



THE SABAN CENTER
for MIDDLE EAST POLICY
at BROOKINGS

ANALYSIS PAPER

Number 32, April 2014

ISLAMIC POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN ISRAEL

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BROOKINGS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), the Israel Institute, and the Ivan Allen College at Georgia Institute of Technology for providing financial support for this research and the future book manuscript on this topic. I would also like to thank Tamara Cofman Wittes for her interest in this subject, Dan Byman for his feedback and interest, and the anonymous reviewers who provided helpful comments. I would like to thank Shahin Sarsour for his time and introductions, Jesse Turcotte for his editorial assistance and map-making skills, and Stephanie Dahle for shepherding this manuscript through the publication process.

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ISLAMIC POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN ISRAEL

Lawrence Rubin

Following the overthrow of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi in July 2013, Islamists demonstrated against the military's take-over and alleged U.S. support for the coup from an unexpected location, Israel. These protesters shouted provocative chants similar to those found in Egypt, such as "Sisi betrayed his people" and "America is a terrorist state."¹ Two months after the overthrow of Morsi, the hard-line northern branch of the Islamic movement dedicated its annual conference, which was attended by an estimated 30,000 Arab citizens of Israel, to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.²

Meanwhile, both before and after Morsi's overthrow, the Islamic movement has played a leading role in organizing protests against one of the most controversial government policies related to the Arab minority: the Praver-Begin Plan (Praver Plan from here). This plan, which calls for the relocation of 30,000-40,000 Bedouin citizens of Israel from unrecognized settlements in the Negev while

providing compensation and economic development to resolve longstanding disputes over landownership,³ has led to growing country-wide strikes and protests that have become violent at times. Many activists and NGOs claim that the implementation of this plan would be another "Nakba" (catastrophe).⁴

And on December 26th, less than a month after the national "Day of Rage" protests that turned violent in some locations, the deputy head of the Islamic movement in Israel and chairman of the United Arab List party, Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, delivered a passionate speech calling for the release of Jonathan Pollard, the American convicted of spying for Israel.⁵

These events highlight just a few of the complexities, challenges, and opportunities of the Islamic movement in Israel. Islamists in Israel have welcomed the rise of Islamists parties in Arab countries and decried their downfall, or in the case of Egypt,

¹ Hassan Shaalan, "Arab-Israelis: 'We'll give our lives for Morsi,'" *Ynetnews*, July 13, 2013, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4404413,00.html>>; Hassan Shaalan, "Hundreds rally in Sakhnin, Kafr Kanna in support of Morsi," *Ynetnews*, July 8, 2013, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4401565,00.html>>; Zuhair Khouri, Kafr Kana: Mudharat Qutriyya: Da'aman lilra'is al-ma'azul Mursi (Kafr Kana: national demonstration in support of the deposed President Morsi)," *Panet*, July 13, 2013, <<http://www.panet.co.il/online/articles/71/73/S-698914.71.73.html>>. For a video of highlights of the rally led by the Northern Branch, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPDBd_VhB00 (in Arabic);

² Hassan Shaalan, "Umm al-Fahm: 30,000 people at Islamic Movement annual rally," *Ynetnews*, September 20, 2013, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4431666,00.html>>.

³ Some activists claim the number is up to 70,000, but it is unclear where the disparity lies.

⁴ Youssef Munayyer, "Why the Praver Plan is just a continuation of the Nakba," *Open Zion*, July 17, 2013, <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/07/17/why-the-praver-plan-is-just-a-continuation-of-the-nakba.html>>.

⁵ MK Ibrahim Sarsour, Speech in the Israeli Knesset, December 26, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUR_OBBf6cI&feature=youtu.be> (in Hebrew). Other Arab members of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) also followed suit, Jonathan Lis, "Arab MK calls for release of Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard," *Haaretz*, December 26, 2013, <[intro-IM.docxhttp://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/premium-1.565475](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/premium-1.565475)>.

their overthrow. In mobilizing against the Praver Plan, Israeli Islamists have employed nationalist (Palestinian) terminology, couched in the language of human rights that should be guaranteed by a democracy. And by calling for Jonathan Pollard's release, a mobilizing symbol for many right wing Zionists in Israel, the Islamic movement has called for the release of Arab citizens held in Israeli jails in an effort to claim leadership on a social issue of great importance to Arab citizens of Israel, the fate of security prisoners. In sum, these events capture many of the complexities of the Islamic movement in Israel, as well as its relationship with its members' Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian identities as Israeli citizens in a Jewish state.

This paper will examine the curious case of the Islamic movement in Israel, from its origins in the early 1970s, to its fragmentation in the mid-1990s, to its present state. It will provide an overview of this Islamic movement as a window into an under-examined subject at the intersection of Israeli-Arab and Islamist politics. While this subject may not seem as relevant to the immediate peace and security of the Middle East in the same manner as the Iranian nuclear issue or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is important for what it can say about the present, past, and future of the region. Indeed, the rapidly changing regional fortunes of Islamists make this subject important for understanding some of the potential outcomes of political processes in the Arab world. Moreover, the question of whether the movement's overall influence will increase, whether it will fragment further or unify, will have a direct effect on how the Jewish majority society views Israel's Arab citizens, as well as how the region views the Jewish state with an Islamist trend among its Arab minority population.

This paper will proceed as follows: the first section will provide an overview of, and reasons for, the evolution of the Islamic movement by surveying its major inflection points, including its development, its split into hard-line and moderate factions, and its attempts at reconciliation. The second section will situate this movement within the domestic and regional environment in order to highlight both the similarities and differences between the Israeli Islamic movement and others in the region. The third section will discuss the future trajectories of the movement, including the challenges and opportunities presented by the Praver Plan and other developments. Lastly, the paper will conclude by highlighting why this movement is important for Arab-Jewish relations, the peace process, and regional peace and stability.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL

The Islamic movement in Israel is one of three socio-political trends among Arab citizens of Israel.⁶ The movement draws its support from the Arab population of Israel that has grown to over 20 percent of the population of the state (1.6 million).⁷ Over 80 percent of this Arab population is Sunni Muslim, concentrated mainly in the Galilee, the "Triangle" (concentration of Arab towns along the Green line), and the Negev in the south (see figures 1 and 2).⁸

The movement has an important presence in local politics, particularly among the Bedouin communities in the Negev, and at the national level. Islamic movement mayors were elected in Hura (Negev) and Kafr Qassem (Triangle) in 2013, including representation on the municipal councils of five

⁶ The other two are Palestinian Nationalism and Communism. For a good overview, see International Crisis Group, *Back to Basics: Israel's Arab Minority and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Middle East Report No.119, 14 March, 2012.

⁷ Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2010, "Society," 10, <http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications/isr_in_n10e.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid.

FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



different localities. There are three representatives of the Islamic movement currently serving in the Knesset. These members make up a majority of the seats in the United Arab List, one of the two largest Arab parties in the Knesset.⁹ This political trend does not represent a majority of the Arab population but it does have significant weight and influence.

