supporting access to food security, where they are utilised to dry agricultural products (grains, dates, vegetables, etc). In addition to this, the straight roofs provided the population space to adapt to the climate of the area, where the village culture of “sleeping on top of the roof” prevailed, and that is to escape the hot summer nights inside the home.

As for building materials, residents used natural local materials. As an example, the inhabitants of villages south of the Sa'ar River, the geological divide between the

Golan Plateau and the Mount Hermon region, used black basalt stone in construction, whereas in villages located north of the Sa'ar River, residents used limestone, as is the case in the village of Majdal Shams, the village of Ain Qunya, and the destroyed village of Jubaatha al-Zayt, as well as in the villages of Mazra'at Sheba'a. In other areas, mud brick construction predominated, for example in the Al-Butayha region. Environmental conditions clearly influenced the form and nature of the house. The use of natural materials in construction gave the village good integration with the natural landscape and created the impression that the village had grown as if it had sprouted from the ground.

With the demolition of villages in the Golan, and with the marginalization and blockade of the agricultural sector in the remaining villages in the occupied part, the agricultural village disappeared, and with it disappeared traditional architecture. All houses came to be built from brick and cement, the flat roofs lost their function, and in many buildings, they were replaced by tiled roofs.

Changes in architectural style and building materials are considered an integral part of the material transformation processes that occur in the village. A local building style gradually developed, containing a mixture of imitation of modern European building patterns as a result of the penetration of urban and rural Jewish settlement, and local components derived from the traditional Arab building style. The use of new building materials and modern construction techniques contributed greatly to changing the building pattern, the image of the traditional house, and, of course also to changing the image of the entire village.

In the past, when village houses were built from local stone, the village was integrated into the surrounding natural landscape. Today, with many village houses built from stone brought from distant places, or from concrete, concrete blocks, and plaster painted in different colors, the architectural appearance of the village has become, to a large extent, foreign to the surrounding natural landscape.

These changes in the characteristics of the Golan village are linked to the transformation that occurred since the occupation in both the field of work and sources of livelihood, where the economic activity of the residents was transferred outside their lands, that is, outside the traditional economic sphere (agriculture and livestock herding), and linked to the occupier's economy.

6.4 The disappearance of hand carving

Besides farming, hand carving became widespread in the villages. However, the expulsion of the population by the occupation and their destruction of the villages, in addition to the absence of the Arab city (such as the center for shopping)²⁷, led to

²⁷ In 1967, Israel expelled the residents of Quneitra (30,000 people), which was the administrative capital of the Golan Heights and a center for marketing village products from the agricultural, livestock, and handicraft sectors. In 1974, Israel destroyed the city before returning it to the Syrian state.

the disappearance of hand-carving (creation of daggers, knitting of carpets, straw plates, sewing traditional clothing, etc.) from the cultural and economic scene for the residents of the Golan villages.

6.5 – Demographic Engineering

Settler colonialism is based on the principle of seizing land and space, and on the erasure of indigenous populations. Because the Zionist project is a settler colonial project, the Zionist establishment adopted this principle under the slogan '**a land without a people...**'²⁸, which is based on two components: **the land component and the demographic component**, and aims to:

- Achieve control over the land and its natural resources.
- Change the demographic reality of the land it controls, in Favor of Jewish demographics.

Based on these objectives, Israel builds its planning policies, adopting a policy in which geography and demographics form a fundamental component. Because Israel was unable to empty the land of all its indigenous population, the demographic factor became one of the most important concerns and challenges for its institutions. This demographic challenge, which is embodied in establishing and maintaining its identity as a '**Jewish state**' in the face of Arab demographics in Palestine and the Golan, receives significant attention to the point of anxiety. Beyond policymakers and politicians, various research centers and academic institutions have included demographic changes in the list of 'risks and challenges' facing the Jewish state²⁹. Some researchers have even gone so far as to adopt a style of marginalising and fearmongering about the '**demographic demon**' as termed by Arnon Soffer, an Israeli researcher and expert in the field of spatial planning and demographics³⁰.

