WEEKEND

Adam Raz

What is it about that flag?

Historical documents show the abysmal seriousness that Israel devoted to flag waving by Palestinians, and no less to the hoisting of the Israeli flag

A Palestinian flag rears its head last month in Tel Aviv, at a demonstration against the government's judicial-overhaul plans. The flag has always been seen as threatening in Israel. *Ohad Zwigenberg*

In November 1968, a year and a half after Israel's conquest of the Gaza Strip in the Six-Day War, an 18-year-old high-school student named Faiz, who lived in Gaza City's Tuffah neighborhood, hung a Palestinian flag on the wall of his school and then ran off. Afterward, about 60 students from the school went outside to demonstrate against the occupiers. Reporting the event, a Shin Bet security service coordinator noted, "When the army appeared… the students ran off and the army succeeded in apprehending a number of students who demonstrated."

In his request to the Israel Police to investigate the event, the Shin Bet coordinator added a few comments: "Faiz is a terrible student. The flag Faiz hung on the wall is handmade. It's not known whether someone sent Faiz to hang the flag."

The police lost no time in launching an investigation. Faiz and another student were taken into custody, as was the school's superintendent – who was released after three weeks, when it turned out that he had been the one who had taken the flag down.

The Shin Bet archives are closed to the public (the document quoted above is from the police archives), so we don't know how this episode ended. What is known is that it was not the only incident attesting to the fact that the Israeli security forces always attached inordinate importance to flags and their appearance in the public space, both within the Green Line (sovereign Israel) and on the Palestinian side as well.

Indeed, reports about flags – whether Palestinian and Israeli – turn up persistently in literature of the period and in historical documentation in Israel. In 1974, for example, Israel Defense Forces Central Command reported on four instances of sabotage in a West Bank Palestinian village, consisting of the repeated disconnecting of a telephone line and the hoisting in its place of "a Palestinian flag that was drawn on a piece of notebook paper." For the Israeli authorities, it's apparent that the attitude toward the display of flags was something of a barometer for measuring the depth of Israel's control over the Palestinians as a whole.

Whereas the appearance of the Palestinian flag (whose origins date back to the time of the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire a century ago) was an indication of the ineffectiveness of Israeli control, the hoisting of Israeli flags – and the more the better – reflected awkward attempts by the authorities to demonstrate the opposite of that. By rigorously seeing to the presence of Israeli flags in the Palestinian public space in Israel, the occupier sought to embed Israeli rule and ingrain it in the visual realm, and thus remind the Palestinians who was running the show. For this reason, considerable resources were invested, over the long years (1948-1966) of military rule over Israel's Arab citizens, in order to carry out observation, surveillance and documentation of the Palestinian citizens who celebrated Independence Day, of those who raised the Israeli flag and those who were against doing so.

In April 1950, ahead of Israel's second Independence Day, military administration headquarters sent a message to the military governors instructing them to underscore the importance of the event. "It is of special interest to us that this year, Independence Day is also celebrated and evident among the Arab population in the administered territories," meaning Arab society within Israel, the governors were told. To that end, it noted several steps that were to be taken in the Arab communities. "The village mukhtar and dignitaries must ensure that flags are hoisted and that the state emblems are hung on all public and [other] important buildings in the village."

In addition, schools were to hold festive events and conduct talks about Independence Day, and in the villages, "special prayers for the well-being of the state and the president" were to be recited that day. The movie theaters in Nazareth and Acre were instructed to screen "special films," at no charge to the audience.

The authorities in the field – the police and the military governors – saw to it that the spirit of the holiday was maintained. Each year, in the lead-up to Independence Day and on the day itself, they reported on the events of the holiday and about what was termed the "state of mind" among Israel's Palestinian inhabitants. In an April 1953 report, for example, the military governor of the Negev, Basil Herman, detailed the main events surrounding the festive reception that was conducted for the Arab public in the military administration building to mark the country's fifth Independence Day.

"Exit permit [requirements] were not strictly observed that day," the governor reported, referring to the travel authorizations that Israel's Arab population had to obtain in order to leave their place of residence during the period of military government. The governor added that, contrary to earlier fears, the representatives of the Bedouin community had not been affected by the drought that occurred year and had not expressed a hostile attitude toward the government during the celebrations. On the contrary: "All the speakers praised the government and the [military] administration."