The Islamic movement began in the early 1970s as a social-religious movement that aimed to encourage the “Palestinians of 1948,” those Arabs that remained in Israel after Israel’s War for Independence, to return to Islam. The movement’s ideological origins can be traced back to Hassan al-Banna, a primary schoolteacher, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Ismailia, Egypt. Similar to Muslim Brotherhood movements in other countries, the Islamic movement in Israel shares a commitment to reform both the individual and society in accordance with Islamic values.¹⁰ Although it does not mention the affiliation officially, the Islamic movement in Israel can be considered an offshoot of the Brotherhood. It has adopted the goal of the Muslim Brotherhood to build an Islamic society based on Shari’a law, whereby the constitution is the Quran.¹¹ The Islamic movement in Israel’s model of action is the Muslim Brotherhood’s bottom-up reform, and their ideologues are Hassan al-Hudaybi and Sayyid Qutb, among others.¹² In

addition, the movement aims to protect Muslim holy places, strengthen the Palestinian and Muslim identity of the Arab citizens of Israel, and protect their rights as citizens of the country.

Since 1996, the movement has been divided into two branches which both call themselves the Islamic movement.¹³ The movement split into two factions in the mid-1990s over the issue of electoral participation in national elections. The hard-liners, who are now called the Northern Branch, broke away because they opposed running candidates in national elections. Shaykh Ra’id Saleh, from Umm al-Fahm, leads the northern branch, The southern branch, the mainstream faction, is led today by Shaykh Hamad Abu Daabes.

The Early Years: Origins, Opportunities, and Development

The recent origins of the Islamic movement can be traced to Abdullah Nimr Darwish’s return to Israel in 1971. This former Communist party youth activist left his political activism for religion and went to study in a seminary in Nablus in 1968. Three years later he returned to his village of Kafr Qassem located in the Triangle to spread the message of Islam *da’wa* (religious outreach) through education within the Green line (Israel’s June 4, 1967, borders).

⁹ Raam-Ta’al has four Knesset members, Balad has three members, and Hadash, the Communist party, considered by many as an Arab party, has four Knesset members. It is difficult to say what this means in terms of support. Electoral support at the national level is unrepresentative because many Arabs may not vote for ideological reasons (i.e. supporters of the northern branch), or they may see no benefit. But these potential voters might still attend rallies, vote in local elections, and participate in other organizations or activities. At the local level, it is also difficult to separate tribal and clan loyalties from party identification. Nonetheless, I have heard officials and analysts’ estimates of support for the Islamic movement range from 10 to 30 percent of the Arab population, although they do not define what support means either.

¹⁰ For the relationship between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and other movements, see chapter 4 in Nathan J. Brown, *When Victory is not an Option: Islamist movements in Arab Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 52-82.

¹¹ Elie Rekhess, “Islamization of Arab identity in Israel: the Islamic movement in Israel: The Islamic movement, 1972-1996,” in *Muslim minorities in Non-Muslim majority countries*, eds. Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky (Tel Aviv: Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish Arab Cooperation, 2013), 56.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ A note about the labeling of the branches: The differences are not geographic because both branches exist all over the state. The labels were attached to these branches because the northern, conservative faction’s leadership comes from Umm al-Fahm, which is further north than Kafr Qassem, the home of the leadership of the southern faction. Supporters of both branches are found throughout the country. The major distinction, which manifests itself in political participation, is how each branch relates to the Israeli state and its institutions, which is why moderate versus hardline distinction is more appropriate. An alternative approach is used by Dr. Muhanad Mustafa, is the extra-parliamentary vs. parliamentary branch. Nonetheless, I shall refer to them as the northern branch and southern branch because these terms are in common usage. See Mohanad Mustafa, “Political participation of the Islamic movement in Israel,” in *Muslim minorities in Non-Muslim majority countries*, eds. Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky, (Tel Aviv: Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish Arab Cooperation, 2013), 95-114.

Religion was not a major source of social and political identity among Arab citizens of Israel when Darwish set out on his mission; the population was more interested in socio-economic concerns,¹⁴ Islamic institutions, such as the Supreme Muslim Council, were dissolved when the British Mandate ended in 1948, and the newly created state of Israel, for a variety of reasons, did not invest in religious institutions.¹⁵ As a result, the Muslim intelligentsia and clerical leadership declined in number, strength, and credibility.¹⁶ Lastly, the territorial changes that brought the Jewish state into existence meant that its Arab (Muslim) population was largely cut off from the Arab-Islamic world from 1948 to 1967. These events and policies meant that there were also few religious resources for those who may have sought them.

The 1967 war changed this situation. Egypt's humiliating in six days was a major defeat for pan-Arabism and served as a catalyst for the Islamic resurgence that affected the region as a whole. While the resurgence of religion in Israel was certainly part of the broader regional trend triggered by the Six Day War, the local territorial changes had a direct and immediate impact on Arab citizens of Israel. Israel's conquest of the West Bank and Gaza meant that Arab citizens now had physical access to holy sites, such as the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque. Arab citizens were also able to meet their kin from whom they had been separated since the 1948 war. This meant they met relatives who may have had a more heightened sense of national, Palestinian identity or religious, Islamic identity. Moreover, access to these populations also meant greater access to religious resources, such as clerics and seminaries. From the standpoint of the movement,

Israel's conquest of the West Bank was a "victory," quipped a prominent leader in the movement.¹⁷

This point in time is precisely where the personal story of the founder of the Islamic movement in Israel, Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish, comes in. Shaykh Darwish was born in 1948 in the town of Kafr Qassem, which is located thirty minutes from Tel Aviv and minutes from the Green Line. As a result of Israel's conquest of the West Bank, Darwish was able to travel to study at a seminary in Nablus. When he returned from his studies, he began to teach Islam at a local school in Kafr Qassem. He then branched out to teach classes and give lectures on Islam throughout the triangle, often walking by foot from village to village.¹⁸ In 1976, Darwish published his first pamphlet explaining his message of why it is Muslim duty to return to Islam.¹⁹

Darwish tried to fill an ideological and spiritual vacuum through a return to Islam. The charismatic Darwish attracted many followers, a number of whom also possessed tremendous charisma. His first generation of students, including Ra'id Saleh, Kamal al-Khatib, Hashim Abd al-Rahman, Kamal Rayan, and Ibrahim Sarsour, among others, became the nucleus of the movement's leadership for the next three decades. This core group was instrumental in attracting supporters through religious education and proselytizing activities within a population that had had little exposure to formal religion.

The characteristics of this generation's collective backgrounds reveal important information about the population from which it sought to mobilize and draw support. Born after the establishment of the state of Israel, they were drawn to the movement in

¹⁴ The Arab population was under military rule from 1948-1966. Elie Rekhess labels this period "accommodation" in which the leadership largely sought integration and cared primarily about socio-economic and social welfare issues, see Elie Rekhess, "The Arabs of Israel After Oslo: The Localization of a National Conflict" *Israel Studies* 7:3 (Fall 2002), 1-44.

¹⁵ Rubin argues that Israeli policy toward Muslim communal affairs was a product of bureaucratic politics and power struggles, not as a result of a grand vision. See Alisa Peled Rubin, *Debating Islam in a Jewish State* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 2.

¹⁶ Rubin, *Debating Islam in a Jewish State*, see chapter 7 for the implications of this void in religious leadership.

¹⁷ Author interview with senior figure in the Islamic movement, November 8, 2012 (location withheld).

¹⁸ Author interview with Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish, Kafr Qassem, Israel, June 11, 2013.

¹⁹ Thomas Mayer, *Hitorerut ha-muslimim b'israel* (Islamic awakening in Israel) (Givat Haviva, Israel: 1988), 36.

their youth when they met and heard Shaykh Darwish. Many of them did not necessarily come from religious backgrounds, but may have had some exposure to religious culture through occasional mosque attendance. Another important characteristic is that these individuals received their secular studies in higher education from Israeli universities and were thus well acquainted with Israeli culture. For example, Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, the current head of United Arab List and former head of the Islamist movement, received his bachelor's degree in English from Bar Ilan University, named for a prominent religious Zionist figure.

