

## Article

# Between Religion and Politics: The Case of the Islamic Movement in Israel

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**Abstract:** The power of the “moderate” branch of the Islamic Movement (*Alharaka al-Islamiyya*, subsequently referred to as IM) Southern Faction (IMSF) in Israel stems from its ability to adapt to different situations, reconcile with the complex reality of being an indigenous minority in a state that defines itself a “Jewish state”, and operate within the state structure accepting democratic processes that have long been debated to clash with Islamism. Besides being represented in the Israeli Knesset since 1996, the culmination of this adaptation was the joining of the movement to the short-lived Zionist coalition government on 2 June 2021 (the government collapsed in July 2022). This historic entry of an Arab Party into a Jewish/Zionist government coalition for the first time in Israel’s history was a shocking surprise to many, not only due to the IM being an Arab–Palestinian movement but also an Islamist movement. My analysis shows that despite this reconciliation, the IM continues to emphasize religiosity, binding it to the national political struggle and identity of Israel’s Palestinian minority. For its supporters, the IMSF is seen as a meeting point of spiritual/religious needs on the one hand and material needs in the social, political, and cultural spheres on the other. However, for its opponents, mainly from the other Arab political parties, the IM had deviated from the national consensus and accepted strategies and tools to deal with the challenges facing them as a minority in Israel. And, for some others, the IM had even deviated from Islam itself. I draw on a field study that spanned several years. It is based on qualitative, extensive interviews with senior Islamist and non-Islamist leaders in Israel, as well as primary sources of the IM, including publications, leaders’ speeches, and social media. All quotes in this article are based on the author’s interviews during 2022–2024. Interviews with the following leaders and activists: IM leader Abdul-Malik Dahamsheh, sheik Ibrahim Sarsour, former MK Muhammad Hasan Ken’an, Nosiba Darwish ‘Issa, IM MK Eman Yassin Khatib, NDA’ chairman Sami Abu Shehadeh, secretary general of *Abnaa al-Balad* (Sons of the Country) Muhammad Kana’neh, and with Kufr Qare’ former mayor Zuhair Yahya were conducted by in-person or by phone during summer–fall 2023. The interviews with former IMNF activist Aisha Hajjar, activist Zuhriyyeh ‘Azab, journalist Abd el-Rahman Magadleh, and DFPE member Elias Abu Oksa were conducted via What’s App, Messenger, and e-mail in 2022. The interview with political analyst Ameer Makhoul was conducted in December 2023 via Messenger. Follow-up communication was mainly through What’s App to clarify certain points. The interview questions focused on the reasons for the Islamic Movement’s division into two wings, the religious and political justifications for entering the Knesset and the coalition, the relationship between the southern wing and the main Arab parties active in the Israeli Knesset, the experience of unity with them, and the experience of its members while in the Zionist coalition. This article examines how the Islamic Movement in Israel uses religion as a tool to influence the national, cultural, political, economic, and social lives of the Arab minority in Israel. It asks: How does the Islamic Movement, religiously and politically, justify its involvement in the political game and in a Zionist government coalition, and how do Arab parties perceive this involvement? Moreover, it raises an important question about the nature of the movement: to what extent is the Islamic Movement a political Islam movement, and whether it has abandoned the basic goals of political Islam for the sake of becoming a democratic Islamic party? This article will provide significant insight into crucial aspects of the IM that have been previously overlooked. While being in a Zionist coalition gave hardly any latitude in decision making about policies, budgets were an attractive avenue for the Islamic Movement to guide public opinion and gain political support. The article comes during the ongoing war on Gaza, which will undoubtedly



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cast a shadow on the political climate and the political map in Israel in general and on the political work of Arab parties and the Islamic Movement in particular. Although it is too early to predict the impact of this war on the Islamic Movement and its political future, it can be assumed that the impact will be profound.

**Keywords:** Islamism; the Islamic Movement; Israel; Palestinian citizens; ethnic indigenous minority; majority–minority relations

## 1. Theoretical Framework

Religion is a major player in shaping political behavior, and nation-states have not succeeded in ridding political activity of religious motives, demands, and influences (Abdulaziz 1989, pp. 5–12). In the Middle East, the resurgence of Islam provided fertile soil for studying the influence of religion on the political sphere, where the reciprocal importance of religion and politics is due to many tasks that each performs in the service of the other and where religion is a source of identity, credibility, and legitimacy (Khamis and al-Tayyar 2021). A growing body of in-depth case studies focusing on particular religious movements and organizations has enriched our understanding of the dynamic interaction between religious groups and their involvement in the public sphere (Filali-Ansary 2016). Still, it is important to analyze each case within its specific political, cultural, and economic context and draw conclusions based on each case’s uniqueness. The literature on political Islam (Islamism)<sup>1</sup> is voluminous (March 2015, p. 105).<sup>2</sup> Yahya Sadowski (2006) argues that although the empirical literature on Islamism is not only rich but getting even better, the theoretical interpretation of the data produced out of that research is still in its infancy. The debate and differences over how to understand political Islam are clearly demonstrated in the writings of many scholars and experts. For Islamists, Islam is *Din wa-Dawla* (religion and state), and any attempt to separate them is seen as offensive to Islam (Krämer 2013, pp. 639–40).

In the 1980s, many equated Islamism with radicalism and terrorism and saw it as monolithic and as a new global threat, especially after the negative experiences of Iran, Sudan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. John Esposito (2001, p. 27) argues that these experiences, as well as secular bias, will continue to raise fears regarding any “mixing of religion and politics”. More problematically, argues Hamid (2014), several American policymakers did not make a distinction between different Islamist groups, lumping together Hamas, the Taliban, ISIS, and others all in the same sentence. But Islamism, the mainstream, has attempted to make peace with the state to reform it rather than to erase it. Casting all Islamists as a problem and calling for constraining their political participation, and even excluding them altogether, is particularly dangerous (Hamid 2014).

Since the 1980s, many Islamist activists have called for basic democratic principles, including the rule of law, human rights, political participation, and accountability (Krämer 1997, p. 71). The emergence of the non-violent face of Islamic political and social activism in the late 1980s and early 1990s was an Islam that had become institutionalized in mainstream social and political activism, where Islamists established schools, day care centers, legal aid programs, banks, and insurance companies, and also participated in the political system (Esposito 2001, p. 22). However, while the Islamization of society will always have the potential for Islam to emerge as a political force, it is important to distinguish between the violent extremists, who are a minority, and the moderate majority of Islamists, who, if given the opportunity, will participate within the political system and society, said Esposito (2001, p. 27).

In his distinction between Islam as a faith and Islamism, Bassam Tibi (2012, p. 2) defines Islamism (political Islam) as: “an ideology that connects religion and state in a *shari’a*<sup>3</sup> (Islamic-based political order), suggesting that the use of terms “radical” and “moderate” to distinguish between Islamist movements is misleading because all Islamists

have a common commitment to the remaking of the world (Tibi 2012, p. 2). Still, Tibi (2012, p. 98) makes a distinction between institutional Islamists and jihadists. Unlike jihadist Islamists, who do not approve of democracy, institutional Islamists approve of the balloting procedure but not the political culture of pluralism, secular values, human rights, and civil society. So, while these institutional Islamists frequently advocate and participate in democratic processes, they cannot be trusted because their commitment to democracy ends with the ballot box, argues Tibi. Tibi (2012, p. 2) concludes that institutional Islamists and jihadists differ over the means but not over the goal and that Islamism is incompatible with democracy because Islamism's end is the establishment of an Islamic system of government and that Islamists who truly consent to democracy and abandon the idea of a *shari'a* law are no longer Islamists but democrats (Tibi 2008).

