

أقلية تحت الاحتلال :**دراسة للمواقف الاجتماعية والسياسية
للطائفة السامرية في الأراضي الفلسطينية المحتلة .**

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**Minority Under Occupation
The Sociopolitics of the Samaritans
in the Palestinian Occupied Territories****Dr. Hussein Ahmad Yousef
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تعتبر الطائفة السامرية إحدى أصغر الطوائف في العالم، يسكن معظمهم مدينة نابلس في فلسطين. وكطائفة قليلة العدد كان الهدف الرئيسي لها هو البقاء والمحافظة على شخصيتها وتراثها. لذلك حافظت على علاقات حسنة مع جميع القوى والاتجاهات السياسية والاجتماعية الموجودة في المنطقة.

ABSTRACT

The Samaritan community is one of the smallest minorities in the World. Most of them live in the City of Nablus in Palestine. As a small minority with a main interest to survive, and to reserve its identity and heritage, the Samaritans do their best to keep their neutrality and good relations with all powers and factions in the region.

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Introduction:

The study of minorities and ethnic relations is gaining more reliability in the contemporary political world. In this research, we use the anthropological approach, and we interview many Samaritan representatives about their attitude towards many political and social aspects. This paper aims to study the specificity of the sociopolitical attitudes of the Samaritans towards the main issues facing the Palestinian people.

The Samaritans: Origin and Beliefs:

The name of Samaritans was first found in the Book of Kings, relating Nablus on Mt. Gerizim and in Holon. The name of Samaritans means conservative people.

In the 4th. and 5th. centuries A.D., the number of Samaritans was more than one million inhabitants settled in many towns and villages in an area from the south of Syria to the north of Egypt. However, pogroms, massacres and forced conversions by other religions reduced these people to only 146 persons by the year 1917 (The Samaritan News A-B, 1986).

Since the 1930's, there has been a change for better conditions in the history of the Samaritan people, with a significant development taking place in all spheres. In addition to the title of the smallest and most ancient people in the world; the Samaritans are now considered the youngest people. Throughout the ages the Samaritans never lost their identity and uniqueness as a nation. They have their own language, which is the ancient Hebrew. They have maintained their own historical traditions for thousands of years.

The Samaritans are guided by four major principles. First, the one God of Israel. Second, one prophet (Moses Ben Omran). Third, one holy script (the Torah and the five books of Moses). Fourth, one holy place (Mt. Gerizim). In addition to the above mentioned principle is the belief in the (Taheb) a prophet like Moses who descended from Joseph and who will appear at the end of time.

The Samaritans only celebrate the festivals of the Torah, the Passover, and the Pesach, but they celebrate them in a different way from the Jews. On the eve of Pesach, the Samaritans usually offer a sacrifice on Mt. Gerizim.

The faith of the Samaritan people means adhering to the four symbols of identification. First, to live forever near Mt. Gerizim. Second, compulsory participation in the sacrifice on the Mt. Gerizim at Pesach. Third, celebration of the Sabbath as written in the Torah. Fourth, adherence to the laws of purity as prescribed in the Torah.

The traditions of the Samaritans contain many practices. For instance, the Samaritans perform circumcision on the eighth day for all their male infants.

The attachment between couples takes three stages: celebrations of the commitment, engagement and marriage (to revoke the first stage does not require divorce), though, divorce is rare. Funerals take place on the top of Mt. Gerizim or in the Samaritan section of the Kiriath Shaul Cemetery in Tel-Aviv. Completing the reading of the Torah by the children would make them be considered as "concludes of the law".

In 1969, the number of the Samaritan community was 414 inhabitants, while in 1986 the number increased to 529. In 1992, the number was only 560 inhabitants. The Samaritans are characterized by low natural increase (18.9 per thousand) compared with their neighbors, while the crude birth rate is 41.5 per thousand, the crude death rate is 22.6 per thousand. Migration doesn't play any role in the Samaritans' growth because the move only between Nablus and Holon. They are characterized by of a high median age (24 years) and the percentage of aged people is 23.7 percent.

The Samaritans marry at an older age compared with their neighbors, the average age of the first marriage is 31.3 years for males and 24.6 years for the females. They have internal marriage and only rarely get married from those who are not from their community; thus,

they have a high percentage of handicapped persons. Most of the Samaritans worked in governmental institutions and trades (Iyad Barghouti, Hussein Yousef, 1985).