Toward the end of the 1970s, some members of the movement took a radical turn. Influenced by the Iranian revolution as well as the writings of extremist Sunni ideologues, some members formed a clandestine terrorist organization called "Usrat al-Jihad" (family of Jihad).²⁰ This terrorist organization aimed to turn Israel into a Muslim state by toppling the dominant Jewish political order.²¹ The clandestine organization set fire to forests and fields, tried to burn a Jewish owned textile factory in Umm al-Fahm, and killed a suspected collaborator.²² Members and those associated with this organization, including the spiritual leader, Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish, were quickly arrested and imprisoned, serving a range of sentences. Shaykh Mukh received the longest sentence, fifteen years, for being the primary organizer.

After spending a few years in jail while the movement's members both inside and outside prison tried to figure out their next moves, Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish was released in 1983. During his time in prison, he came to the realization that he

needed to "work in the state of Israel by Islamic values without breaking the law."²³ Darwish convinced his 60-100 followers, almost all under the age of 25, to abandon their violent tactics and public calls for the creation of an Islamic state. He was elected leader of the movement in 1983 just before his release from prison. Over the years, Darwish would go on to write a series of works expounding upon his position to spread Islamic values among Muslim citizens within the confines of Israeli law. The idea that continued to evolve over time was that the movement would respect the laws of the state. These works, combined with essays in newspapers, collectively form the closest thing to a platform for the movement.

Shaykh Darwish's imprisonment was a key turning point for the movement. Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, one of Darwish's first disciples and the chairman of the United Arab List, claims that the movement was "born again" after the arrest and release of 'Usrat al-Jihad members.²⁴ In addition, Sarsour believes that this experience was necessary because, "the movement learned to work within the confines of the Israeli system and law." The leadership both inside and outside the prison was in "100 percent agreement" that there was a need for a new program and that there was no justification for political violence and military jihad.²⁵ This experience refocused the movement's objectives to push for Israeli-Palestinian peace and to seek equality for the Arab citizens of Israel. The objective of "Islamization from above" was replaced with "Islamization from below."²⁶

The movement's focus on projects aiming to improve the community underscored the self-help attitude of the movement and was a key to its rapid

²⁰ Mayer, *Hitorerut ha-muslimim*, 42-52.

²¹ Mohammed Amara, "The Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism in Israel," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8, no. 2 (1996), 156.

²² Mayer, *Hitorerut ha-muslimim*, 46-47; Nachman Tal, "The Islamic Movement in Israel," *Strategic Assessment* 2, no. 4 (February 2000).

²³ Amos Gilboa, "Ha-moatzot etmol, ha-knesset mahar (The municipal councils yesterday, the Knesset tomorrow)," *Sofshavua*, April 6, 1990, 28.

²⁴ Author interview with MK Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, Kafr Qassem, November 6, 2012.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mohammed Amara, "The Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism in Israel," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 8, no. 2 (1996), 156-157.

expansion. Its growth came from the growth of many types of institutions.²⁷ The religious, medical, educational, and social services were centered around the mosque, establishing a hub for organizational development through networks.²⁸ One of the crowning achievements of the Islamic movement that brought it widespread publicity was the “work camps.” These volunteer community improvement projects, which usually took place over a short period of time, built mosques, schools, etc. with resources drawn from the surrounding community organized by the Islamic movement.²⁹ For those who volunteered to build these public works, the experience both utilized and solidified the growing networks connected to the Islamic movement. For outside observers, these work camps became a symbol of pride and demonstrated what could be done with the proper mindset, motivation, and organization. The accomplishment of the work camps communicated the movement’s commitment to doing something for the community rather than simply complaining about it.³⁰

The Islamic movement became increasingly popular throughout the 1980s by improving local conditions through an Islamic frame of reference. This growing popularity and awareness of the accomplishments of the movement translated to electoral successes at the municipal level. Shaykh Darwish saw this as the next phase of the movement as a natural and

inevitable progression.³¹ Thus, Shaykh Kamal Rayan of Kafr Bara, a village next to Darwish’s, was the first to run and win an office in 1983.

Islamic movement candidates entered local politics in increasing numbers, slowly chipping away at the Communist party’s political hegemony of the Arab sector, until the major breakthrough in the municipal elections of 1989. The Islamic list won representation in every place it contested elections, including five mayoralities and 45 seats on eleven municipal and local councils (compared to six seats on four councils in 1983).³² These elections were a watershed for the Islamic movement and Arab politics in Israel.³³ Shaykh Ra’id Saleh became mayor of Umm al-Fahm, the second largest Arab city, and served in this role until 2001. This city became an important point of political activism in the Triangle, where it hosts the Center for Contemporary Studies and a seminary for Islamic studies. It is also the location of the Islamic Movements’ al-Aqsa festival, which often attracts up to 70,000 people.³⁴

Success and fragmentation

These successes had unintended consequences. As the movement continued to grow and expand into other areas, the number of domains over which hard-liners and moderates disagreed increased. The internal disagreements grew over time and reflected

²⁷ Mayer, *Hitorerut ha-muslimim*, 56.

²⁸ See Issam Aburaiya, “The 1996 split of the Islamic movement in Israel,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 3 (Spring 2004), 443. For how vast networks of Islamic institutions furnished an infrastructure for mobilization in Egypt, see Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), specifically Chapter 5.

²⁹ See David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire: conversations with Palestinians in Israel*, (New York: Picador, 1993), 242-249; Tilde Rosmer, “Resisting ‘Israelization’: The Islamic Movement in Israel and the Realization of Islamization, Palestinization and Arabization,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* (Summer 2012), 325-258.

³⁰ Amara “The Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism in Israel,” 162.

³¹ Author interview with Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish, Kafr Qassem, Israel, June 11, 2013.

³² Reuven Paz, “The Islamic Movement in Israel and the municipal elections of 1989,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 53 (Winter 1990), 4. The cities were significant: Umm al-Fahm, the second largest Arab city, Jaljulia, Kafr Qassem, and Kafr Bara in the (small) Triangle, and Rahat, the largest Bedouin town, located in the Negev.

³³ Interestingly, for this religious-based movement, political pragmatism in two main areas had a lot to do with why the list was so successful. First, the Islamic movement cooperated with the *hamula*, or clan, lists. Second, the Islamic movement focused on local issues for these local elections, not national issues, because the local issues of education, medical services and sewage were what mattered. Issam Aburaiya, “The 1996 split of the Islamic movement in Israel,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 3 (Spring 2004), 444.

³⁴ Lawrence Louer, *To be an Arab in Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 73.

the differences in orientation of factions within the movement. The Intifada and the birth of Hamas, in particular, were catalysts. During the Intifada, the humanitarian aid that Israeli Islamic movement organization sent to the West Bank and Gaza strengthened relationships at organizational level and between the populations.

Hamas' rise complicated this burgeoning relationship and brought out differences within the movement over its orientation. On the one hand, Hamas seemed like a natural ally to the Islamic movement, given the shared ideological values of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Hamas' violent tactics and its declared aim to destroy the state of Israel limited diplomatic and political support and put Hamas at odds with the Islamic movement in Israel's trajectory.