However, others argue that political Islam should be understood in the broadest sense possible as a range of modern political movements, ideological trends, and state policies that give Islam an authoritative status in political matters (March 2015). Andrew March argues that while political Islam is considered right in the political spectrum, it is wrong to treat them as a single movement or ideology (March 2015, p. 104).

There are different trends ranging from left-leaning populist protest movements to ultra-conservative movements. Peter Mandaville (2020, p. 24) argues that although Islamism shares common ideological roots, the practical expression of political Islam varies enormously depending on the circumstances that produced them and in which they operate. Some even doubt the analytic utility of the term that is applied today to a wide range of contradictory politicized interpretations of religion.

Tibi (2012, p. 116) asserts that there is no way to reconcile pluralism with Islamism because it conflicts with the authenticity of the "Islamic solution". He further argues that Islamism rejects democratic pluralism, which is an outcome of cultural modernity, as part of their rejection of Western values. IM senior leader and former member of Knesset (MK) Masoud Ghanayem questioned the generalization of Islamist movements, the meaning of terms used to describe such movements, and also the attempt to regard them all as one. He said: "It is an unfair generalization to accuse all Islamist movements of being backward and anti-modern. Islamism is not all the same; ISIS considers itself Islamist. When we discuss Modernism, we should ask what do we mean by that; do we mean technology and science, or freedoms and democracy?" (Daoud 2016a). Ghanayem also said that the IMSF position from the West is not thoughtless but selective and makes a distinction between the political and military endeavors of the West that "colonized us and weakened the Arab Islamic nation and created a reason for the Palestinian *Nakba* and the creation of Israel, and while it rejects Darwinism, Western hegemony, and exploitation, it accepts technological advancement and science, the political notions of democracy, separations of powers, freedom, justice, human rights, and plurality, values that are ignored by the West in its relationships with nations outside of Europe, where it acts as a cruel colonizer" (Daoud 2016a).

One crucial question in a theory of religious law is the interplay between divine textual orders and considerations of social necessity and public welfare (Shaham 2018). Some accused Islamic law of being "rigid" and working by the "text" and do not consider the constantly changing circumstances. Achieving *maslaha* is one of the *shari'a* objectives (*maqasid al-Shari'a*) (Syaputra et al. 2014). *Maslaha* literally means benefit or interest. When it is narrowed to *maslaha mursala*, the term indicates unregulated public interest in the sense of not having been regulated by the lawgiver, as no textual authority can be found on its validity or otherwise (Al-Qaradawi Net 2015). According to al-Ghazali, *maslaha* is the consideration that secures a benefit or prevents harm but in harmony with the aim and objective of the *shari'a*. These objectives include five essential values: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. According to Ghazali, any measure that secures these values is *maslaha*, and anything that contravenes them is *mafsada* (evil) (Syaputra et al. 2014).

As for “*mursala*,” Yusuf al-Qaradawi defines it as “unrestricted and absolute”, meaning “the interest that no specific evidence from the texts of *shari‘a* indicates its consideration nor its abolition, so they are absolute from consideration or cancellation” (Al-Qaradawi Net 2015).

With the increasing number of permanent Muslim minority communities globally, Muslims face a challenge on how to function and participate fully in a non-Muslim society while still preserving a Muslim identity (Esposito 2001, p. 30).

Millions of Muslims, many of them are devout and practicing, live today in secular societies in the West and countries that never belonged to *dār al-Islam*<sup>4</sup> (such as the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, and Russia) or Muslim countries that are not largely secular (Turkey, Tunisia, and Indonesia) or countries that were under long Islamic rule (India), but the question, according to Krämer (2013, p. 638), is whether these Muslims view secularity as a legitimate and desirable principle for the regulation of a Muslim “state and society”.

For Muslims who constitute a minority in non-Muslim states, the ideal in the past was not to create permanent Muslim minority communities. In Europe, for example, the real choice facing Muslims living today is not between being a Muslim or European but rather between integrating or remaining separate. Legal citizenship or economic integration is not enough; integrating requires participation and the political culture of pluralism (AbdelAzim 2016). Tibi introduces the “Euroislam” concept, which suggests that Muslims living in Europe can fully assimilate without compromising their religious beliefs and, at the same time, without Islamizing Europe (AbdelAzim 2016).

## 2. Islamism in Israel

Palestinians in Israel are part of the Palestinian Arab people. However, the Palestinian national minority in Israel is unique, compared with other segments of Palestinian people, because they were shifted to the margins of Israeli society as “a minority in a Jewish state, as citizens in a state that they did not choose, so to speak, a state that is not theirs” (Bishara 1993, p. 7). Being a Jewish state rather than a state of all its citizens, the integration of the Palestinians who remained in their land following the 1948 *Nakba* into state institutions had always been conditional. On the one hand, they were granted political rights and Israeli citizenship, but on the other hand, they were regarded as a “fifth column” and a security threat by the authorities. Still, the vast majority of the Palestinians in Israel see their future as citizens of the state and have no interest in relocating to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza when established. They are aware that their future will be different from that of other Palestinians (Ghanem and Mustafa 2018).

One of the consequences of the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the Palestinian *Nakba* was the shutdown of all institutions that belonged to the Muslim Brothers (MB) organization, which operated in Palestine. The MB suffered a major setback in the newly formed Jewish state as it was suppressed and was unable to recover. The fleeing of the Arab leadership left the Palestinians in Israel without religious guidance or religious courts, and access to Islam was hindered (Daoud 2009, p. 32; Ghanem and Mustafa 2018).

Today, Muslims constitute about 80 percent of the Palestinian citizens in Israel. They are part of the indigenous Arab minority who remained in their land after the creation of Israel. Systematically discriminated against in all spheres of life, including education, housing, municipal funding, and income, they are further discriminated against legally with a series of laws, including the legalizing of the expropriation of their lands and prohibiting the internally displaced Palestinian citizens from returning to their homes and properties. Additionally, none of the symbols of the state reflect the Palestinian citizens of Israel. They are referred to as “Non-Jews”<sup>5</sup> in official documents, and while they have the right to observe their own holidays according to their customs, national holidays, the national day of rest, the “Sabbath”, the flag, the state’s emblem, and the national anthem are purely Jewish and represent Jewish history, culture, and Zionist ideology (Knesset Website n.d.).

Islamization of the Palestinian citizens in Israel was seen as a way to escape the marginalization and hostility toward them (Israeli 1999) and as a reaction to Arab secularism in Israel, Jewish Westernization, and the general failure of Arab nationalism to solve

the Palestinian cause (Stendel 1996, p. 135). Regional events helped develop the IM in Israel, including the Islamic Revolution in Iran and later the rise of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the first intifada in 1987 (Daoud 2016a).

Since the Palestinian Muslim Brothers' leadership was never allowed to gain traction in the new Israeli state, the IM was not an extension of it. According to former IM MK Masoud Ghanayem, the IM in Israel "was not rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood's presence in Palestine during the British Mandate period but was influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brothers in its theological and political thought" (Daoud 2016a). Founder Sheikh Abdallah Nimr Darwish<sup>6</sup> further argued that Palestinians who live in Israel live in a unique situation: "We are part of the thought-approach of the Islamic Awakening initiated by Hasan al-Banna. However, we are not part of any Islamic organization because our circumstances and situation required that" (Al-Jazeera 1999).