A report by military government headquarters in Acre about holiday events in the village of Yasif in May 1958 was also enormously effusive about the local celebrations. "The village's [playing] field was festooned with national flags, colorful ribbons, abundant electric light that was provided by a special generator brought to the site for that purpose, a stage decorated with rugs, flags and pictures of the state's public personalities and Zionist leaders," the district commander noted, and summed up, "The technical arrangements, including comfortable places for the audience to sit, were not inferior, in my opinion, to the arrangements in a Jewish community."

> Peace Now co-founder Tzali Reshef observed in his 1996 book about the movement, that waving the Palestinian flag diverted attention from the large-scale demonstration and served the right wing by presenting all the demonstrators as extremists. 'The extremist image clung to us, and all we could do was try to reduce the damage.'

A perusal of the rest of the report makes it clear that the celebrations took place in spite of the objections of the local governing council, whose members decided unanimously to boycott the Independence Day events, per the report, "for Arab nationalist reasons."

Over the years, numerous disputes occurred in connection with the Israeli flag, which the police addressed with profound seriousness. On Independence Day in 1962, for example, unknown persons in the village of Tira removed "two flags from over the high school, one flag from over the Histadrut [labor federation] building… two flags from the local council building, while about 15 flags were taken down from the electric pole on the main street."

Police rushed to the site, but weren't able to find the flag vandals. With the aid of the Shin Bet, possible suspects were found and "brought before a magistrate's court judge in Netanya and taken into custody for 15 days." In the wake of the investigation, an 11-year-old boy was detained, "who confessed, following which we [the police] arrived at a clear picture" about the removal of the flags, which had also been defaced.

After 1967, the policy that had required Israeli flags to be flown in Arab communities within Israel during the state's first two decades of existence, evolved into a restriction on display of the Palestinian flag in the territories. Thus, one of the first steps taken by Israel after the conquest of the territories was to declare a ban on undesirable symbols. Article 5 of the 1967 Military Order 101 on the "Prohibition of Incitement and Hostile Propaganda Actions" (which was, in fact, a ban on all political activity in the recently conquered territories) states: "It is forbidden to hold, wave, display or affix flags or political symbols, except in accordance with a permit of the military commander." No such permit was ever issued, of course.

Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, asked shortly afterward in the Knesset about the ban on displaying the Palestinian flag, explained the logic of the policy. "I assume that raising a flag in a public place means that the flag is meant to symbolize the rule in that place… The government of Israel believes that in the West Bank, the rule is that of the government of Israel."

It wasn't only a symbolic matter. Shlomo Gazit, the coordinator of government policy in the territories in the first seven years after their conquest, noted in his book "The Carrot and the Stick: Israel's Policy in Judaea and Samaria, 1967-68," that Israel aspired to prevent the residents of the territories from participating in shaping the area's political future. The military government in the territories, he added, was adept at doing damage to the business and property of anyone there who displayed "nationalist" inclinations. Under the military government, the Palestinian flag was seen as an expression of collective Palestinian identity, and therefore must not be flown.

Display of the Palestinian flag instigated a furor not only in the occupied territories but also within Israel for many years. In this sense, the recent comments by both coalition and opposition members about the appearance of Palestinian flags at demonstrations against the judicial overhaul currently underway are merely upgrades of reactions that were voiced across decades. In the huge demonstration organized by Peace Now in March 1982, to mark the third anniversary of the signing of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty, when a Palestinian flag was raised by a left-wing demonstrator, it was a number of left-wing activists who got rid of the symbol. Tzali Reshef, a founder of Peace Now, observed in his 1996 book about the movement, that waving the flag diverted attention from the large-scale demonstration and served the right wing by

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BODY

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hand. The results of the investigation will probably end up being permanently buried, along with Rayyan's body. It's not difficult, of course, to imagine what would have happened if the roles were reversed – if a Palestinian shepherd had shot a settler dead.

