

Palestine: The entire history of Zionism's injustices, in one Bedouin village

Monday 25 November 2024, by [NOY Orly](#) (Date first published: 20 November 2024).

The destruction of Umm Al-Hiran exemplifies the Zionist view of Palestinians as impermanent; moveable chess pieces in a game of demographic engineering.



Israeli police surround and destroy the mosque in Umm Al-Hiran, Nov. 14, 2024. (Oren Ziv)

Last week, the State of Israel hung the scalp of another Palestinian community on its belt after completing the demolition of [Umm Al-Hiran](#). On the morning of Nov. 14, hundreds of police stormed the Bedouin village — which is located in the [Negev/Naqab desert](#), in southern Israel — accompanied by special forces officers and helicopters. The residents, Israeli citizens who had [long feared](#) that this day would come, had already self-demolished most of the structures in the village to avoid having to pay large fines. All that was left for police to destroy was the mosque.

Just like that, two and a half decades of legal struggle to save the village came to an end, and the residents were rendered homeless. If you want to understand the entire history of Zionism's injustices against Palestinians — with all the discrimination, racism, dispossession, and violence, grounded in a vision of Jewish supremacy and a concomitant obsession with demographic engineering — you need look no further than Umm Al-Hiran.

In Israeli-Jewish discourse, the destruction of a Bedouin community barely raises eyebrows, let alone makes headlines. After all, it was an “[unrecognized village](#)” — a linguistic device Israel deploys to portray Bedouin citizens as invaders in their own lands. The Israeli public perceives the systematic destruction of these communities as a mere [crackdown on rulebreakers](#). But not only were the residents of Umm Al-Hiran not invaders, [they were moved there](#) by the state itself.

Before Israel was established, the community that became Umm Al-Hiran lived in the northwestern Negev. In 1952, Israel's military government forcibly displaced them further east in order to expropriate their land for the construction of Kibbutz Shoal. Four years later, the state decided to uproot them again, pushing them to an area just inside the Green Line, near the southwestern tip of the West Bank, where they remained until last week.



Israeli police surround and destroy the mosque in Umm Al-Hiran, Nov. 14, 2024. (Oren Ziv)

Throughout all these decades, the state did not bother to regulate the status of the village. It did not provide residents with infrastructure or basic services such as electricity, water, education, or sanitation. This is Zionism's sleaze laid bare: depriving the Negev's Palestinian residents of the most basic living conditions for generations, before one day replacing them with a Jewish community in the name of "making the desert bloom."

The Negev constitutes more than half of the territory of the State of Israel, and vast areas of it are empty. Yet the state nonetheless insists on destroying "unrecognized" Arab villages to build new Jewish ones. In the case of Umm Al-Hiran, the new community was originally supposed to bear a Judaized version of the name of the village it was replacing: Hiran. Someone thought better, and now it is to be called Dror — "freedom."

This is, of course, nothing new. Israel has been destroying Palestinian communities and settling Jews in their place since its establishment. It depopulated hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages during the Nakba of 1948 alone. But the story of Umm Al-Hiran contains another layer of Israel's attitude toward Palestinians, which is essential to understanding Zionism's modus operandi: the perception of Palestinians' presence as temporary.

This is one of the most violent expressions of Jewish supremacy. Palestinians are seen as human dust that can be simply swept away, or as chess pieces that can be moved from one square to another in accordance with Israel's never-ending project of demographic engineering between the river and the sea. It is an essential part of the dehumanization of those whose lands the state has its eyes on: the deep conviction that these people have no roots, and therefore moving them from place to place cannot possibly be considered displacement.



Villagers stand next to the rubble of destroyed buildings in Umm Al-Hiran, Nov. 14, 2024. (Oren Ziv)

In this way, it is possible to keep ignoring the pleas of the residents of the Galilee villages of [Iqrit](#) and [Bir'em](#), more than half a century after the High Court ruled that they should be allowed to return to their lands after they were expelled during the Nakba; it is possible to carry out [widespread ethnic cleansing](#) in the West Bank under the pretext of security and the rule of law; and it is possible to order hundreds of thousands of Gazans to evacuate [again and again and again](#), turning them into eternal nomads as Zionism intended — and, on top of it all, to consider this a humanitarian act.

Zionism's demographic engineering is not limited to Palestinians. The story of [Givat Amal](#), a Mizrahi neighborhood in Tel Aviv that was [forcibly evicted and demolished](#) in 2021, has many parallels to the story of Umm al-Hiran; there, too, the state compelled a marginalized community to move to a frontier area, never regulated their status or rights to the land, and as soon as that land's value increased, it expelled the residents out of greed. Meanwhile, state-approved "[admissions committees](#)" continue to uphold apartheid in hundreds of Jewish communities across the Negev and the Galilee, ensuring that the "right people" live in the right places.

But it is Palestinians whom Zionism has transformed into a temporary people with a transient identity. This is the assumption that lies at the heart of the land-swap plan championed a decade ago by [Avigdor Liberman](#), which would see several Palestinian communities inside Israel dislocated to the West Bank while Israel annexes some of the settlements: today Palestinians can be citizens of Israel, but tomorrow, with the wave of a finger, they can cease to be so. (Liberman, once considered to be on the far right of Israeli politics, has lately become a kind of [hero of the center left](#).)

Perhaps what underpins this Zionist determination to rip Palestinians out of their place is an internalized fear of their deep-rooted connection to the land. Perhaps it's the delusion that if they are uprooted and thrown about from place to place enough times — whether by death marches in Gaza, ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, or destruction and expulsion in the Negev — they will eventually give up and leave.

Eight years ago, Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid [wrote an ode](#) to the [Hashomer Hachadash movement](#), in which he quipped that "a man who plants a tree is not going anywhere." There is something remarkable about the ways in which the subconscious sometimes erupts from the pen, in spite of the person holding it. After all, the state knows exactly who planted the olive trees that [the army bombs in Gaza](#) and [settlers set ablaze in the West Bank](#). But even after decades of destruction, expulsion, and carnage, Zionism refuses to accept that they are not going anywhere.

Orly Noy

P.S.

• +972. November 20, 2024 :
<https://www.972mag.com/umm-al-hiran-destruction-zionist-demography/>

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#).

• Orly Noy is an editor at Local Call, a political activist, and a translator of Farsi poetry and prose. She is the chair of B'Tselem's executive board and an activist with the Balad political party. Her writing deals with the lines that intersect and define her identity as Mizrahi, a female leftist, a woman, a temporary migrant living inside a perpetual immigrant, and the constant dialogue between them.

• **Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war. The world is reeling from Israel's unprecedented onslaught on Gaza, inflicting mass devastation and death upon besieged Palestinians, as well as the atrocious attack and kidnappings by Hamas in Israel on October 7. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing this violence.**

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to intensify their attacks on Palestinians. The most far-right government in Israel's history is ramping up its policing of dissent, using the cover of war to silence Palestinian citizens and left-wing Jews who object to its policies.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 14 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, entrenched occupation and apartheid, and a normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is a leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists, activists, and thinkers can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

[BECOME A +972 MEMBER TODAY](#)