With renewed contact between Palestinians in Israel and Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip after the 1967 war, Islamism revived and began penetrating the Triangle Muslim area in Israel. Young Palestinian men attracted to religion went to study in Islamic colleges in the OPT, and when they came back, some created an underground organization named *Usrat al-Jihad* (Family of the Jihad) (Aburaiya 2004; Daoud 2016a; Neuberger 1997). The Family of Jihad, which, Farid Abu Mukh,<sup>7</sup> who founded the movement with Darwish, combined the Islamic and the national vision, operated between 1979 and 1981, called for an arms struggle, and was responsible for minor operations against the state. However the organization was uncovered, and about 60 of its members were put in jail.<sup>8</sup>

After a three-year imprisonment, Sheikh Abdallah Nimr Darwish<sup>9</sup>, who was regarded as the spiritual leader of the organization, moderated his political views and established the Islamic Movement as a pragmatic, moderate political/religious organization. The movement denounced terrorism and violence, recognized the state, and accepted the status of a minority within a Jewish majority. Further, the movement's members adopted the "democratic" framework of the state, and similar to the other Palestinians who remained in their land after 1948, they accepted citizenship and permanent residency and the right to vote and run for public office. Years later, reflecting on his involvement in *Usrat al-Jihad*, Darwish described it as a "youth mistake". He also rejected the idea of an Islamic revolution (Shreim 2021).

Mansour Abbas, the current leader of the IM, reflected on the *Usrat-al-Jihad* experience, saying, "Perhaps the most important impact of this jihadist experience is the Islamic Movement's early turn from armed *jihad* to civil work, and political participation locally and nationally in the Knesset elections, through the launch of projects and institutions of advocacy, educational, charitable, relief, educational, cultural and endowment, and the construction of mosques and Quran centers and others". MK Mansour Abbas pointed out that the experience of the armed jihad organization stemmed from the fundamental question: "What is the judgment on the new political reality after the 1948 Nakba?" He considered that the experience of peaceful civil activism stemmed from another central question: "How do I deal with the emerging political reality in light of the balance of power, the reality of the nation, and the world order?" Abbas's remarks come against the backdrop of a political philosophy developed by the late Sheikh Abdullah Nimr Darwish and adopted by the Islamic Movement, according to which there is no other horizon for the Palestinians who remained in their homeland after the Nakba than the political horizon (Al-Quds Al-Arabi 2020).

Scholars have argued that the IM in Israel differs from other fundamentalist Islamic movements around the Middle East because it is aware of its limitations operating in a Jewish state. It recognizes the state and accepts the status of a minority within a Jewish majority (Ghanem 2001, pp. 125–26). But unlike the three circles (Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic) that Farid Abu Mukh embraced in the late 1970s, the movement calls for equality and embraces four identities: Muslim, Arab, Palestinian, and Israeli.

Darwish's daughter, Nosiba Darwish 'Issa, who is a member of the movement's *Shura* (consultation) council, also considers Israeli citizenship as one circle of multiple circles that constitute her identity but adds another big circle, "the humanity circle", which she regards as her favorite.<sup>10</sup> She said,

We are united by a large humanity circle, where we have rights and duties and this is my favorite. So, I am a human being, a Muslim, an Arab, a Palestinian person living on my land, and I am also a citizen of the state of Israel. I work to preserve my identity so it does not harm my citizenship. I may not violate Islamic law, and at the same time, I am a citizen of Israel, and I do not violate its laws. Being a woman is found in all these circles.

The movement's success in the local elections came at the expense of the secular Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE)<sup>11</sup>. The IM's win was attributed to the strategy used by the movement of sending a double message to the electorate in Arab communities. It spoke of a return to religion while attempting to underplay the significance of its orthodoxy (Daoud 2009). Faced with the hostility of DFPE, the main party attracted Arabs in Israel in the 1980s,<sup>12</sup> and to prove that it was not a reactionary movement aimed at restricting women (as it was accused of being), the IM wanted to prove that Islam is a moderate religion not excluding women from the public sphere. It adopted strategies toward gender issues, advocating women's education and encouraging their involvement in charitable, educational, religious, social, and national activities for the first time in their lives (Daoud 2016b). According to Ayman Odeh, leader of DFPE, the Islamic Movement was the only movement that truly challenged DFPE's cultural program (Odeh 2023, p. 166). "From the beginning the IM presented itself as a comprehensive "religious, social, educational, and political movement" (Al-Mithaq Facebook Page n.d.). It operates on these levels without prioritizing rather than mingling them in one recipe. Similar to Hamas and other Islamist movements, the IM quickly established a diverse and wide network of charitable organizations, stepping in to fill the economic and social vacuum that the state failed to provide for, including computer centers, daycare centers, clinics, health and rehabilitation centers, and education services. This has been very appealing to a large segment of the Palestinian Muslim society in Israel (Daoud 2016a).

On the religious level, it focuses on defending Islam and Islamic sites and the rehabilitation of many abandoned mosques. They offer religious classes, organize prayers, hold children's camps, and help the needy, all of which are integral to Islam's religious tenets.

On the national level, the movement keeps contact with Palestinian families in the OPT and offers financial help to needy families, mainly those who suffer from the Israeli occupation.

In addition to political activism, religious sermons, and mass prayers, the Islamic Movement became very active in the social welfare sphere, filling the vacuum that the government had failed to fill. Using members' donations, it provides medical services, religious services, sports activities, builds facilities attracting thousands, takes credit, and connects to the people, especially the needy. According to Aisha Hajjar, formerly in the IMNF: "The Islamic movement began as a social system: it helped the poor, the small families, and made the people feel equal. The movement was a social movement more than a religious one. They indeed talked about rituals, but most of it was a social movement".

But where does the money come from to support all these projects? The first head of the United Arab List in the Knesset who also served as deputy of the head of the Knesset in 1998, Abdul-Malik Dahamsheh explains:

We took a decision that we will not take funding, not even a single shekel, from Qatar or elsewhere. I do not know if there were people who were taken individually, but as a movement and institution, this never happened. This is an internal decision not to take aid. We believe that "whose bread comes from his effort, his opinion comes from his head". I challenge if a single person from the movement has taken a single shekel. We once went to Arafat in the Palestinian

Authority, and during the visit, they offered us money. They brought a bag of money and put it next to my legs. They said, “A little help”. They thought we were like other parties. I said, “We cannot take the Palestinian people’s money”. I shouted at them, “Take the bag from here”, and the matter ended there. They did not return to this issue again.

Maybe not from Qatar, but some suggested that Mansour Abbas is backed by external powers such as the UAE and Turkey claiming that all these financial possibilities, plus the fraud in the elections, contributed to his power.

But for Nosiba, “Lies and slander” that the movement is supported from abroad. “We depend on the donations of our people, we do not have any agenda outside the Green Line. If Qatar had given us one dollar, we would not have been able to enter the coalition”.

### 3. Inside the Whale’s Belly

“We live inside the belly of the whale”, argued founder Darwish, almost on every occasion. This became Darwish’s trademark. Living inside the whale’s tummy required survival strategies or maybe just tactics.

Being part of the Palestinian national minority that was shifted to the margins of Israeli society, the IM was also aware of its unique position and conditional integration into state institutions and that the IM had no chance of ruling or acquiring state power, at least in the foreseeable future.

Darwish’s concerns were how to protect the Islamic project he initiated on the one hand and how to survive as Palestinian Muslims in the Jewish state on the other hand. These questions were the core of the IM split in 1996. Intense arguments within the IM over the Oslo Accords<sup>13</sup> and running for national elections resulted in a complete split of the movement in 1996, which created two factions, both of which identify as IM.<sup>14</sup> The “Southern faction” of Darwish was viewed as “moderate”; it recognized the Oslo Accords and ran for national elections in 1996 as part of a coalition of other Arab parties, justifying its participation as “civil jihad” (Rudnitzky 2015). The “Northern faction”, led by Sheikh Raed Salah, was viewed by many observers and officials as “radical”;<sup>15</sup> it opposed the Oslo Accords and opposed active participation in national elections, believing that participation would imply recognizing Israel as a Jewish state.