A circle of stones, some bearing not-yet-dry bloodstains, marks the spot where Rayyan fell. From a poor family, he worked at a marble mill in town; he and his wife Anuar, 26, have three children: Jod, 5; Jena, 3; and 1-month-old Suleiman. A settler who's now walking free and will probably never get the punishment he deserves has taken away their father forever. The man probably never tormented himself for even a moment over his deed. And maybe it won't be his last act of violence. The villagers say the same settler continues to threaten and intimidate them, and also tries to steal their sheep.

When Mohammed stood with us next to the house and the settlers' all-seeing drone once again appeared in the sky – the terror returned and all he wanted to do was get away. He was fearful the settlers would show up again.

Last Saturday, 3:30 P.M. Three construction workers were building Mustafa Mari's new house on the outskirts of Qarawat Bani Hassan, amid some olive trees. The land here is privately owned, but because this is Area C of the West Bank (that is, under full Israeli control), the Palestinians are denied building permits. So they build without a permit, just like their neighbors in Havot Yair do. But unlike the settlers, they build not on land that has been stolen, but that belongs to them.

Suddenly the trio of builders heard a drone chirping above them, and shortly afterward were shocked by the sight of some 30 armed settlers, some with machine guns, others with pistols, striding rapidly toward the skeleton of the structure they were working on. The workers were on the second floor. One of them managed to flee quickly, the other two – Mohammed, 23, and his brother A., 38, who did not want his name used – stayed where they were. About a dozen settlers climbed up to them and started cursing, shoving, beating and threatening the two.

"Why are you building here?" demanded the members of the armed militia, self-styled enforcers of local building regulations. "You're not allowed to build here." The frightened men replied that they were only laborers, that the house belonged to someone else, who had hired them. "What do you want from us?" they asked helplessly.

When Mohammed and his brother started to phone for help, the settlers told them to stop. The two did manage, however, to send a hasty voice message to the head of the local council, Ibrahim Asi. Asi was in Jericho, but sent an urgent message of distress to the town's WhatsApp groups. Meanwhile, the settlers pushed A. from where he'd been standing, and he suffered bruises. Mohammed got away. The settlers fired a few rounds into the air in order to heighten the terror; a few bullet holes were visible this week in the unfinished structure.

In the meantime, villagers who had received Asi's message came to the rescue. One of the first on the scene was a 53-year-old merchant, who was wearing a checked suit and had a keffiyeh draped around his neck when we met him this week in the office of the council head. He received the cry for help at 4:20 P.M., and immediately drove to the site with a friend. He recalled seeing a large number of armed settlers standing a few dozen meters from the house, and the two brothers trying to escape.

For his part, Mohammed told us he had fled in a panic. The settlers broke part of a window that was under construction and tore out some iron rods and threw them to the ground. When Mohammed stood with us next to the house and the settlers' all-seeing drone appeared once again in the sky – the terror returned and he wanted only to flee. He was fearful the settlers would show up again, in the wake of the drone. He hadn't returned to the building site since the incident.

"Anyone who wants to come to work here is invited," he said with a sad smile. "I'm done with this job."

Last Friday, a shepherd who was tending his flock of about 70 sheep, was attacked in the valley by a settler. According to council head Asi, the man managed to steal seven sheep and began to herd them toward his home in the new outpost. The settlers alleged afterward that the shepherd had later tried to attack the settler's wife (there was no information about what happened to the sheep). Maybe the settlers returned the next day to mete out punishment for that, too.

Asi, at 35, one of the youngest council heads in the West Bank, whose attractive, renovated council building was dedicated only two weeks ago, told us that settler violence has been escalating, along with the frequency of visits by inspectors from the Israeli military government's Civil Administration. He didn't think this situation was due to the advent of the new, hard-line Israeli government or to changes in the administration – the deterioration began last October, but he had no idea why.

The council head's two cellphones didn't stop ringing for a minute during our conversation. He said the townspeople know who is terrorizing the farmers and also know the father of the violent settler from the outpost. The father lives in Yakir and is very nice, they say. In a video clip after the incident with the sheep, in which villagers and settlers can be seen arguing, separated by soldiers who were summoned to the site – the man who would die the next day can be seen. Not far away is the person the Palestinians think is the killer: *Haro'eh*, they call the violent settler, "the shepherd."