State policies aimed at marginalising the agricultural sector and removing it from the economic cycle of life for village residents in the Golan, and linking their sources of livelihood to the occupation's economy, led to a decline in the population growth

²⁸ "**A land without a people for a people without a land**" is an idea promoted by Zionist leaders such as Israel Zangwill and Theodor Herzl. This slogan implies that there is a "land without a people," namely Palestine, which must be given to a "people without a land," namely the Jews.

²⁹ **Abdul Qader Badawi**: Israel's Demographics at the Beginning of the New Decade: Implications and National Dimensions! July 2021, Madar - The Palestinian Center for Israeli Studies.
<https://shorturl.at/7JRTE>

See also: The Double Demographic Obsession in Israel, Palestinian Information Center, 2009.
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³⁰ **Arnon Sofer**: The Demographic Demon Lives, Haaretz, 04.10.2010

<https://shorturl.at/Jwq2n>

rate, as there was no longer a need for the large family, as a labor force, to manage the agricultural sector³¹.

In fact, this decline cannot be limited only to the deterioration that affected the livestock and agricultural sectors. The demographic change occurring in the Golan villages can be explained through several additional factors, including:

- **Increased educational achievement** in the Golan community (both males and females), and the resulting social changes, particularly the entry of women into the labor market (inside and outside villages) instead of childbearing and child-rearing, and work in the family and local agricultural sector.

- **Changes in the occupational distribution** of the labor force, most notably the emergence of a middle class, most of whose members are academics, which led to a decline in birth rates. Increased educational level (especially among females) contributed to a decline in the age of marriage and childbearing, in addition to the desire among educated women, not only to balance work and family, but also to advance in their careers. All of this created a new demographic equation in the Golan villages, which states that the higher the educational level, the lower the birth rate.

- **Consumer culture:** The elimination of traditional sources of livelihood in the Golan villages (agriculture and livestock herding), and their replacement with sources linked to the capitalist economy of occupation institutions, led to a radical change in consumption culture in Golan society. It is well known that an agricultural rural society is characterised by a lifestyle that depends on consuming basic necessities for individuals, and is not limited only to food, but also relies on providing shelter and other basic necessities.

The changes that Golan society has undergone, and the emergence of a middle class within it, consider consumption a means of achieving happiness and prosperity, which greatly contributed to changing the existing consumption culture, to the point that it spread to affect all segments of society. The circle of spending money for consumption widened within society, not for necessity, but rather took on a competitive dimension among members of society.

In light of this consumerist culture pervading society, in addition to fluctuations and changes in economic reality, including deteriorating economic conditions, rising cost of living, and the sharp increase in real estate and land prices in Golan villages resulting from the planning policies of the occupation authority, all of this prompted many to abandon the idea of having a larger number of children, not only in order to 'maintain' their socioeconomic position, but because securing a good future for family members has become a major challenge.

³¹ Before the occupation, the population growth rate was 4.3% (Uri Davis, p. 11), and in 2018, it fell to 1.4%. See: **Nazeh Brik, Ethnic Planning...**.

In conclusion, it cannot be said that the demographic changes in the occupied Golan villages (five villages) occurred within the framework of decisions, plans, and programs established by the occupation authority, with the stated and direct goal of controlling the population growth rate. Rather, they came as a result of the practice of ethnic-planning policies, including resource distribution, division of public space, planning and construction, and others. What is undoubtedly clear is that Israel welcomes these demographic changes in the Arab community (Golan and Palestinian). Yet despite this, the state through its institutions (planning and specialised academic) and its politicians still consider Arab presence and increase in its population numbers, despite the decline in the growth rate, a danger to its existence as a Jewish state, and deal with it from this perspective ³².

6.6- Diet

The diet of village residents differs greatly from that prevalent among city dwellers, as it is characterised by its reliance on many plants and natural herbs available in their geographical surroundings, including: Gundelia, Dandelion, Fennel, Thyme, .Mallow, Borage, and others

The marginalisation and decline of the agricultural sector, and the linking of residents' livelihood in Golan villages to the occupation's economy, led to the weakening and dismantling of the connection to the land, since it no longer constitutes a source of income for them. This dismantling resulted in the loss of knowledge (especially among the youth generation, which grew up under occupation) about the healthy and free food resources that nature provides them, which led to the breakdown of the dietary system that had been prevalent since ancient times. The culture of gathering herbs and edible plants, which had constituted a fundamental component of the diet of Golan village residents, has disappeared from the lives of the youth generation, and has been replaced by processed foods that come from the Israeli market.