Nosiba, Darwish’s daughter, explains:

The idea of the Islamic movement escalated politically in the ‘70s where the Israeli Communist Party<sup>16</sup> was dominant and there was no Islamic umbrella. Sheikh Darwish was since the age of 16 working in local work and was greatly influenced by Islamic thought and was from a young age a reader. He read a lot and was very influenced by Hassan al-Banna, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Muhammad Abdo. The movement began in Kufr-Qasim and then spread to the rest of the areas. What distinguished him was diligence and courage. Sheikh Darwish put an Islamic thought that suits the specificity of the situation of Palestinians inside. This thought was not “copy and paste” from other experiences. We have a very special situation that differs from the whole world and everyone else. This is what the Sheikh famously described: “We live in the belly of the whale”.

Dahamsheh explained the movement’s two red lines that required moderation and pragmatism. Two red lines were taken in consensus before the split: “The first redline is Islamic law, and the second is not committing to transgressing the law. We cannot work against the laws of the state. We know that there are unjust laws, and there are laws that we do not accept, but we do not oppose them using illegal means or by carrying weapons”.

Surviving in the whale’s belly requires moderation and accepting the reality.

Ghanayem explained:

We do not have one religious or political authority; we consider ourselves part of the moderate stream of Islam that is represented today by the Ennahda Movement in Tunisia<sup>17</sup> and the Justice and Development party in Morocco, who accept the

political game. We are part of the general school of the Muslim Brothers, however, we have our own *Ijtihad* (Islamic term that means independent reasoning) taking into consideration our reality as a Palestinian minority in Israel. (Daoud 2016a)

Ghanayem was consistent with other senior IM leaders such as Ibrahim Sarsour, the first successor of Darwish, who explained the objectives of the IM, saying: “We seek a pure Muslim society of Muslims who believe that Islam is the source of power and that it is the future. We seek a modern society but one that has values based on ideology”. He further said:

I am fully convinced that the reason for the defection of Sheikh Raed Salah and the establishment of the northern wing of the Islamic movement is in essence related to the inability of the leaders of this wing to adapt to the democratic atmosphere established by the founder of the movement, Sheikh Darwish, which means respecting the legitimate decisions taken by the sovereign institutions of the movement in a free and democratic manner. In addition, the northern wing is a replica of the Islamic movement from which it splits in terms of areas of activities and quality of services. . . . “The quality of the speech” is one of the most important differences between them. The Islamic movement adopts a rational discourse that is aware of the objective conditions experienced by the Movement in particular and Arab society in general. While the northern wing adopts a tense rhetoric that has hindered the work and exposed it to a lot of official prosecutions and harassment. Moreover, in a several security incidents in which a number of those belonging to the northern wing were accused, the leaders of this wing used to come out in the Israeli media to disown these young people who broke the law, and stressed that their wing operates only within the framework of the law! This simply means that the leaders of the northern wing are returning to the policy adopted by the Islamist movement, the foundations of which were laid out by Sheikh Darwish a long time ago.

Sarsour refuted the claim that the differences within the Islamic Movement that led to Sheikh Salah’s split from it were the Knesset elections. He said: “This is simply a falsification of the facts! The leaders of the northern wing participated in all discussions and voting rounds on the decisions related to the elections, and declared their support for the decision to run for them. However, for the reasons I mentioned, they decided to defect from the Movement because they wanted to lead the scene after they lived in the shadows for many years”.

However several incidents in the past have raised doubts about the IM’s commitment to the state’s “democratic” framework and its real aspiration. One interesting example is the movement’s reaction to Kamal Khatib, deputy of the outlawed IM Northern Faction, who said in a TV interview before the outlaw that Jerusalem will not just be the capital of a Palestinian state but the “head of the Islamic Caliphate”. While Khatib faced strong criticism from secular Arab parties, the Southern Faction supported Khatib, however, with the emphasis that national issues should come first. According to Sarsour, “Now we have to focus on liberating Jerusalem from occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian full sovereign state, this to be a first step towards a bigger thing we hope for” (Nabulsi 2014). However, after criticism, Sarsour clarified his position, saying, “It is unreasonable for me to call for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Israel, and only in one case can I do that, if we wake up tomorrow morning to the news that 81% of the population of Israel have embraced the Islamic religion. We, as an Islamic movement, believe that is what is best for the Islamic and Arab countries. They must be governed by God’s law, and I did not mention Israel” (Mona Gibran 2006).

Ghanayem also agreed on the ultimate goal. However, reality requires a different strategy: “As Muslims, we do have hadiths that the caliphate will be back and Islam will eventually prevail, but we also believe in reality. We live in a specific reality inside Israel and our project in the IM is to protect our national identity through Islam” (Daoud 2016a).

The realistic/pragmatic approach of Darwish and the IM stressed his readiness to converse with anyone about the rights of the “Arab sector” in Israel and Palestinian’s rights for a state with 1967 borders: “I hold dialogue with the nearest and the farthest. I have a clear compass when holding a dialog. The most dangerous thing for a human being is to set an imaginary goal. I do not have imaginary goals” (Alqaria Net 2008). But would this approach bring *Maslaha* (benefit) for Muslims in general and the Palestinians in Israel in particular?

#### *Maslaha Mursala or Mafsada?*

When asked about the religious-Islamic sources used to justify acting within a state that defines itself not only as a Jewish state but the state of the Jews worldwide, former IM member of Knesset (MK) Masoud Ghanayem explained: “We rely on precedents of the life and biography of the Prophet (pbuh). These allow us the space to work in this reality; the prophet dealt in pragmatism with Mecca’s reality, which contradicted his beliefs and convictions. Still, he managed to coexist with this reality and further he used the available tools of that time, which were *jahili* and *kafir* [non-believer], to protect the *d’awa* [preaching for Islam] and the believers. For example, when the Prophet (pbuh) wanted to enter Mecca, he did that accompanied and protected by one of the infidels. He also made political and military alliances with many tribes who were non-believers” (Daoud 2016a).

However heated debates about entry to the Knesset required more than relying on precedents of the life and biography of the Prophet. The IM looked for *fatwas*<sup>18</sup> (religious verdicts) to judge on the issue of participation in the Knesset. *Fatwas* were used by many ruling regimes, especially in Arab countries who employed religion in the public sphere by launching religious justifications for their policies so that they could gain and maintain legitimacy (Hassanein Tawfiq in Khamis and al-Tayyar 2021).

According to Shadi Hamid (2014), recognizing the state and state power as a political fact, since the state had more responsibilities, providing education, healthcare, regulating mass media family planning, Islamic Modernists and mainstream Islamists alike made an effective distinction between matters of faith and creed, which were changeable, and matters of policy, which were not. If something was in the public interest, or *maslaha*, then it could probably be justified, and if prohibitions stood in the way of it, then there would have to be a way around it. Islamists needed to build in this flexibility, Hamid (2014) argues.

Dahamsheh explained the IM process that led to the decision to run for the national elections and seek representation in the Knesset:

In 1992, when we began thinking about entering the Knesset after the 1989 elections for local councils (the movement then succeeded in heading five councils and municipalities), we said that we were more deserving of serving our people. The people gave us confidence and gave us the local councils, so why don’t we serve them at the parliamentary level? So, I proposed the idea of the Knesset. At that time, a kind of hesitation and questioning occurred; Maybe this is forbidden. So, we decided to postpone this talk for four years in order to give time to those who wanted to ask, confirm, and be reassured. Sheikh Abdullah, may God have mercy on him, said: “Do not take the fatwa from me. I say there is nothing forbidden in it. But do not respond to me. Go for four years and ask whoever you want.

Dahamsheh continued to explain how al-Qaradawi backed away from his initial support to the IM entering the Knesset:

So about 20 people, including Sheikh Kamal Al-Khatib and Sheikh Hammad Abu Da’abes, went to Istanbul, Turkey and met with Sheikh al-Qaradawi, who said exactly the same words as Sheikh Darwish. He said, from his perspective, a legal obligation, this issue does not fall within *al-halal wa’l-haram* (The lawful and the prohibited). This is an interest sent to you. If you see that this is in your *maslaha* (interest), enter to the Knesset. But what happened next after we entered the

Knesset, al-Qaradawi changed the fatwa. I do not know why. He changed it and banned the Knesset. This happened after we entered the Knesset, and after the Brotherhood split from us in 1996. He backed away from it.