The Political System of the Samaritans:

The religious situation of the Samaritans has a great influence on their economic, social and political system. The Samaritans are divided into two groups from the religious point of view. The first is the *Priest family* who is supposed have discarded from the grandson of Haron, -brother of Moses-; thus they have the religious authority of the community, which they take through the inheritance system. The oldest person from the priest family is usually nominated to be the high priest of the whole community. In the Samaritan religion, it is assumed that members of the priest family must not work except in the religious matters, and the rest of the Samaritan families help them economically by a system, whereby part of their income goes to the Priest and his family. But in these days, life has become more complicated and the number of the priest family has become large, compared to the rest of the Samaritans. This older situation was no more practical and the member of the priest family have begun to seek jobs like any other Samaritan.

The second type of the Samaritans is the rest of the families, which do not have any official religious position in the community. The priest family provides the high priest, the prayer leader (Imam), and the teachers, who teach the ancient Samaritan language (Hebrew), while the (Mukhtar) of the community could be any Samaritan (the present elected Mukhtar is a priest family member).

The secretary of the community is elected from all of the community, but they have an agreement that he should not be from the priest family to make for some balance of the power inside the community. It is worth mentioning that, Samaritan women started to participate in the elections in the recent time.

The Political History:

During the Samaritan history, the situation of the Samaritans was not homogeneous. It differed from good sometimes to bad in others, according to the type of rule in the area. For example, they were massacred by the Romans, while during the rule of Salah Eddin in Palestine, They were given a promise of protection for their lives and properties because they helped him against the Crusaders.

The Samaritans described the Ottoman period as the worst period in their modern history. In that period, many Samaritan families changed their religion, many of the famous families in Nablus like Shakhsheer, Yaish, and Maslamany families were Samaritans and became Muslims during that period.

The situation of the Samaritan community became better during the British Mandate of Palestine. At that time, they began to work in the public sector like other Palestinians. During the thirties' one of the Samaritans, Tawfeek Khadir al-Kahen, was nominated as a member of the Nablus Municipality.

Before 1948, like other Palestinians, the Samaritans were divided politically into two factions. The first was led by al-Kahen Sadaqa, who supported the Palestinian leader al-Haj Amin al-Husseini, the leader of the Palestinian revolution against the British and the Zionist movement. While, the second faction was led by al-Kahen Wasef, who supported another Palestinian leader Ragheb al-Nashashibi, who was supported by the British.

After the end of the British Mandate on Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel, on more than three-quarters of the Palestinian land, some of the Samaritans who were living in Jaffa emigrated to the West Bank and lived in Nablus. But by the end of the fifties, around one hundred Samaritans left the West Bank to Israel under the agreement with the Jordanian authorities. They lived in Gaff and the Tel-Aviv area, where they lived before 1948, then they went to Holon with the others in 1965.

The Samaritans in Palestine were supported by the Hashimait family, since the establishment of the Transjordan Emirate in 1922. During the 1936 revolution in Palestine, King Abdullah had warned of the consequences of attacking the Samaritans. After that, Samaritans started to have good relations with King Hussein. For example, after the earthquake in Nablus in the fifties, King Hussein himself compensated the Samaritan families whose homes were destroyed.

Another example; when Jordanian Education Minister, Mr. Shankety, attempted to force Samaritan teachers to work on Saturday (Sabbath), King Hussein rejected the attempt. Also the King ruled for the Samaritan community in a case concerning land on Mt. Gerizim, which they consider as one of their Holy Places.

Many of the Samaritans worked in governmental jobs during the Jordanian rule in the West Bank. The Samaritans who live in Nablus Jordanian Passports and are treated as full Jordanian citizens and they can go to Amman anytime. The Samaritan community had had their complete freedom during the Jordanian rule according to one of the community leaders. Generally speaking, there is common agreement among the Samaritans that during the Jordanian rule, their situation in the West Bank was almost ideal.

The Samaritans Today:

The Samaritans in Israel:

In 1965 all the Samaritans who lived in Jaffa and Tel-Aviv moved to one of the Holon quarters. They got Israeli Passports and became more related to the Israeli society by that time. Some of the Samaritans in Holon married Jewish girls, as the percentage of women in the Samaritan community is low both in Holon and in Nablus.