Not only that, but occupation institutions attacked the food culture of the residents. In 1977, Ariel Sharon (Israeli Minister of Agriculture at the time) signed a decision to add thyme and sage to the list of protected plants, under the pretext that picking them causes damage to nature, and in 2005 Gundelia was added to the list, under

³² Demographic Transformations among the Arab Population in Israel, Mada al-Carmel - The Arab Center for Applied Social Research, 2015, File No. 6.

<https://mada-research.org/storage/uploads/2014/11/suliman1.pdf>

See also: Abdul Qader Badawi: Israel's Demographics at the Beginning of the New Decade: .Implications and National Dimensions, Madar - The Palestinian Center for Israeli Studies, 2021

the pretext of threat of extinction, and heavy penalties and fines were imposed on anyone who did not comply with this ban.³³

Picking Gundelia, Thyme, and other plants, and gathering mushrooms, is an ancient popular culture that was practiced by all segments of society, where they would go out in small groups to pick these plants.

The Arab person's knowledge of the plant cover of the place, and the ability to distinguish between what is edible and what is harmful among plants, affirms the ancient relationship between them and the place, which reached the point of fusion with the place. This fusion produced knowledge of how to benefit from the plant cover, not only in the field of nutrition, but also in the field of treating diseases, which is known as folk medicine, and which is based on herbal remedies, and is widespread in rural areas.

This 'legal' ban comes not only within the framework of restricting the economic sphere for the Arab person, but also within the framework of the colonial Zionist institution's work to dismantle the Arab's relationship with their land and identity.

Despite this ban, there is still a sector in society that rejects this law and adheres to this popular culture, considering this ban an encroachment by the occupation authority on their economic rights, on their food identity, and on their popular culture.

6.7- Folklore

People are influenced by the identity of their geographical location, and they are influenced by economic, social, and religious identities. This mutual influence has produced a fusion between the person and the place, and gave birth to various identities, of it, is the traditional folklore.

The folklore identities were born in the countryside, with the beginning of human stability in residential communities (agricultural). This stability planted an understanding to the community of a connected fate and produced strong social connections between its members. From here, folklore identities shed a light on community culture and traditions, their way of life, and tells stories of love, individual and collective heroism, and the impact of humans on the environment.

Folk literature (stories and song) testifies to the great significance that place holds in the life of the community³⁴. And because folk culture was born with the agricultural

³³ Rabiea' Ghabaria: Why Israel Fears the Gundelia and the Thyme, 2017, Arab48 website. <https://shorturl.at/KEtow>

³⁴ On the role of plants in folk songs, see: Osama Al-Ashqar: Plants in Palestinian Folklore, Academy of Refugee Studies.

village, at the beginning of human settlement in groups, the relationship between place (nature) and agriculture produced folkloric identities, such as songs of agricultural seasons (the agricultural song), which express agricultural work and encapsulate the psychological and emotional dimension between land and people.

Agricultural sector songs do not only address ploughing, sowing, harvesting, threshing, grinding, picking, and so on, but often mixed these agricultural activities with human emotion. In many of these songs we see men depicting their feelings and emotions toward women, in expressions that do not contradict the values of conservative agricultural society.³⁵

Folk songs express not only collective work, human emotion, and the embodiment of social relations, but also expresses the culture of belonging to the land, and national identity, and plays a role in human consciousness and strengthening their attachment to place.³⁶

The destruction of agricultural villages, expulsion of residents, and elimination of the agricultural sector in remaining villages had a devastating effect on Golan folk heritage, which constitutes an essential part of national identity. Everything from this heritage related to the agricultural sector has disappeared from the lives of residents of occupied Golan villages.³⁷

Israel continues to target the cultural heritage and folk traditions of Golan village residents. Immediately after the occupation, it abolished the Syrian education system and imposed Israeli curricula³⁸. with the aim of dismantling cultural and social ties with the Syrian state, erasing national memory, and destroying its material and immaterial components. In addition, through imposing Israeli curricula, Israel seeks to disseminate the Zionist narrative, especially among the youth generation, regarding its presence in the region.