Dahamsheh stressed that the IM entry into the Knesset was supported by many other prominent Islamic scholars (See also ([Al-Jazeera 1999](#))) and that there was no single and clear opinion regarding this issue. He said,

Our reference is from within us and scholars greater than them (al-Qaradawi and those who opposed the entry into the Knesset) have approved it. I met Sheikh Muhammad al-Bouti,<sup>19</sup> the great scholar in 1997 or 1998, during a visit to Syria. I was then a member of the Knesset, and we went to him as a delegation and asked him about this topic. He said, it is not forbidden but he based his fatwa on reasons other than the reasons given by Sheikh Darwish or al-Qaradawi; He did not say *maslaha mursalah*, but he said: “In my opinion, from a *shari’a* point of view, you are like prisoners. You are under occupation, Israel that occupied you and captured you, and it is our duty to set you free. But, if we cannot free you from your prison, you have the utmost freedom, how to behave in the ways you see fit, and it is a shame for us to tell you to go to the right or the left. What you see suitable do it and it is not forbidden”.

Dahamsheh further said that they did not go to Saudi Arabia in order to get a fatwa, and those who went were IM members who “defected” from the movement—Sheikh Raed Salah and Kamal al-Khatib:

We did not go to Saudi Arabia in order to get a fatwa. We did not go to anyone, but we know who went and who met. I met once with the late Sheikh Fadl Hassan al-Abbas, dean of the University of Jordan, one of the greatest *shari’a* scholars in Jordan, and we had a friendship. They went to him from the Northern Faction Movement and put pressure on him to sign a petition banning the elections, but he refused.

Interestingly, while many regarded the entry into the Knesset as the main issue that caused the split, including the IM leaders themselves,<sup>20</sup> Dahamsheh and Sarsour stressed that this was not true. Sarsour said,

I do not think that the legitimacy of entering the elections was the reason for the defection, especially since brother Sheikh Raed Salah and the three brothers—members of the *Shura* Council of the Islamic Movement before its split (27 members)—had participated in all the discussions that took place and went beyond the issue of the Knesset legitimacy. Moreover, the General Conference of the movement, which was convened to say its final opinion on the subject, came at the request of the four brothers, headed by Sheikh Raed, and also took the decision to agree. Following the decision, we met at the house of Sheikh Abdullah Darwish, the founder and president of the Islamic Movement at the time, and we pledged to support the decision and make it a success, and Sheikh Kamal Khatib, Sheikh Raed’s deputy, came out the next day on Israeli radio in Arabic to confirm the decision and to declare his support for it. Therefore, the claim that the defection is the result of disagreement over the legitimacy of entering the Knesset is not true, especially since Sheikh Salah has not yet announced his prohibition of entering parliament, but rather announces before each election that he gives his followers the freedom to vote in line with their religious and national beliefs.

Dahamsheh gave what he thought was the correct reason for the IMNF defection:

After Rabin’s assassination, Sheikh Darwish asked them in the *Shura* Council about the issue of *al-halal wa’l-haram*, and whether they reached a conclusion. They said they were going to the Knesset and there is no sanctity. We voted by majority more than once in the *Shura* Council. In the final week, they said, “Or there will be a general conference that will decide the issue of the Knesset, or we

will defect”, and announced on television and radio that they were committed to the conference decision, but after four or five days they withdrew from the *Shura* Council and defected for other reasons. Not because of whether or not to enter the Knesset. They committed and voted after the matter was decided at the General Conference almost before the 1996 elections, and these are recorded historical facts. But they created a new narrative and believed it. They have a point of view and they could not pass it. They wanted to control the movement and when they couldn’t, they split.

#### 4. The Outlaw of the Northern Faction

To consolidate his position amid many personal and political troubles, including accusations of corruption and bribery (Breiner and Hovel 2018), right-wing Likud Party leader and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu<sup>21</sup> has taken dramatic steps to address these challenges by aiming his efforts against the Palestinian minority. His passing of Basic Law: Israel as The Nation-State of the Jewish People Law on 19 July 2018<sup>22</sup> only deepened the alienation of the Palestinian citizens, as the law states that the “right of national self-determination” in Israel “is unique to the Jewish people”. The law was passed under Netanyahu, reaffirming that Israel is a state of international Jewry—not of all its citizens—thus excluding 1.8 million (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022)<sup>23</sup> indigenous Arab citizens. Unlike most opening statements of many regular laws in Israel that define Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, this law does not include any reference to its democratic aspect. A provision that existed in earlier versions of the law was omitted in the final version of the law, which represents a significant departure from the status quo (Yousef Jabareen 2018, pp. 254–55). The law is consistent with another move made by Netanyahu when he outlawed the IMNF in November 2015 and accused it of terrorism and incitement (Daoud 2018). Netanyahu said: “Those who incite violence and subvert the state to establish an Islamic caliphate in its stead cannot refuse to accept responsibility. A democracy must protect itself from those who wish to subsume it” (the Prime Minister’s Office, in Daoud 2018).

Zaki Ighbariyyeh, a former member of the outlawed IMNF, argued that there is “an international cooperation” of world leaders against the Islamist movements, claiming they support terrorism. Netanyahu wanted to “associate his name with big events, so he incites against Palestinian citizens to gain attention” (Daoud 2018).

Considering the outlaw of the IM Northern Faction as a move directed against all Arab parties in Israel, Sami Abu Shehadeh, chairman of the National Democratic Assembly Party (NDA)<sup>24</sup>, said,

The outlawing of the Northern Islamic Movement in Israel was not for legal reasons, for a legal debate, or legal crime it committed. It was outlawed according to the emergency regulations of World War II and without the IMNF even having the right to defend itself legally. Even associations of the movement were outlawed, including civil society associations that had nothing to do with political work. It was clear to us that there is a stream in the political establishment, and even more in the security establishment, to derail the political activism of Palestinians inside the country; Anyone who is politically unacceptable to them and works outside the circle decreed for them will be outlawed. Racism towards the Palestinians inside and dealing with us as an enemy, is not a secret, this is a declared policy.

But Muhammad Kana’neh, Secretary General of *Abnaa al-Balad* (Sons of the Country)<sup>25</sup>, which opposes the Palestinians’ entry to the Knesset, did not expect the outlaw, and unlike Abu Shehadeh, he saw it as a move against every movement that opposes the integration in formal politics and participation in the national elections. He said,

I did not expect the northern faction to be outlawed, although it is not strange for the institution, which started with the Islamic movement and continued to suppress us in the political arena; Repression of young activists, female and male,

issuing travel ban orders, and I was one of them. This move was to check the pulse to attack the other organizations. When Sheikh Raed Salah was arrested in 2003 and 2004, it was a heavy blow. They hit everything related to the Sons of the Country. They hit the stream that was in opposition to official politics that is not running for the Knesset. If we had institutions like the Northern Faction, they would have outlawed us as well.

The lack of unity between the two factions was seen by IMSF as the main reason for Israel's outlawing the IMNF. Sheikh Sarsour said:

I do not doubt for a moment that if the Islamic movement was united, it would have been difficult—objectively—for Israel to depart from the law, because unity has advantages, perhaps the most important of which is the presence of a leadership that represents a variety of ideas and even moods, making it possess (brakes) that make its march safer, and therefore less exposed to aggressive attacks from any source.

Unity is considered a strategic goal for the IM, and it was expressed by every senior IM leader I interviewed. Unity was not only between the different Arab parties in Israel but also between the IM itself.