In the case of marrying a woman from different religion, the woman should live for three months in the "Synagogue," where the Priest would be able to teach her the Samaritan religion and be sure that she is not going to go back to her religion. On the other hand, none of the Samaritans who live in Nablus got married to a woman from outside his community.

Those who live in Holon are Israelis by law, but they are classified as part of the lower social class in society. Around two-thirds of the Samaritan working people in Holon work in small trade and in low jobs, while the rest of them work in banking or in governmental jobs (Iyad Barghouti, Hussein Yousef, 1989).

The Samaritans in Holon publish a magazine concerning Samaritan issues, called (The Samaritans News A-B) also there is an institute for Samaritan studies, which the second president of Israel helped in establishing.

Generally speaking, the Samaritans in Israel served in the Israeli army like other Israelis except for those who are from the Priest family, because their religion prohibited them from serving in the army like religious Jews. Samaritans who serve in the Israeli army serve in places far from the fighting areas.

According to the Samaritans in Nablus, the Samaritans in Holon have become less committed to their traditions and religion because of their closer ties with the Israeli society, which is open and different from the conservative Palestinian society in Nablus. Another factor was the death of the Priest in Holon who was a main factor of the community's unification. The current Priest does have the same characteristics and power.

Those who live in Holon and have Israeli citizenship participate in the Israeli political life, especially in the elections. In general, the Samaritans in Holon are divided between the two main parties Labor and Lickud. In principle, the Samaritans would not vote for Jewish religious parties because of the religious differences between them. The Samaritans and religious Jews accuse each other of being oblique from the real Jewish religion. On the other hand, they would not vote for left parties because of ideological differences, as well as the Tsomet Party whose leader General Etan, believes that the religious people should serve in the Israeli army. Samaritans in Holon have no relations with Arabs, consequently, they do not vote for Arab Parties.

The Samaritans in Nablus after 1967:

The Palestinian neighbors, who shared with the Samaritans the Israeli occupation have a great interest in Samaritan matters in Nablus as a peaceful minority, as well as other group's world wide. For instance the Pope in Rome donated to the community \$186 thousand to build a school and a club. The Samaritans consider this donation as an old loan being repaid by Christians because the Good Samaritan gave Jesus some water to drink. On the other hand, the American Consulate in Jerusalem donated to the Samaritan community some money to build physical training facilities.

The Samaritans in Nablus are in harmony with the Palestinian society as far as the political situation and political orientation are concerned, at the same time in their attitudes towards Israeli occupying forces. In spite of the fact that many of them left Nablus early before the occupation to live in Israel, we found that one of their leaders, al-Kahen Wasef al-Samery, declared in 1960 that Israel is an enemy for them as its an enemy for the Arabs, because of which it is not logical that Israel will help the Samaritans (al-Ussbu' al-Arabi, 1960).

Some Samaritans mention that after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank the Israelis offered them the opportunity of moving to Holon and taking Israeli citizenship. The offer was refused on the ground of religious principles; since they have to live near their Holly Religious Places on Mt. Gerizim in Nablus. Since the Israelis are very protective of the Jewish nature of the State of Israel, which is reflected in their laws and practices, the offer as it stands meant that they considered the Samaritans as Jews, while on the other hand, the Samaritans themselves do not think so.

Around two thirds of the working power of the Samaritan community work in governmental jobs, and around 15 percent work in trade. The rest of them work in construction, nursing, etc. (Iyad Barghouti, Hussein Yousef, 1985). The Samaritans in Nablus benefited from their knowledge of the Hebrew language and their relation with the Samaritans in Holon to become dealers for many Israeli companies in the West Bank. Thus their economic status became better, compared to their Palestinian neighbors.

The Israeli officials were interested in visiting and keeping good relations with the Samaritan community in Nablus. The Israeli President H. Hertsug visited the community and, according to the Samaritan Magazine A-B published in Holon, he was welcomed warmly by the Samaritans both in Nablus and Holon as a President "who visits his people". When they were asked, whether considered Mr. Hertsug, the President of Israel, as their President in Nablus, the Samaritans in Nablus, according to one of them, said, "the editors of the Samaritan News A-B of Holon have embarrassed us many times".