When Shaykh Darwish officially and publically differentiated his views from that of Hamas³⁵ in 1988, not everyone within the movement agreed. Hard-liners over time began to more closely identify with Hamas.³⁶ These differences within the movement grew wider and became more public during the early 1990s as a result of the peace process and the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The Islamic Movement supported the PLO-led process while Hamas rejected it, and Shaykh Saleh's dissatisfaction and closer identification with Hamas became more public with the implementation of the Oslo Accords. As a result, Shaykh Darwish visited Gaza in 1994 after it was handed to the Palestinian Authority but Shaykh Ra'id and Shaykh Kamal Khatib refused.³⁷

Nonetheless, the major area of disagreement over which the factions eventually split was the question

of whether to run candidates for national elections. The successes of 1989 intensified these discussions and raised the expectations of what could be accomplished if candidates ran in national elections. Could Arab citizen's interests and grievances be better served by parliamentary representation? Assuming the movement could achieve gains, what principles might the movement have to sacrifice?

There were significant ideological barriers and considerable skepticism. Political participation in municipal elections was accepted as a means to gain power at the local level at the expense of the dominant political forces, tribal/clan politics and the Communist party.³⁸ The justification that permitted participation was that this type of political activity did not recognize the national Israeli government and allowed Islamic movement leaders an opportunity to do a better job of providing goods and services to Arab citizens of Israel. The movement did not instruct its supporters not to vote in national elections but it had not run its own candidates for Knesset election.

Serious and intense discussions took place around the 1988 and 1992 elections as well as in 1995, but ultimately no action was taken to change the status quo.³⁹ Then in 1996, the Islamic Movement's *shura* voted in favor of allowing candidates to run for parliament by a narrow margin (47-45). The next day, the hard-line faction, led by Shaykh Ra'id Saleh, succeeded and claimed that it was the real Islamic Movement. This extra-parliamentary faction of the Islamic movement became commonly known as the northern branch, while the branch that supported Knesset participation became known as the Southern Branch.

³⁵ Louer, *To be an Arab in Israel*, 77.

³⁶ Elie Rekhess, *Islamism across the Green line: Relations Among Islamists Movements in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Policy Focus* 33 (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997), 5-8.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Amara, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Israel," 163.

³⁹ Elie Rekhess, "The Islamic Movement in Israel: Internal Debate over Knesset Representation," *Data and Analysis* 2 (April 1996), 3, <http://www.dayan.org/kapjac/files/info2.pdf>.

Each faction justified its political position on religious-ideological grounds. The southern branch's leader, Shaykh Darwish, argued that the Islamic Movement must adapt to local circumstances to serve the interests of the local community. In this case, Palestinian citizens of Israel would be best served through national representation. These interests again included enhancing their Muslim identity, improving the protection of holy sites, and fighting for equal rights for Arab citizens of Israel. Participation was permitted as long as the Muslim minority's right to worship was protected. Meanwhile, the Northern branch, which shared the same goals, did not believe Islam sanctioned participating in a democracy, in which the majority could decide moral-legal issues, and especially ones that were hostile to Muslims.⁴⁰ Shaykh Ra'id Saleh argued that parliamentary representation was irreconcilable with Islamic concepts because no secular legislative system (especially a Jewish Zionist one) could replace the source of divine legislation. In sum, the hard-liners' ideological objection rested on their inability to reconcile the traditional Islamic outlook with the Jewish-Zionist nature of Israel as well as its Western, democratic institutions.⁴¹ It preferred, instead, to focus on the municipal level and work as independently as possible from the state.

The 1996 split sparked the development of separate institutions. These parallel organizations often only differed by one or two words in title even though their purpose was the same.⁴² Some of them included a soccer league, youth organizations, and newspapers.⁴³ The creation of these parallel institutions meant that the northern branch could more easily pursue its political agenda through its own fundraising efforts.

The most important parallel organization Shaykh Ra'id Saleh established was the al-Aqsa Foundation (*mu'assat al-Aqsa*) to compete with the similarly named al-Aqsa Association (*jami'at al-Aqsa*).⁴⁴ Their missions are similar: protection of Muslim holy places, or land that was once a sacred ground, including mosques and cemeteries, within the 1967 borders. These organizations were named after al-Aqsa because preserving the al-Aqsa mosque located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is a primary goal. The goal of the protection of holy places is not limited to al-Aqsa; it includes holy places, such as cemeteries, abandoned mosques, etc. throughout the country.

This institution and the symbol it represents, protecting al-Aqsa, has become Shaykh Ra'id Saleh's trademark. He has employed it as a central frame to mobilize support at home and abroad through the evocative slogan "al-Aqsa fi Khatar," or "the al-Aqsa mosque is in danger."⁴⁵ These frames warn that this Muslim holy site, and Jerusalem in general, is being Judaized and its Islamic past is being erased. In line with this stated aim, the financial resources he has attracted has helped to fund internal mobilization efforts to sponsor tens of thousands of Arab Muslims to visit the Muslim Holy sites in Jerusalem en mass.

Shaykh Ra'id Saleh's use of al-Aqsa as a mobilizing frame has increased since the outbreak of the second intifada. His large public rallies, such as the al-Aqsa festival, which attracts tens of thousands of supporters to locations such as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, have over taken Land Day commemorations that communist and nationalist leaders had used to mobilize supporters for the last

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ For a good overview of these positions, see Elie Rekhess, "Islamic Movement in Israel: International Debate over Knesset Representation," 2.

⁴² Louer, *To be an Arab in Israel*, 74.

⁴³ The Northern branch's newspaper *Sawt al-Haqq wal Hurriyya* (the voice of right and freedom) while the Southern branch's newspaper is *al-Mithaq* (the pact).

⁴⁴ The full name for the Southern Branch's foundation is: *Jami'yyat al-Qasa li-Ri'ayat al-Awqaf wal-Muqaddasat al-Islamiyyah* (al-Aqsa Association for the Custody of the Awqaf and the Islamic Holy Sites), and the Northern Branch's is *Mu'asat al-Aqsa l'awqaf wal-turath* (al-Aqsa foundation for the Awqaf and heritage), <<http://www.iaqsa.com/>>.

⁴⁵ One example is monetary awards he receives, such as the King Faisal International Prize in the category of Service to Islam <<http://www.kff.com/en01/kfip/1434H2013G/KFIPWinners1ST1434H2013G.htm>>.

30 years.⁴⁶ Saleh has said that the events related to al-Aqsa have two principal goals: first, to increase Islamic awareness about al-Aqsa Mosque and its tragic circumstances (namely, alleged Jewish designs on it); and second, to encourage Muslims from around the world to travel to Jerusalem and to pray in the mosque.

These activities should also be seen as part of a competition between branches for the political affinities of Arab citizens of Israel. The provocative rhetoric and activities, which have led to multiple arrests and the imprisonment of Shaykh Saleh, have attracted global attention. He has been put on an international map and in the local media's spotlight, much to the dismay of the leaders of the Southern Branch, who are constrained by their working relationship with Israeli institutions. In fact, since the summer of 2013, the northern branch increased its activities on the Temple Mount to combat some of the increased activity from Jewish hardliners. In a sense, Jewish radicals and Muslim radicals have forged an "unholy alliance."⁴⁷

OBSTACLES TO RECONCILIATION

The competition between the two branches has not precluded calls for reconciliation and re-unification of the branches. Islamic movement members have long asked why the Islamic movement is divided over politics. Pressure from below has pushed the leadership of the branches to come together.

The most serious attempt at reconciliation took place on board the Mavi Marmara in 2010, the Turkish sponsored humanitarian ship that tried to break the Israeli and Egyptian blockade of Gaza. Shaykhs Abu Daabbes and Ra'id Saleh met and

talked while on board this ship and many hoped that this contact would be the beginning of reconciliation between the branches. But even as the Arab uprisings increased this bottom-up pressure for reconciliation, attempts to reunite the two branches have come up short.