Following the death of Darwish, Sheikh Sarsour hoped that the reunion between the two IM factions was closer than ever. However, he expressed deep disappointment at the loss of a historic moment that could have unified the movement.

I expected Sheikh Raed Salah to take the courageous decision required at that pivotal stage in the history of the Palestinian Arab masses at home in general and in the history of the Islamic awakening in particular, which would have placed Sheikh Salah in the ranks of great men, but he—unfortunately—preferred narrow organizational considerations and personal calculations that fell short of making the decision that millions of the nation's sons had been waiting for. Lessons have not been drawn, and this is a major loss by all standards.

Considering the presence of Arabs on the political map in Israel is illegitimate, explained by Abu Shehadeh, who said:

If we were in a real democratic state and in a democratic system, the political weight of the votes would be completely different. This is due to the racist structure and a permanent marginalization of the Palestinian voice and the Palestinian political role. Netanyahu today, when he incites against Lapid,<sup>26</sup> he says that Lapid wants to establish a government with the presence of Arabs in it, what does that mean? It means, in Israeli, political concepts, the presence of Arabs in the political map is an illegitimate thing. Of course, we go to the elections in order to represent the concerns of our people and the issues of our people before the Israeli governments. We do not want to be part of either the Zionist left or the Zionist right.

But the “moderate” Islamic Movement wanted to be part of a Zionist coalition. Some suggested that this was out of fear or as a reaction to the outlaw of the Northern Faction.

## 5. Making History: An Islamist Party in a Zionist Coalition

“It was a picture that nobody in Israel could have imagined”, wrote TIME (Halpern 2021), describing the picture of the IM leader, Mansour Abbas, sitting alongside Naftali Bennett, the leader of the religious ultra-nationalist Zionism, and the secular centrist Yair Lapid. The three were depicted on 2 June 2021, ready to sign the coalition documents, bringing a devout Muslim and Palestinian citizen of Israel into a coalition government with the two Jewish Zionist leaders. “It was a historic moment”, Abbas later told TIME (Halpern 2021).

This entry was indeed historic. Arab parties in Israel were never part of an Israeli government, and the Arab vote was always considered illegitimate (Daoud 2009, p. 33).

There was one case in 1992 when DFPE and the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) were able to exercise a veto during the government coalition crisis in which the unity government fell apart that year. Moreover, these parties (with their five seats) formed a blocking power and blocked the Likud government from taking power. Later, they helped former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin get the Oslo agreement through the Knesset (Kaufman and Israeli in Daoud 2009, pp. 34–35).<sup>27</sup>

The entry of the Southern Movement Faction to the Zionist coalition government on 2 June 2021 was coined by the movement's leader, Mansour Abbas: "the New Way". While this was a surprising move to many others, for those who knew the history of the IM, Abbas' entry into the Zionist coalition was not surprising at all. Abd el-Rahman Magadleh, a journalist and head of the PR office in Baqa el-Garbiyyeh who first supported Abbas' New Way, said:

To understand Abbas' and the IM precedent of joining the government's coalition, we have to look back at the transformation of this movement when its founder, the late Sheikh Darwish, and others from the movement were jailed in 1981, accused of belonging to a "hostile organization". After the release of Darwish, he expressed his willingness to enter public life and run for the Knesset. He said on many occasions that the Islamic movement will not oppose cooperation and influence if the right conditions exist. This stance was known to everyone in his party, and to other politicians and those who work in the media.

Dahamsheh also stressed that Mansour did not bring anything new to the table. In an interview with him on Reshet B Radio in 1996, when the IM entered the Knesset for the first time represented by the United Arab List (Ra'am in Hebrew), he expressed his willingness to work with the Likud or the Labor Party and with "Whoever cooperates with me for the benefit of my people, I am ready to cooperate with him. My statement on that day caused an earthquake, everyone started calling me and asking me about this. I replied that I was ready to resign but without playing a role between the two big blocs, I have nothing to do in the Knesset. How would I get anything if I was in the pocket of the left that was then in opposition? I must be the winning card. The difference is that I only stated this while Mansour did it in a big and international way".

The unique opportunity to become part of a Zionist coalition was first created by Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister (2009–2021), who initiated secret negotiations with Abbas for his party's entry into Netanyahu's coalition. It was due to political and personal reasons and not for democratic principles or the belief in the incorporation of Arabs in the decision-making process, as explained by Magadleh:

Lacking of a Jewish majority that could save his government and facing serious corruption charges in three lawsuits, Netanyahu wanted to form a government that helps him pass a law that prevents a trial of a sitting prime minister. Thus, he gave legitimacy for the United List to be part of his coalition knowing that this party is more willing to accept such a thing than other Arab parties (DFPE and NDA). These secret meetings were revealed a few months ago in the Hebrew media. But Netanyahu's plan did not see daylight, because of the strong opposition of the right-wing MKs to having Abbas and his party in the coalition.

United to prevent Netanyahu from winning another election, other Arab parties agreed to support a Zionist coalition that opposed Netanyahu's coalition, creating a situation where the whole idea of Arab parties supporting government coalitions was legitimate. Former MK from the Arab Party that is no longer represented in the Knesset, Hasan Ken'an, said:

Abbas is not considered a man of the Islamic Awakening. Abbas is a charismatic figure who has influence on the movement's institutions and the members of the *Shura* Council. He is a son of the Islamic movement, but he is not an ideological man. He is looking for a role and influence. This did not happen in the past: a party of four members wanted to be part of the coalition. Abbas was able to influence to a certain extent and was present all the time in the media.

However, Kana'neh held the other Arab parties equally responsible for Abbas's move. He said:

Who paved the way for Abbas are Oudeh, Tibi, and Mtanes Shehadeh (leaders of DFPE, The Arab Movement of Renewal, and NDA). They are the ones who recommended Gantz and Lapid<sup>28</sup> on more than one round. They knew Bennett would rotate as prime minister. These paved the way for Abbas. They say they have conditions for their entry. They always justify. They wanted to be in the coalition in place of Abbas.

Abbas's explanation for his move was that only from within a government, and not being in opposition, can his party improve the status of the Arabs in Israel and influence policies on main issues concerning them, including crime, housing, education, budgets to Arab localities, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In a tweet<sup>29</sup> on 11 August 2021, Abbas said, “I came to politics with a moral and a valet mission: to promote a tolerant political dialogue and real partnership for the good of all state citizens. It is not enough to pray for peace, we have to act to achieve it” (Abbas 2021). Later, in another tweet (23 November 2021), Abbas asserted, “The times when we were just a number lacking any influence and meaning in Israel's politics has ended”.

The message of Abbas appealed to many. Magadleh was one of them. He explained his early support for Abbas:

Abbas spoke about a new way that intended to influence the decision-making process and Israel politics where Arabs do not stay sitting on the bench watching the game, screaming and opposing without real influence but rather inside the game achieving goals and rights for the Arab society in Israel. Getting closer to the “plate” will result in getting better financial opportunities and budgets. I and many others supported this.

Kana'neh also said that the outlaw of the Northern Faction and budgets played a role in that decision. He said,

The Northern ban gave the Southern Branch strength and some people in it got scared and went to the Southern wing. The relief institutions are with them and on the financial level they are strong. Having five members in the Knesset means a huge budget.

IM MK Eman Yassin Khatib, the only veiled woman member in the Israeli Knesset, asked:

Do we want to be present or partners in the government? The question that must be asked first is whether we should be in the Knesset in the first place. I say yes. There is no other alternative to organizing as a group. There is no solution except in parliament, and since we have entered, it is wrong to be neutral or in opposition. I say this from experience, although it is less than a year. How we were in the previous session we got more abilities in controlling many things. We are fully aware that we live in a Jewish-Zionist state, but it is right to be within the coalition because the possibilities of influencing important issues have accumulated over decades is much greater. The experience is not easy and it has many contradictions with our creed/doctrine. We are citizens of the Jewish state and there is conflict between the Palestinian national identity and the civil identity that is Israeli. Recently, after the judicial coup, we had a role and an initiative. We met with professional people and the state's president<sup>30</sup> and requested fair and equal status. Prior to this discussion with the president, the focus was on everyday issues of violence and crime. There is no possibility of participation in the public sphere if there is no effective participation in the coalition.