³⁵ **Muhammad Khaled Ramadan:** From the popular heritage of the Golan Heights: Work songs - Rajida songs, 2009.

<https://kassioun.org/more-categories/art-and-culture/item/50747-24499>

³⁶ **Omar Atiq:** Folk Song in Agricultural Seasons, Popular Culture Magazine, Issue 46, 2019, p. 150
<https://folkculturebh.org/upload/issues/issue46.pdf>

³⁷ For more on the popular heritage of the Golan, see: Muhammad Khalid Ramadan and Abdullah Dhiyab al-Hussein: From the Popular Heritage of the Golan, Publications of the General Syrian Book Organization, Ministry of Culture, 2010.

³⁸ It is worth noting that in Israel there are educational curricula for the Jewish sector, and others for the Arab sector. In 1975, the Israeli Ministry of Education decided to exclude Druze schools from the approved educational curricula in the Arab (Palestinian) sector, and to create educational curricula specific to Druze schools. These curricula were imposed on schools in the villages of the occupied Golan Heights.

7.0 – Conclusion:

Under occupation law, the occupying power does not acquire sovereignty over the occupied territories, and is required to respect the laws and institutions existing in the occupied territories to the greatest extent possible, and not to adopt policies or measures that would lead to permanent changes in the status of the occupied territory and its essential characteristics, particularly in social, economic, and demographic fields. Several decisions issued by international courts in recent times have affirmed that occupation forces are obliged to comply with their obligations related to human rights in the occupied territories, and essentially require the occupying power to maintain as normal a life as possible in the occupied territory, and to administer the occupied territory for the benefit of the local population (taking into account its own security needs), and the occupying power is not permitted to exercise its authority in order to promote its own interests, or with the aim of using the population or resources or other assets of the territory it occupies for the benefit of its own territory or population.

Attempts to remove people through forced displacement, seizing their land, erasing their identity, and changing their way of life constitute a fundamental pillar in the history of colonial movements, particularly settler colonialism. Forcibly expelling Arabs from their land through force and violence, and destroying their homes, is a policy pursued by Israel since its establishment until today, aimed at emptying the land of its Arab owners and replacing them with settlers who adhere to Zionist Judaism.

Cleansing the Palestinian and Golan geography of the Arab agricultural village, through displacing its residents and destroying and erasing the residential fabric, comes within the Zionist colonial project, based on a foundation of replacement through:

- Expelling Arab residents and replacing them with Jewish settlers.
- Destroying Arab villages, eradicating them from the geographical and urban landscape, and replacing them with Jewish settlements with an alien European character.

This replacement falls within the demographic calculations of the Zionist institution, which since the establishment of the Israeli state has worked on re-engineering Palestinian and Golan geography demographically and urbanistically, and infusing it with the Zionist narrative.

The war of extermination that Israel has been waging in Gaza for more than a year is a demographic war par excellence, aimed at emptying the place of its indigenous inhabitants (ethnic cleansing), and thus achieving the slogan '**a land without a people...**'. It is not the first extermination war in Israeli history. In 1948, the Jewish state committed numerous massacres against the Palestinian people and followed them with the expulsion of more than 800,000 people, then destroyed approximately 530 villages. In 1967, it committed the same acts in the Golan, committing massacres, expelling approximately 142,000 of its residents, and destroying their residential fabric, which consisted of 340 villages and the city of Quneitra.

Israeli occupation of Arab lands (the Golan and Palestine) constitutes a source of severe human rights violations, and these violations include: forced expulsion of residents, demolition of villages, establishment of settlements, annexation of the Golan and Jerusalem, confiscation of natural resources, discriminatory planning laws, discriminatory law enforcement, and imposition of a two-tiered system of political, legal, social, cultural, and economic rights that differ on the basis of race.

The world has not witnessed a state that disregards international law more than Israel, due to the direct complicity of Western states with it (participation of the military institution, provision of weapons and money), in addition to providing it with extensive coverage and protection before international judicial institutions.

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