There are a number of reasons why the prospects for reconciliation in the near future are slim. First, the personality differences between the leadership are too difficult to bridge. It is difficult to imagine the charismatic and dominating personality of Shaykh Ra'id Saleh, who has led the northern branch since 1996, stepping down from power and/or submitting to the institutionalized leadership rotation mandated by the southern branch's charter. Second, given that the movement has been split longer than it has been unified, the institutions associated with these branches may stand to lose not only their autonomy, but also their financial resources. There is recent talk of some type of coalition between the branches, but not much optimism surrounds this proposal.⁴⁸

THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: ISLAMISTS IN A JEWISH STATE?

The Islamic movement in Israel shares many features with other Islamic movements in the region, including its ideology, organizational structures, and operational mechanisms. Modeled after the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, many of the slogans, the ideologues, and the avenues of participation are the same. However, the political, social, religious, and linguistic context within which the Islamic Movement in Israel operates distinguishes it from Islamic movements in the region. These

⁴⁶ Louer, *To be an Arab in Israel*, 77. Land Day is the annual commemoration of a protest by Arab citizens against land expropriation in 1976 in which six people were killed. It is one of the most important events in the history of Arab citizens of Israel. For more on Land Day, see Khalil Nakhleh, "Yawm al-Ard (Land Day)" in *The Palestinians in Israel* eds. Naim Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, (Haifa: Mada al-Carmel, 2011), 84-88.

⁴⁷ Avi Issacharoff, "Tension at Temple Mount is escalating week by week," *Times of Israel*, December 6, 2013, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/tension-at-temple-mountain-is-escalating-week-by-week/>>.

⁴⁸ Author interviews with Islamic movement members throughout the country, October 2013.

differences make the differences between the Islamic movement in Israel and Islamic movements in Arab countries far greater than differences between Islamic movements in Arab countries.

That an Islamist movement exists at all in a “Jewish state” is enough of a distinction. Islamist ideology and rhetoric often contain strong anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes including conspiracy theories accusing Jews and Israelis of blood libel, or plots against the Arab-Islamic world. In addition to the ideological aspect that views Israel as an enemy, the linguistic dimension reflects unique societal differences related to language. Islamist leaders, and the Arab population in general, speak Arabic with Hebrew words and phrases. The fact that citizens speak an official language of the state (Hebrew and Arabic) is not surprising or striking unless it is placed into a broader context. For participants and observers of Islamic movements in Arab countries, the sight and sound of Islamists speaking flawless Hebrew may give them pause.

The type of regime in which the Islamic movement in Israel operates sets it apart from other movements as well. Prior to the Arab uprisings of 2011, Islamic movements in the Arab world operated outside of official politics or in the shadows. Many Arab authoritarian regimes’ used “selective repression” against their Islamic movements. In the political realm, some states, such as Jordan, allowed Islamists to form a political party (Islamic Action Front) in the 1990s but has constrained its activities. Other states, such as Egypt under President Mubarak, did not permit religious parties. As a response, those Muslim Brotherhood candidates who did run for parliament often ran as independents.

The Islamic movement in Israel, however, has been allowed to run as a party. While there is no official or overarching policy toward the Islamic movement, security concerns have been present since members of the movement were arrested and imprisoned for their activities in ‘Usrat al-Jihad. The Israeli security services are concerned about radicalization and, in particular, relations with other terrorist organizations, such as Hamas and Hizballah. The northern branch has been closely watched for its leaders’ incitement and links to Hamas. Charities run by the northern movement have been shut down because of their links to Hamas. Shaykh Saleh was imprisoned from 2003–2005 for sending aid to Hamas. Saleh has also been charged with inciting violence and racism, and in 2007 spent five months in jail for striking a police officer. In 2008, the police and the General Security Services (Shin Bet) shut down the Northern Movement’s al-Aqsa Institution and seized their documents and records.⁴⁹ And on March 4, 2014, Shaykh Saleh was convicted of incitement to violence and sentenced to eight months in prison for a speech he made in 2007.⁵⁰

With regard to political violence and terrorism against the state, both branches emphasize they forbid it. Nonetheless, although relatively few Arab citizens have been involved in acts of terror, it is still a serious concern for the security services.⁵¹ This fear is heightened during violent conflict between Israelis and Arabs, and when there are state or individuals’ violent acts against Arab citizens. After Baruch Goldstein slaughtered 29 Muslims in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron (1994), security services apprehended individuals who they suspected of planning to commit terrorist acts. This took place

⁴⁹ Sharon Roffe-Ofir, “Police shut down Islamic movement institution,” *Ynetnews*, August 8, 2008, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3586641,00.html>

⁵⁰ Kobi Nachshoni, “Islamic Movement leader in Israel in jailed for incitement,” *Ynetnews.com*; March 4, 2014, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4495092,00.html>

⁵¹ According to the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 136 Arab citizens of Israel were arrested for their links to terrorist cells during the second intifada, <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF1/APR2_05_773723859.pdf>. This data does not distinguish who was involved in the movement. Some of the incidents include the Rosh Hashana bombing in 1999-linked to an individual with connections to the Islamic movement.

in a tense atmosphere of marches and other forms of civil disturbances in the Bedouin communities, mobilized by the Islamic movement.⁵² In September 1999, three Arab citizens of Israel, with links to the northern branch, died in two separate incidents in what may have been unsuccessful suicide terrorist attacks. And on September 7, 2011, a man who became religious through the Islamic movement killed three and injured dozens more in a suicide attack at the Nahariya railway station.⁵³

In response to some of these fears, there have been debates about banning the movement or organizations run by the movement.⁵⁴ Right wing Israeli politicians have called for banning the movement.⁵⁵ Israel's General Security Services and the police are also sometimes at odds on this issue. But political fallout aside, the security argument against banning the movement is that it will drive it underground and make it more difficult to monitor.

While the security services remain vigilant to protect against threat of radicalized individuals, the greater challenge and longer-term threat, according to a former advisor to a number of Prime Ministers on Arab Affairs, is the educational activities of the northern movement.⁵⁶ The northern movement's provocative rhetoric and its growing rejection of Israeli institutions and society may be laying the basis for radicalization. More generally, many are also concerned about the rising influence of Islamic movement in the Ministry of Education who run the day-to-day affairs. The Shin Bet may be still involved in many of the high level appointments.⁵⁷ Yet this oversight may be just to prevent northern

branch members and largely geared toward the higher administrative positions. Nonetheless, the Islamic movement's dominance in the Arab sector in the state education bureaucracy is pronounced in the Bedouin communities. Islamic movement members occupy important local bureaucratic positions and thus have an influence on shaping the extent to which youth identify with the state.⁵⁸

Returning to the comparison, another interesting feature that characterizes the difference between the Israeli Islamist movement and other Islamic movements is that the Israeli Islamic movement operates in a context in which there is no chance for it to acquire state power. Arab Muslims, the natural constituency for the Islamic movement, are a minority with Israel's 1967 borders, and there is little chance they will become a majority in the foreseeable future (unless, of course, Israel annexes the West Bank and Gaza and grants citizenship to the Palestinians there). Thus, unlike neighboring movements, the Islamic movement in Israel could not justify its participation as a means to control state power; rather, it must argue participation and thus *de facto* legitimization is a means to better the community of Palestinian citizens of Israel. The southern branch now led by Shaykh Abu Daabes has concluded that they have a pact with the state. To illustrate this point, a journalist recalls a rally in the late 1980s where Shaykh Darwish, waved his identity card wallet in the air and proclaimed, "this is your pact with the state, anyone one who throws it away, throws away this pact."⁵⁹ Indeed, the social contract has a religious foundation as well. Shaykhs Darwish and Sar-sour, as well as clerics not associated with the Islamic

⁵² Author interview with advisor to Israeli Police, unit of minority affairs, October 2013.