Crossing every line as an Islamist and as a Palestinian, according to many, Abbas was faced with strong opposition and criticism from within and outside of his party. Some

accused him of treason. Kana'neh argued that Abbas's move was an ultimate betrayal of the Palestinian national cause:

This is how Dr. Abbas Mansour justifies his entry, "If you go to the Knesset, the entry into the coalition is taken for granted". This is the logic of people today. This is a consumer society. They say we received 4,000,000 shekels; that's how they calculate things. The Islamic Movement uses this as a justification for treason. The theoretical position says that entering the Zionist Knesset is a betrayal. The national movement cannot enter the parliament of a colonial entity and agree to its right to exist on our land. The entry of Bennett's government, which is based on arrests, assassinations, killings, and incursions into Al-Aqsa Mosque, the government with all its composition is responsible. This is a rise in the ladder of betrayal".

An IMNF activist, who comes from the opposite side of the spectrum where Kana'neh is, expressed concern and discontent with Abbas's entry into the coalition:

When Mansour Abbas entered the Knesset, I had a strong crisis and questions; Is this politically bad for us? I started to rethink things again and wonder if Mansour's step could be a mistake, and in my opinion, it is a mistake because he separated the religious from the political from the social from the civil, and focused only on the immediate things; Fighting crime, the economic situation, as if we are trading our identity and collective memory and things that make us a society with other civil things that should be natural rights and must come automatically. There's a law that says I'm not equal, but because they gave NIS 5,000,000 I have to shut up and swallow this frog. They called Abbas, Abu Raghal.<sup>31</sup> Treason is not a simple label. They used religious collective memory to present their position on this issue.

Secular DFPE member Elias Abu Oksa listed Abbas's many actions that harmed Arab rights:

Abbas received promises that were not actualized. They promised him billions, divided by several years, but these promises are gone with the collapse of the government. Not a penny was transferred. Abbas said that he will support the coalition for the people's benefit and will not interfere in the state's affairs and security matters. In other words; blindly. He translated his "New Way" by voting against the Arab parties supporting racist laws including the Kamenets law, enacted in 2017, that confirms Arab house demolitions, voted against Palestinian family union, against connecting Arab houses to electricity, against canceling the entry test to universities that works mostly against the Arab students and against forming a committee to investigate violence in the Arab localities.

Expressing deep discontent with Abbas's actions, Ibrahim Sarsour, one the most prominent leaders of the IM and its former leader, said, "The IM rejects Abbas' statements regarding the normalization with Israel and the Jewish nature of the state and considers it a deviation from its religious and national conventions". Sarsour further called Abbas to commit to "the IM in spirit and actions".

Activist Zuhriyyeh 'Azab considered Abbas' actions to constitute a phenomenon that is not new but one that is connected to the failed process of Israelization.<sup>32</sup> She said,

The system does not want the Arab citizens to enjoy equal rights, and treats them with racism, stealing their rights. Mansour Abbas did not add anything to our rights as Arabs in this state. Even budgets we did not see due to continuing failures of governments and going to many elections. Abbas does not represent the Palestinians; he is a bad example of everything religious and national. He has no connection to Islam whatsoever except for, maybe, praying like us but nothing more than that.

Magadleh was even more harsh in his criticism. He said:

There is absolutely no excuse for what Abbas and the United List have done. Even the claims that we received budgets are not a reason to relinquish our Islamic and national fundamentals. In my view, Abbas, in his attitudes and statements, had crossed his limits as a representative of the Palestinian people and also crossed God's lines when he said that "Israel was created as a Jewish state and will remain Jewish regardless of what others may think".

Using religion to gain political support was criticized by Zuhair Yahya, a former mayor of Kufr Qare':

They make a drama from religion. They have nothing to benefit society other than keep saying: the prophet said this and the prophet said that. Abbas before he starts his political speeches, he begins by mentioning the prophet and calls for a collective prayer. What did Mansour Abbas accomplish? He said he entered the coalition to improve the situation of the Arabs in Israel. 250 times the house demolition in the Negev had increased. People vote because of religion first and then due to the financial factor. The masses of the Islamic Movement are tired of being in the opposition and want influence from within. The public supports this idea, but right-wing Minister (of Interior) Ayelet Shaked did not give them this opportunity.

While Mansour's opposition grew among his party members and supporters, no action was taken to remove him from its leadership. Magadleh explained why this did not happen:

Inside the IM, there is discontent towards the pragmatic way of Abbas and that was expressed in the mass media and social media but due to personal interests, they are not acting against him. Sarsour, the former leader of the IM, said in a post that Abbas' actions are against everything the IM believes in and that he is against it. Abbas issued statements that harmed the Palestinian narrative and the historic positions of the Palestinians inside [Israel], ignoring the war on Gaza that the government that he was part of waged.

Also, former KM Hasan Ken'an said: "Masoud Ghanayem was against the entry of the United List into the coalition, but within the establishment of the movement he cannot say that he is against". But Dahamsheh opposed how the media presented the opposition of two senior IM members, Ibrahim Sarsour, and Massoud Ghanayem, who went against IM entering the Zionist coalition, saying:

Mansour said we don't want to be in anyone's pocket, and we want to be the winning card. I can understand why our two brothers opposed and they opposed it respectfully. But Mansour won an overwhelming majority in the *Shura* Council. In the end, they maintained their affiliation and obeyed the decision of the majority (there are 20 to 30 elected members of the *Shura* Council) and the agreement and discussion were conducted democratically.

But Abbas was not only attacked by main Arab parties' leaders and activists within Israel but also by some far-right supporters who accused Prime Minister Bennett of bringing a "terror supporter" into the coalition. Moreover, Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, criticized Abbas for joining the coalition, and Sheikh Kamal Khatib, vice president of the outlawed IM Northern Faction, tweeted describing Abbas's behavior as "treasonous" (Khatib 2022). Abbas's reaction to these accusations was a complete denial of connection to Hamas, the Muslim Brothers, or extremism. He argued that the United List is not an agent of anyone and that "it stems its legitimacy from its voters. Its compass is directed towards the benefits of the Arab society in Israel" (Abbas 2022). Years before that, and shortly after the start of the first Palestinian uprising, "Intifada" in 1987, Darwish wrote in *Assenara*, a newspaper published in Nazareth, that "we are not Hamas, Hamas does not represent us, and we do not represent Hamas" (Abu Helal 2018, p. 54).

Casting away from Hamas and the Palestinians in the OPT was not new. Back to founder Darwish, who argued that Palestinians in the OPT should be responsible for their own decisions and choose by elections between the path of “resistance” represented by *Hamas* and the path of negotiation represented by *Fatah* (Gazzar 2008) to Sarsour, who said after a terror attack on four Arab citizens of Israel in Shaf’amr city in Northern Israel, rejecting vengeance against Israeli targets suggested by some Palestinian groups in the OPT, “As Arabs in Israel, we will not tolerate vengeance, both because in principle we oppose the murder of civilians and because we are convinced that linking between the Shaf’amr massacre and events in the territories will only harm”.

Following the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel, Mansour Abbas strongly condemned the attacks, calling them “inhumane and go against the values of Islam” (Blitzer 2023; Rudnitzky 2015; Abbas 2023a, 2023b). Moreover, when his party member, MK Iman Khatib-Yasin, said in an interview that Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) footage did not show the rape of women and that Hamas did not slaughter babies, Abbas objected to her statement, saying that “There is ‘no place in the party’ for minimizing Hamas atrocities” and called for her resignation. Khatib did not resign but apologized (Pacchiani and TOI Staff 2023).