When the confrontation that afternoon grew more intense, several dozen meters from the unfinished house, with stones being thrown by the Palestinians and shots being fired in the air – the settlers claimed that firecrackers were also thrown by the Palestinians, which they deny – a villager named Shaher Mari, a merchant of 50 who speaks Hebrew, tried to calm the situation down.

Eyewitnesses told us that Rayyan was standing next to Mari, with stones in his hands. One of the settlers ordered him to drop them; he did and moved away, about 30 meters. A moment later, a settler fired a bullet directly into Rayyan's head, they said. He fell, blood spurting from his nose and mouth, and probably died instantly. One eyewitness related that he rushed to his side but Rayyan wasn't responding. Young people carried him to a private car, which was met en route by a Palestinian ambulance that took the mortally wounded man to Yasser Arafat Hospital in the town of Salfit, where he was pronounced dead.

Suleiman Rayyan, holding a photo of his son Methkal, this week. "Only the next day did I understand that he was really dead." *Alex Levac*

Havot Yair issued an official statement Saturday night, claiming that a group of "residents" had gone on a hike in the area; they had been attacked by hundreds of Palestinians and one person in their group had been wounded in the face by a stone.

The Spokesperson's Unit of the Israel Defense Forces stated, in response to a query from Haaretz, that soldiers arrived only after Rayyan had been evacuated and that no soldiers had been at the scene when he was shot.

For its part, the Israel Police stated: "Upon receiving the report about the case, an investigation was launched that is still underway. Naturally, we do not provide details about an ongoing investigation; however, we will note that we shall continue to investigate with the aim of arriving at the truth."

In the photo on the mourning poster hanging in the street, Methkal Rayyan is seen wearing a red shirt and a blue tie – his wedding picture. Suleiman Rayyan, his bereaved father, entered the office of the council head with faltering steps, still visibly stunned. In a blue jacket and keffiyeh, he told us that two days before losing his son he had undergone a cardiac catheterization in Nablus. He had had a bypass procedure a few years ago and hasn't worked since. Suleiman is 54, the father of eight other children.

Methkal used to visit his parents every evening after work, and did so on the last evening of his life as well. What happened when you heard your son had been killed, we ask. I passed out, Suleiman admitted, with a wan smile. "Only the next day did I understand that he was really dead."

FLAG

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presenting all the demonstrators as extremists. "The extremist image clung to us, and all we could do was try to reduce the damage," he explained.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin devoted the first cabinet meeting after the demonstration to deriding the "rotten fruit" that was Peace Now. The distance between "rotten fruit" and the remarks of a number of currently serving cabinet ministers is not great.

It wasn't only among Jews that the issue of raising the Palestinian flag stirred a lively debate. In the second half of the 1980s, when the Palestinian flag became more of a pronounced presence in communities throughout the Triangle (a concentration of Arab towns and villages adjacent to the Green Line) and further north, in the Galilee, it was Rakah – one of the incarnations of the Israeli Communist Party, which is today represented in the Hadash party – that objected. MK Meir Vilner, for example, Rakah's leader, criticized the flying of the Palestinian flag because, "when it is raised in Israel, it's as though we are saying: The area of Israel should also be incorporated into the Palestinian state." Nazareth mayor and also MK Tawfiq Zayyad, one of the most influential voices among the left-wing Arab leadership in Israel, argued that although there was no doubt that the flag of Palestine is "our national flag," displaying it was "a purely tactical question and not a fundamental question." He urged people to act wisely in connection when it came to raising the flag at demonstrations.

Together with addressing the issue of flying (and not flying) flags, the historical record shows a systematic engagement with the music played at weddings in Arab society in Israel – which in the view of the authorities had a tendency to express forbidden national yearnings – and a rigorous monitoring of books of poetry read by the country's Arab population. Until the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Arab literature in Israel was subjected to censorship. Suffice it to mention the writer Emil Habibi and the poet Samih al-Qasim, whose works were censored and even banned by the military censors, though today their books are available in bookshops.