⁵³ Joel Greenberg, "Of Bombs and Israeli Arabs, and Years of Loyalty," New York Times, September 8, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/08/world/of-bombs-and-israeli-arabs-and-years-of-loyalty.html>.

⁵⁴ On discussions about banning the newspaper, Zvi Bar'el, "The Newspaper that threatens the state," *Haaretz*, December 27, 2002, <<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-newspaper-that-threatens-the-state-1.24035>>.

⁵⁵ Gil Ronen, "Knesset rejects bill to outlaw Islamic movement," *Arutz Sheva*, January 27, 2010, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/135744#.UwtWQPZCOO8>

⁵⁶ Author interview with former Advisor to Prime Ministers on Arab Affairs, Jerusalem, Israel, June 24, 2013.

⁵⁷ Opinion, "Suspects in Education," *Haaretz*, December 7, 2001, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/suspects-in-education-1.76748>

⁵⁸ Author interview with advisor to Israeli Police, unit of minority affairs, October 2013.

⁵⁹ Author interview with journalist, October 13, 2013, Hura, Israel.

movement, have argued that in terms of jurisprudence, Muslims in Israel should be given the status of a minority in a non-Muslim majority society, similar to Europe (*Fiqh al-Aqaliyyat*).⁶⁰

Lastly, the ethno-national component is another layer of this comparison that stands out. These Arab citizens who remained after the 1948 war are the remnants of the community before Israel was established. Their kin are found in the politically significant Palestinian diaspora in neighboring countries and beyond. The Islamic movement in Israel sees itself as the guardians of Palestinian, and in particular, Muslim heritage. Therefore, similar to Islamists in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan, the Palestinian cause is directly connected to their national identity and not just a cause that overlaps with their Islamist or Arab identities.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Islamic movement faces a number of challenges and opportunities from within the population it seeks to draw support. As introduced at the outset, the Islamic movement is one of three political trends within the Arab sector; the other two are Palestinian nationalism and Communism. These trends, represented by the political parties of Balad and Hadash, respectively, are still the primary rivals of the Islamic movement. The religious component of the movement has both advantages and limitations. The advantage is that the movement can more easily appeal to an important segment of the Muslim population, the Bedouin, who do not have a history of identification with Communism or Palestinian nationalism. This can easily be seen in the Islamic movement's strong political presence compared to the other parties' weakness in the Negev. While the Islamic movement's conservative

social values and religious traditions may appeal to Bedouin in the Negev, they do not appeal to the more secular-minded segments of the Arab Muslim population, or to Christian Arabs. For example, despite voting together on a number of issues, Balad, a Palestinian nationalist party, and the United Arab List often find themselves on opposite sides of debates on social issues.

Another challenge for the movement is to convince Arabs that their leadership is genuinely committed to addressing the grievances of the community. One critique of the Islamic movement leveled by its opponents is that it has become corporatized and too business-like. As one journalist related in a play on words, the *Harakat Islamiyya* (Islamic movement) has become a *sharikat Islamiyya* (roughly translated as the Islamic company/corporation).⁶¹ While this critical attitude toward Arab leadership is not unique to the Islamic movement, this quip underscores sentiments even from some activists in the movement who feel that the movement needs to refocus on its original purpose: tending to the local and more urgent needs of the community. One Islamic movement member from Rahat, the largest Arab (Bedouin) city in the Negev, claims that many people have heard enough about Ra'id Saleh's focus on Jerusalem; they want to hear more about how to solve the local problems of crime, poverty, and education—the issues that attracted people to the movement in the first place. He goes on to explain, “It is not *al-Aqsa fi khatar* (al-Aqsa is in danger) but *Rahat fi Khatar* (Rahat is in danger).”⁶²

Leadership succession, as it relates to the generational gap, will be another challenge on the horizon for the movement. The most senior leaders are in

⁶⁰ Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi's fatawa are extremely influential. See Sagi Polka, “Constructing Muslim Identity in Western Society: The Rulings (Fatawa) of Shaykh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi for Muslims in the West,” in *Muslim Minorities*, 31-52. Shaykh Darwish has applied these concepts to the Arab Muslims in Israel in his numerous writings in Arabic. See also the work of Qadi Iyad Zahalka, “The Challenge of Administering Justice to an Islamic Minority Living in a Non-Muslim State: The Shari'a Courts in Israel,” *Journal of Levantine Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 2012), 157-168.

⁶¹ Author interview with local journalist, Kafr Qassem, Israel, June 11, 2013.

⁶² Author interview with Islamic movement member and municipal official, Rahat, Israel, November 9, 2012.

their late 50s and early 60s. MK Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour plans to step down as the head of the United Arab List at the end of his term. It is unclear what the succession plans are for the northern branch leaders. A vast majority of the Arab population is under the age of 30. The Facebook and Twitter generation came of age in a post-Oslo environment and in the growing alienation of Arab citizens since the second Intifada (2000-2004). The next wave of leaders, those in their 40s and early 50s, will have to contend with a new generation that is very different from the previous one.

The municipal elections of 2013 should provide some basis to reflect upon some of these challenges and opportunities. The Islamic movement did not perform as well as it had hoped, particularly in the Galilee and Triangle. Yet the movement did maintain its strong presence in the Bedouin communities of the Negev where its candidates were elected in three of the seven local councils (as well as two mayoralties). The movement also won seats in the mixed cities of Ramla and Lod. In other localities, the movement aligned with other political parties rather than complete independently.⁶³ It is also worth noting that this election marked the last stage of the northern branch's withdrawal from (official) local politics. Following its pledge in 2003 not to support candidates in municipal elections, the movement's northern branch supported its candidate until the 2008 election. While some have argued that this withdrawal was due to their weakness and fear of losing, others have suggested that an ideological shift is responsible.⁶⁴ There is insufficient evidence for either claim at this time. However, it is certain that the both branches of the movement have taken note and are plotting their future moves.

The Islamic Movement in the Negev

The biggest challenge and opportunity for the Islamic movement is how it will continue to engage the Arab Bedouin community of the Negev. The history, demographics, and types of challenges the community faces makes it fertile ground for political competition and mobilization.

The Bedouin community composes a third of the entire Negev population and is equal to a fifth of the Arab population of the state. It is one of the fastest growing communities in the country and the birthrate among this population is approximately 30 percent higher than the average of the rest of the Arab population.⁶⁵ This population also has a very high unemployment rate, lower literacy levels than the national average, and nearly a third of the population is under 19.⁶⁶ In addition, many of Bedouin, particularly those in unrecognized villages, do not enjoy the same access to water, electricity, and other state services that the Jewish public does.

The Bedouin population has gone through vast changes as part of a process of rapid urbanization over the last few decades. As a result of Israel's independence war, only 11,000 Bedouin remained in Israel. From 1949 until 1966, this population was under military rule similar to the rest of the Arab population, and was confined to an area called the Siyag. Since the 1970s, this population, encouraged by government policy, began to settle in permanent townships, and later cities. During the urbanization process over the last few decades, widespread social and economic problems have accompanied these changes. While the majority of this population of the Negev is located in recognized cities and

⁶³ For a preliminary overview, see Arik Rudnitzky, ed., *The Municipal Elections in Israel 2013: Arabs in Israel Update*, February 16, 2014 (Tel Aviv: Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2014), 1-31.