The Samaritans in Nablus always try to show the differences between them and the Jews more than those who live in Holon. As a minority, the Samaritans complained that the military authorities do not treat them as one, on the contrary they felt that they were treated like other Palestinians. The bottom line is that the Samaritans in Nablus do not comment on the legal aspect of the occupation existence but on the daily treatment they get from the occupying authorities.

The Samaritans in Nablus have participated in the elections which took place in Nablus. During the election of the Chamber of Commerce in Nablus in 1992, all the Samaritan merchants voted for the National bloc and refused to vote for the Islamic bloc because of religious differences.

On the other hand, Samaritan students at An-Najah National University in Nablus, voted for Fateh supporters during the Student Union elections and none of them voted for the Islamists or the left parties.

The Samaritans during the Palestinian Intifada:

We have previously said that the Samaritans in Holon became more identical to the Israeli society, while those in Nablus kept their Palestinian identity and still held the Jordanian Passport. For reasons concerned with getting Israeli social security benefits, around twenty persons from those in Nablus accepted the Israeli Passport after they reached the age of 65. It is true that the Samaritans are closer to the

Israelis more than other Palestinians because of the language and other cultural similarities. Thus, many of them who had worked in governmental jobs in the Occupied Territories faced some difficulties during the Palestinian Intifada.

At the beginning of the Intifada, the Samaritans lived in their quarter inside the city of Nablus, but when many Palestinians were killed and wounded by the Israeli soldiers and after the long period of the curfews and sieges, many Samaritans moved to live at the top of Mt. Gerizim where most of the Samaritan families have houses, these houses are used during the festival times or in hot summers only.

As usual, the Samaritans kept on their political neutrality during the Intifada. Thus, none of them was killed by the Israeli soldiers or by the Palestinians unlike what happened to some collaborators with the Israeli authorities.

When the Unified Leadership of the Intifada asked for the resignations of those who worked in the Israeli administration, some Samaritans agreed, while the others, who refused were warned like other Palestinians that their houses would be burned. In another incident a Samaritan shop was burned because the owner was selling alcohol, this was done by Muslim fundamentalists and not due to national issues because this case happened to many Palestinian merchants both Muslims and Christians.

Samaritans refuse to give their opinion of the Israeli occupation because they believe it is a political matter and they do not want to be involved in politics, in this respect they would evaluate their relation with the authorities according to the personality and their relation with the military commander of the day. The Samaritans mention that there are differences in the treatment, according to the origin of the commander; those commanders from western origin treated them as a minority with special care, while those from oriental origin deny the Samaritans this right and treat them like the other Palestinians.

The Palestinian National Authority gave the Samaritan Community a seat in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Three of the Samaritans were nominated themselves for the election, one of them was among Fatch candidates, the others were independents. Al-Kahen Salloum one the independent candidates won in the elections.

Conclusion:

Many factors had contributed to the fact that the Samaritans had kept their political neutrality in the conflict between the Palestinian and the Israelis.

One of the most important factors was that in their life, there was a contradiction between their religious beliefs, which make them closer to the Israelis on the one hand, and the fact that they lived among the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation in a city which lost many of its residents due to the Israelis, on the other. Another factor was the one concerning their number, which did not exceed 600 and made them not only weak to take sides but also lost the ability to do so.

In spite of the fact that the Samaritan communities of both Nablus and Holon consider themselves as one, yet, when it comes to politics and when they have to give a clear opinion, the community of Nablus usually takes sides with the Palestinians while the other community in Holon sided with the Israelis.

Finally, Samaritans who live in Holon are closer to the Israeli society and well integrated, while those who live in Nablus are closer to the Palestinian society which suffers the consequences of the occupation.

Foot Notes:

1. **The Samaritan News** A-B. 15/8/1986, p. 3.
2. Iyad Barghouti and Hussein A. Yousef, Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Samaritans in Nablus. **al-Biader Studies Center**, Jerusalem, 1985.
3. Iyad Barghouti and Hussein A. Yousef, "Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Samaritans in Holon", **Sho'un Academy**. No. 3 & 4, 1989, pp. 19-33.
4. al-Ushbu' al-Arabi. No. 46, 1st. year, April. 1960.
5. Iyad Barghouti and Hussein A. **Yousef**, 1985, opcit.