In a meeting of the Central Committee for Security in February 1970, representatives of various security organizations addressed the logic of the supervision and censorship of books of Arabic poetry that were published in Israel, explaining that canceling the censorship of literature that contained what they perceived as "incitement," would lead to a "loosening of the reins in Arab society."

In these cases, too, as with the Palestinian flag, the issue at hand was not security or "public safety." In fact, it was the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs, Shmuel Toledano, who made it clear that the censorship was not at all intended to enhance Israel's security, but constituted a tool for educating the Arab citizens.

It is regrettable to find that among those who are protesting today against the government's effort to weaken the judiciary are demonstrators – perhaps they are even a majority – for whom raising a Palestinian flag at a protest in central Tel Aviv constitutes the sabotaging of the call for the democratization of the public space. In that sense, they have internalized the political and military logic that has ruled here for decades: Democracy, yes; but only up to a point.

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Departures | Arrivals

Danna Frank, Photos by Tomer Appelbaum

Tzvi Katav, 42; lives in Kiryat Ata, flying to Munich

What's the story in Germany?

They're going to bring a production line to Israel. I write operating instructions for factories. They want my help so that when the line arrives in Israel it will be possible to start using it right away.

What's the production line for?

It's [for] a medical product that's manufactured in Israel manually, and now there will be a semi-automatic production line. In other words, an employee will press a button, the machines will go into motion and do the assembling, and the worker will just have to supervise. My goal is for there to be clear instructions, so that the people who read them in Israel will understand easily how to operate the machines. With most of the companies I work with in Israel, they bring whatever they need from abroad, and the instructions are rewritten here. In this case, someone thought a step ahead and decided that when it's all assembled in Israel, people should also know how to operate it.

How long have you been in this line of work?

Since 2017. I hadn't planned on getting into this – I have a law degree, actually. I attended the air force's technical high school, and during my military service I was a technician in the air force. I got into this work unexpectedly. I'm happy doing it. It's a lot of responsibility: I have to choose words carefully [when writing instructions]; sometimes there's no text at all, just symbols. People who work in a profession like mine need to get into the worker's head and try to understand how he will see it. How he understands it. Engineers build the product and they design the training process, and it's all well and good that they can understand it and repair it, but the workers themselves may have no technical background at all. Sometimes I look at the instructions that come [with the product], and they're barely comprehensible. I myself can hardly figure out what they mean. Really.

What's your life like outside of work?

It's fine, I'm happily married, I like sports, I like my job. No kids yet, my wife has cats. We both work independently: She builds websites and does internet marketing. We've been together 12 years, if I remember right.

How did you meet?

When I was a student at university, I worked as a guard in a security unit for public transportation. It was a period of terrorist attacks, and the government decided to establish a unit called Magen. We wore khaki jackets and wandered around bus stops and on public transportation. In one of the places, the Central Bus Station in Nahariya, there was a shawarma restaurant. There was a guy who worked there who liked me, he did matchmaking, trying to connect people. He saw me, and I think he knew her mother and knew she had a daughter who was also looking, and he said, "Let's try to get them to meet." He's a really nice guy. Some people do matchmaking for money, but not him.

I wasn't expecting anything, I wasn't looking for a match. I'm religiously observant today, but in the past I wasn't. So it happened like that, without us planning. From the start, I didn't expect anything to come out of it, but she's the only one I liked out of everyone I met. She's a very educated woman, speaks six languages. Someone after my own heart, let's put it like that.

Was the matchmaker invited to the wedding?

Yes, of course.

When did you become religious?

A little before my army service. Until then I traveled on Shabbat and everything. In the air force school, the only Bible we studied was for the matriculation exams. I told myself that as someone who wants to become educated and enrich my knowledge, I should read the Bible. Not to become religiously observant or anything – for general knowledge. And then I started to read a chapter every night before I went to sleep. I did that for a long time, starting with Genesis, Exodus, then Numbers, and so on.