⁶⁴ Author interviews with local politicians before the elections, October 2013, Israel. See also Nohad Ali, "The Significance of the Islamic Movement's Abstention in Israel's Municipal Elections," in *The Municipal Elections in Israel*, ed. Arik Rudnitzky, (Tel Aviv: Konrad Adenauer Program of Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2014), 5-8.

⁶⁵ Author interviews with local politicians before the elections, October 2013, Israel. See also Nohad Ali, "The Significance of the Islamic Movement's Abstention in Israel's Municipal Elections," in *The Municipal Elections in Israel*, ed. Arik Rudnitzky, (Tel Aviv: Konrad Adenauer Program of Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2014), 5-8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 17.

villages, a significant percentage is not. Dwellings in unrecognized villages and illegal settlements are subject to demolition by the state.

There have been a number of attempts over the years to resolve the issue of land claims and the associated socio-economic problems of urbanization. The most recent attempt, the Praver plan, has also become a mobilizing symbol for many Arab political activists (as well as a number of leftwing Zionist NGOs and politicians). The plan is a follow-up by the recommendations from the Committee for the Regulation of the Bedouin Settlements in the Negev, headed by Supreme Court Justice Eliezer Goldberg, commissioned under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The committee report recommended recognizing 46 Bedouin villages in the Negev (approximately 62,000 residents) while at the same time emphasizing the enforcement of monitoring of the building of illegal settlements.⁶⁷ The new law, the Praver-Begin plan, proposes to relocate approximately 30,000 Bedouin⁶⁸ to 35 recognized communities in the Negev, which will provide them more access to modern state services, as well as provide financial compensation. It seeks to settle a long-standing dispute between the state and some Bedouin tribes' claims to land. Those who oppose the plan claim that not all the recommendations of the Goldberg commission were followed, and there was no official Bedouin representation on the commission. Some within this camp deem the current, or any, relocation plan as racist, and argue that this plan does not fairly recognize the legitimate claims of the Bedouin population that reside there. Others more harshly criticize government efforts in the Negev as part of a larger plan to "Judaize" all Arab areas. The counterargument is that this political activism does not accurately represent the interests

and preferences of the entire Bedouin community, and that many of the Arab protesters and leaders that take part in the demonstrations are not from the Bedouin communities but from the north of the country.

TRIBAL HIERARCHIES, THE NATIONALIZATION OF A LOCAL CONFLICT, AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Since the 1980s, the Islamic movement has made tremendous inroads in the Negev in mobilizing political support from the nearly 200,000 Bedouin citizens, whose population is said to double every 15 years. The Islamic movement is the most powerful local political force in this region, and at the national level, there is a member of Knesset from the Negev, Taleb Abu Arar.

The Islamic movement fills many important functions in the Negev. First, it provides a non-Zionist political identity for a population that has not previously had strong political traditions compared to Arabs in other parts of the country. Second, the Islamic movement provides vital social services for a segment of the population that the state's services do not always reach. The movement provides educational opportunities, supplemental health services, financial support, childcare, and spiritual guidance. The fact that the Islamic movement has built nearly all of the new mosques is more than just a religious service and symbol statement. Mosques serve an important function: they anchor for social and communal activities.⁶⁹ Third, the movement is a political asset to non-authentic, lower status Bedouin tribes who do not possess land. In theory, the movement tries to bridge the tribal divisions and hierarchies. In

⁶⁷ Aviad Glickman, "Report: State Should Recognize Unrecognized Villages," *Ynetnews*, December 12, 2008, <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3637006,00.html>>.

⁶⁸ The NGO Adalah claims the number is 70,000. "Praver Plan Demolition and Eviction of Bedouin Citizens of Israel in the Naqab (Negev)," last modified January 2014, <http://adalah.org/eng/tags/Praver-Plan/1>. Other sources found in the newspapers are often about half that number.

⁶⁹ Akiva Bigman, "Ha-tenua ha-Islamit v'ha-negev: Raa'yon im Aatef Abu Ajaj, mumche l'tenua (The Islamic movement in Israel: Interview with Aatef Abu Ajaj, expert on the Movement)" *Mida*, April 11, 2013, <<http://mida.org.il/?p=8916>>.

practice, however, it has used the hierarchical structures to enter politics by providing resources and status to leaders and the tribes they come from.

One of the most important activities of the Islamic movement is rebuilding homes demolished by the state. No other organization or group does this with the same speed and efficiency. According to an academic who is also a Bedouin resident of the Negev, “The Islamic movement is there within hours providing food, comfort, and rebuilding the house almost immediately.”⁷⁰ Rebuilding these homes immediately has tremendous symbolic power. The Islamic movement circulates videos to show their defiance and strength vis-à-vis the state and on behalf of the Bedouin residents. Despite the state’s legal claim and its attempts to negotiate or compromise, the Islamic movement has much to gain. This individual continues, “Who would you support if your home was destroyed by the state and someone was there within hours rebuilding it and giving you food and shelter?”⁷¹ Thus, the success of the Islamic movement in the Negev is not so much because of religion; rather, it is the provision of social services that the state does not provide.⁷²

While the question of land ownership dates back to Ottoman and British rule, the politicization of the conflict over land on a national scale has relatively recent origins. Following the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai as a result of the peace treaty with Egypt in the 1980s, new military bases were built in the Negev on land occupied, in some cases, by the Bedouin. The most notable case was the evacuation of Tel Malhata to make way for the Nevatim Air Force base. The negotiated evacuation created a situation that physically disrupted a social-status hierarchy between tribes—a hierarchy based on tribal origin, land ownership, and their ultimately their

“authenticity” as real Bedouin. The Islamic movement was able to make inroads between both these groups of evacuees.⁷³ Its support for the lower status tribes overlaps with the land issue because these tribes do not have the same recognized claim to land as the ‘authentic’ tribes that tend to be more closely associated and aligned with the government.

In the current struggle over the Praver plan, the Islamic movement has taken a leading role in the mobilization against the plan. While a number of NGOs and political parties are involved in the protest against the plan, the Islamic movement has the potential to be the most important political actor because of its mobilization capabilities, its entrenched local political interests (including representation in local government, regional, and national councils), and its opportunity to gain political points vis-à-vis other Arab parties. The fact that one political party has strong networks and structures that also overlap with other representative councils gives the Islamic movement’s greater leadership weight than other Arab parties, such as Balad and Hadash, that have taken similar positions opposing the bill.

But the overall competition between the two branches of the Islamic movement is also a significant part of the story. The two factions generally do not sponsor events together, though they may sponsor the same event at different times, such as the “work camps.” While the southern branch may be more successful in politics, the northern branch is able to attract more people to its events and festivals.

In addition to the intra-Islamic movement competition, the competition between Arab parties helps transform many local issues, such as land, to national ones. In June 2013, when the Praver plan went up for a vote in the Knesset, a number of Arab

⁷⁰ Author interview, June 10, 2013, Beer Sheva, Israel.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Akiva Bigman, “The Islamic movement in Israel: Interview with Aatef Abu Ajaj, expert on the Movement,” April 11, 2013.