And then I said – in the Torah, God asks us to do all kinds of things, so why not do them? It's not hard for me, it's not complicated. I started like that, very slowly. At first, I deliberately walked around without a kippa. I said, I'm not going to do things because the rabbis tell me: I want to get to know and understand alone, to do what I understand. I saw that there are very fine things in the Torah, from the stories to the Bible code. My wife had also became religiously observant, without connection to me. She actually grew up in Italy, and when she came to Israel she started to become religious.

Are the instructions in the Bible clear, or could they be phrased better?

Interesting question. Read Maimonides' introduction: He explains where the instructions came from, and why they are sometimes unclear. Well, that's it, I hope I was of help to you.

Amir Gil, 25, lives in Lod; Naama Lindeman, 61, lives in New Jersey, and Ori Gil, 32, lives in Jerusalem; Naama is arriving from New Jersey

What were you doing in the States, Naama?

Naama: I live there now. Tomer – their father – and I relocated there last November for his job.

And how's it going?

Naama: Challenging. It's like learning how to walk again. Everyone says that, and no one understands how true it is. It starts with going to the supermarket and knowing what to buy. From many points of view, we live on automatic pilot, and suddenly everything changes. Your whole way of organizing things changes, too. For example, in the United States anyone who doesn't have credit doesn't exist. You have to start over with everything – beginning with getting a driver's license so you have confirmation that you exist. It's a thing in the United States: Just telling them that you exist doesn't do it.

Where do you live?

Naama: In the heart of the Israeli swamp – in Tenafly. But we don't feel any pressure to make connections. We came like a young couple; our children all remained here, and our grandson, too.

Wait a minute, did you have to do a driving test?

Ori: Twice.

Naama: Luckily, we only had to do the theory part, but it's hard. The rules aren't hard, but the test is about the penalties [for different violations], all kinds of weird things. Everything is different. But I work here and live there – I'm a tour guide. I'm there for two months and then I return to Israel for six weeks to work.

How did you get into that profession?

Naama: I did guiding when I was still in high school, which was some time ago. In the army, I was a noncom specializing in Israeli geography. Afterward I went on being a tour guide for years. At a certain stage, I went in the direction of teaching, but I continued to guide and do activities in nature. In the end I gave up teaching and only did the touring. That's what makes me feel good.

What has changed in the profession over the years?

Naama: The Land of Israel has changed, if you haven't noticed (*Laughs*). Where we live [here], most of the area is nature. Even between the houses. It's amazing. So beautiful. I looked down at the country from the plane and could see saw almost as far as Hadera, and it's all built-up. There is a shortage of nature in our country. We didn't just happen to live in Mitzpeh Hila [a Western Galilee hilltop community] by chance. A lack of nature doesn't make headlines today.

Do you think that has an impact on people?

Naama: Of course. That's my credo. I think nature is the place where people feel healthiest. I have no doubt about it – it's been proved scientifically.

How do children react to nature?

Naama: Children today are very far away from nature. I see a big difference even between the situation that existed when my children grew up and the way things are now. Children today don't know that a cucumber comes from a plant; [they think] it comes from the shelf. They don't know what plant Bamba [a peanut-flavored snack food] grows on. But there are many schools, like the "Forest" network of schools, where they are trying to get back to nature.

Ori and Amir, where are you these days?

Ori: I live in Jerusalem.

Amir: I'm in Lod.

What do you do in Lod?

Amir: I returned from overseas five years ago, and had to decide where to live and set up my business. I'm a dog trainer. I looked for quality of life on a budget, and it's relatively cheap there and close to lots of other places. I knew the city 10 years ago, from my National Service year, and I still have friends there. A lot of people realized they can live 20 minutes from Tel Aviv and 35 minutes from Jerusalem at a reasonable price. Besides that, there are nice places in Lod.

How many siblings are you?

Ori: Four. We have two older sisters. I moved to Jerusalem recently. One sister also lives there, she has a little baby, so that's nice. I've started to learn shiatsu there. I wasn't sure I'd stay, but I did.

How are you experiencing your parents' relocation abroad?

Ori: The main difference is that now they choose when I meet with them, not like when they lived in Mitzpeh Hila and I chose when to see them.

Amir: It also means that we meet up by ourselves.

Ori: Although we didn't see each other much at our parents' even before, after everyone left home.