⁷³ Ibrahim al-Qurain, “Ha-bedouin, b’negev beyn zahut li’umiut aravit phalastinit l’shivtiut” (The Bedouin in the Negev between Palestinian Arab national identity and tribalism)” (MA thesis, Ben Gurion University, 2006).

members of Knesset demonstrated their opposition in the Knesset by tearing up the bill on the podium. Knesset Member Dr. Ahmed Tibi, who is not from the Islamic movement but is part of its joint ticket, poured water on the bill in dramatic fashion (he was censured by the ethics committee).⁷⁴ Leaders called for a nation-wide strike on July 15 to protest the Praver plan, and some of the protests throughout the country during the month of Ramadan that summer turned violent.

Protests continued, and on November 30, 2013, the “Day of Rage” that featured nation-wide protests, some of them violent, led to dozens of arrests. The day after the protests, the Islamic movement (Southern Branch) released a five-point statement of its position. The Islamic movement blamed the violence on the police and the Netanyahu government for the escalation, reaffirmed its rejection of the Praver plan and instead called for a unified position of all political forces.⁷⁵ This attempt to claim leadership on this issue was strengthened by movement’s Knesset members’ prominent role in the Arabic media (in Israel), in which they defended the protesters who were arrested and condemned the Israeli government.⁷⁶

This national level political mobilization has translated to pressure on local leadership from different directions. For example, before the municipal elections, many mayoral candidates were encouraged to pledge that they were against the Praver plan even though this issue was irrelevant for the local elections that November.⁷⁷ These top-down and bottom-up social pressures put many local leaders, some of

whom are affiliated with the Islamic movement in a difficult position. These local leaders, who tend to avoid the political demonstrations, must balance these powerful normative and social pressures with their own needs to work with the government on projects that provide their constituencies opportunities for employment and social services.

It is unclear how this competition will play out in the future. But in the end, these outbidding processes may eventually hurt the very people that some of the activists claim they represent. A government official in charge of implementing the plan claims 80 percent of the Bedouin in the Negev actually supports the Praver plan.⁷⁸ Critics claim this figure is inflated for political purposes and is impossible to verify. On the other hand, many of the activists leading the rallies are indeed from the central or northern parts of the country. Moreover, the numbers of the protesters, even in the Negev, where the population would be most affected by the plan, are not very large relative to the population as a whole (at most numbers are in the low thousands but are generally in the hundreds). The protests could grow, especially if there is an increase in violence. The situation is unstable and the competition between the political actors could increase mobilization.

These internal dynamics, combined with provocative state actions, could be a recipe for greater conflict should widespread unrest break out. Unrest would make compromise on behalf of the state or aggrieved actors much more difficult. The more that this issue is framed as a national one (Palestinian vs.

⁷⁴ Palestinian News Network, June 24, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS-7ZGNYLaQ>.

⁷⁵ “Beyan al-Harakat Islamiyya: yasqut mukhatat brafer al-mustamira (Statement of the Islamic Movement: Down with the Colonial Praver Plan)” December 2, 2013, accessed January 16, 2014, <<http://www.methak.org/ar/?articles=topic&topic=20747>>.

⁷⁶ For some examples, see “Details of the trial of the detainees in the Day of Rage demonstration in the Negev” (in Arabic), *Panet*, December 2, 2013, <http://www.panet.co.il/online/articles/1/2/S-742252.1.2.html>; see also, “Day of Rage: the release of detainees,” (in Arabic) *Al-Makan*, December 1, 2013, <http://www.almakan.co.il/?mod=articles&ID=41841>.

⁷⁷ “Beersheva conferences urges Arab candidates to oppose Praver Plan,” *Maannews*, October 8, 2013, <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=636786>>. From personal interviews and observations, I found little evidence of mayoral campaigns about national issues, October 2013.

⁷⁸ Shirley Seidler, “Israeli government claims 80 percent of Bedouin agree to resettlement; Bedouin Leader: State is Lying,” *Haaretz*, December 2, 2013, <<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/.premium-1.561241>>.

Israeli) by the political actors in Israel and abroad, the smaller the political space for compromise on any side. This escalation may result in greater alienation of the Bedouin population in Israel, a trend that has increasing since the second intifada, and may continue to affect the enlistment of Bedouin in the Israeli Defense Forces. The decline in IDF service by the Bedouin, an objective for the Islamic movement, would be damaging to the legitimacy of the Israeli state's democratic legitimacy. If there were to be a major violent event, such as the killing of the 13 Arab citizens during the second intifada, greater alienation of the Arab sector would be likely. These potential outcomes might cause Jewish and Arab citizens to view each other increasingly through a security lens. Dr. Thabet Abu Rass, director of the Negev branch of Adalah, an NGO that seeks to protect the legal rights of minorities in Israel, warns, "implementation of this plan could lead to an intifada."⁷⁹

Other trends on the horizon could contribute to these risks. By 2030, the Arab population is projected to constitute a greater percentage of the country than it is currently. This demographic change could produce a spiral of mutual fear between the Arab and Jewish populations of not being sure if the other might radicalize out of fear or growing confidence. For example, while a large plurality of Jewish Israelis feel that Bedouin land claims are fair, according to a poll sponsored by Rabbis for Human Rights, these numbers might change if the issue is framed as a national security concern.⁸⁰

At a more general level, a further deterioration could have foreign policy implications and is thus important for Jewish-Arab coexistence, the peace process, and Israeli relations with the Arab-Islamic world. Should serious and prolonged violence break out,

moving a peace process forward between Israel and the Palestinian Authority would be more difficult. Leaders on both sides would face domestic pressures to harden their positions or back away from negotiations in light of an escalation of violence. For example, on the Palestinian side, if the Praver plan becomes fully accepted as another "Nakba," as it is being currently framed, and is accompanied by violence, President Abbas would surely face additional domestic and international pressure not to back down. The unrest might spread to the Bedouin populations of the West Bank (Hebron Hills) and Gaza.

The response to the Praver Plan speaks volumes about the future of the Bedouin community and the political opportunities for the Islamic movement. The Negev could very well be the primary area of focus in the future. For the Islamic movement, the Negev is extremely important.

But what do these developments mean for the United States? Although the future of the Islamic movement is not as important for the United States as Iran, the movement's evolution and future trajectory do provide important lessons and insights about Islamic movements in the Arab world and about conflicts more generally.

Without taking sides, the United States might be able to find additional opportunities for development projects in the Negev. But this will be very difficult due to pressure from several directions. For example, Arab Members of Knesset sent Secretary of State John Kerry a letter accusing Israel of "ethnic cleansing" and "crimes against humanity."⁸¹

From a U.S. policy perspective, viewing the Islamic movement in Israel from a regional perspective, may provide some political room to maneuver.

⁷⁹ Author interview with Dr. Thabet Abu Rass, May 30, 2013, Haifa, Israel.

⁸⁰ Rabbis for Human Rights, Press Release June 25, 2013, <<http://rhr.org.il/eng/2013/06/press-release-majority-within-jewish-israelis-thinks-bedouin-claims-just-oppose-praver/#.Ucmb9zgBz9o.twitter>>.

⁸¹ Haviv Rettig Gur, "Arabs MKs to Kerry: Bedouin relocation a crime against humanity," *Times of Israel*, December 5, 2013, <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/arab-mks-to-kerry-bedouin-relocation-a-crime-against-humanity/>>.

The Islamic movement in Israel is not actually very different from Islamic movements in other places. They mobilize in much the same way, have many of the same values, and share much of the same worldview. In the past, leaders of the movement have

served as informal bridges and sometimes lines of communication to sensitive actors within the Arab-Islamic world. For those optimists looking for signposts of coexistence in the Middle East, the Islamic movement in Israel could serve this purpose.

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