Ameer Makhoul, a Palestinian political analyst and citizen of Israel, commented on Mansour’s reactions to the events since October, saying, “The entire behavior of Abbas during the war, especially his rebuke his party member and MK Eman Khatib asking her to step down because of her statements (See (Gianluca Pacchiani and TOI Staff 2023)), and his entire political methodology is based on keeping himself acceptable to the Israeli ruling elites. Currently, he is open to any government that does not reject him and does not worry whether it is right or center, because he does not want to interfere with political decision-making, but rather with the service level, as he did with Bennett and Lapid coalition government. In my opinion, he is very interested, and he sees the usefulness of his movement as a basis if it is in the coalition. The war benefited him politically because the people adopted a pragmatic approach and adopted silence, which for him is the optimal mentality for the Arabs. It was remarkable though, the Israeli media paid attention to his positions, still, they did not believe him such as Ayala Hassoun of the First Channel, who accused him of supporting Hamas”.<sup>33</sup>

But if Darwish was still alive, would he not have given his blessing to this entry? Daughter Nosiba said: “I think in the days of my father there was no opportunity like that and here the opportunity arose. I can’t predict whether he will agree or not to enter the coalition, but I don’t think he’s going to oppose a move that contributes to and protects his community. This opportunity was created, and I was very supportive of it. If I had a second chance, I would support it again. The experience was historic, unprecedented for any Arab party, but also this was the first step”.

Nosiba evaluated the experience, saying:

This is something new, and we faced strong opposition. Every experience has mistakes, and who works a lot makes a lot of mistakes. We discussed the matter and evaluated it in the Political Council and the *Shura* Council, the first arm is authorized to take decisions and the second to make recommendations and draw lessons from experience. There are things that don’t go outside. We entered the coalition for less than a year in which there were a lot of achievements. That was the most period in which the *Shura* Council was held to make decisions. We did not sleep. Very difficult experience, and we paid a very high price. We came to serve and had to endure atonement and treason.

Entering the coalition now rather than earlier, Abu Shehadeh thought that Ibrahim Nimr Darwish was ready to make concessions like Abbas did, if not more, but such concessions did not transpire due to differences in the time period of the two scenarios. Abu Shehadeh said, “at the time of Darwish, the national movement in the inside and abroad and the situation generally in the Arab world in the 1980s towards Israel and the issues of normalization are not like today. In those days, there were people who put limits for him. But he and Abbas did not differ in essence”.

Interestingly, Abbas was angrier at the Arab parties, which accused him of abandoning the Palestinian cause and the national fundamentals. He accused them of spreading lies and trying to distort the reality about the United List, insisting he achieved big accomplishments, which served the Arabs in Israel, saying: “Just in a few months in the coalition, we achieved what those who try to embarrass us failed to achieve”. On Abbas’s party’s Facebook page, al-Qaema al-Arabiyya al-Muwahada published in Arabic, there are many examples of the achievements of Abbas’s party, including the reduction in violence and crime in Arab localities by 40%, the recognition of three previously un-recognized Arab villages in the Negev area by the government, the base of Abbas’s support, and the allocation of five billion NIS to the Negev area (See for example [United Arab List \(2022\)](#) Facebook 22 and 25 December 2022). Abbas also argued that his approach would positively impact the Arab–Jewish relations inside Israel, which would result in a positive push to achieving peace based on a two-state solution. Relying on a survey conducted by the leading Hebrew TV news channel, Channel 13, [Abbas \(2022\)](#) took pride that 53% of the Arabs in Israel supported his decision-making in the coalition. Abbas further argued that the actual number is even higher than that.

But Magadleh questions:

Should we celebrate if they open a school or pave a road for us? We are the indigenous people of this land and budgets are our basic rights as citizens. We should not accept this humiliation because conditional rights are not rights but blackmailing and dispossession of our freedoms being inside the coalition or outside it.

While the many efforts to reunite the two IM factions failed, the March 2015 national elections saw an unprecedented unification of the four major Arab parties (DFPE, NDA, the Arab Party for Renewal<sup>34</sup>, and the Islamic Movement IMSF), who all formed a united list, called a Joint Arab List (JAL)<sup>35</sup>, for the first time in their history ([Eg lash 2015](#)). The list achieved 13 mandates (out of 120) and became the third-largest party in the Knesset, with 2 of the 13 members coming from the IM. In the 2020 elections, the party achieved 15 seats and remained the third-biggest party in Israel.

Commenting on this unity and the historic achievement of the Arab parties, IM member and former MK Ghanayem asserted his convictions about this unity, saying: “We are eager to keep this unity and regard it a strategy and not a tactic because it is the answer to the biggest challenge for us as a minority in Israel”. However, this unity was deeply damaged due to Abbas’ actions.

However, an examination of Abbas’ “New Way” reveals a total renunciation of the traditional IM political behavior and contradicts Abbas’s New Way announcement itself, which claimed to serve the Arab citizens of Israel and help to promote peace efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. In February 2021, Abbas decided to leave and break up with JAL.

Using a controversial bill as an excuse to break away from that unity, Abbas claimed that there was increasing pressure on himself and his party to leave the Arab Joint List after the vote on a bill that banned accessible conversion therapy for gay individuals ([Zaken 2020](#)). The bill stirred harsh criticism against the secular leader of the Joint List, Ayman Odeh of DFPE, who was accused of betraying Muslim-Arab values for supporting gay rights. Abbas, who was not yet in the coalition, accused Odeh of creating a rift with the Arab public that elected him, arguing that the traditional, religious public demands that Odeh “limits himself to dealing with the burning issues of Arab society, and not deal with this one especially sensitive topic” ([Zaken 2020](#)).

After the rejection of other JAL parties, an ultimatum from the IM to vote against LGBTQ issues and to have greater freedom with voting was given to the right-wing parties ([Zon shine 2021](#)).

Abu Shehadeh explains the break-up of JAL, blaming Abbas for it.

Mansour Abbas, after entering the Knesset and studying the game more deeply, decided that the way of political action among the Palestinians inside the front,

represented by DFPE and NDA is far from his vision, line and thought. So, this is why there was constant tension in the relationship when we were together in the Joint. He went and worked behind the Joint several times with Netanyahu and the people who represented Netanyahu because he knew that this was unacceptable to us, and then he decided to split the Joint, not because he was oppressed or took less than he deserves. The opposite is true. The Islamic Movement taking much more weight than it deserved (4 members, and we had three).

But was Abbas's split from JAL and his entry into the coalition motivated by personal ambition or budgets?

Sami Abu Shehadeh had a different explanation. He says that the most important thing for the IM Southern Branch is that Israel does not do to them as it did to the Northern Branch (referring to the outlaw of the IMNF by Netanyahu) so that they can keep the *d'awa*: "The most important thing is to preserve the projects of religion and the teachings of the Qur'an. That's the basis they have. The Palestinian issue is already solved since God has promised them victory, and they believe in this, until they win, they do not have to take political steps, but they have to pray, fast, do pilgrimage, and please Allah". He further said:

Mansour represents a religious trend that has a certain reading regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and this religious reading allows him to do things that we cannot do. Religious reading is relative and there is nothing clear and agreed upon. According to his understanding, he is in a winning battle: God promised him that he would eventually win.

Abu Shehadeh explained why many had voted for Abbas and his list:

Secular people do not go to holy places on a daily basis so they do not know their power and importance; they are unaware of the role of the mosque, the church, and the synagogue. A large part of IM voters, voted for Zionist parties like the Likud, Labor, and Meretz because they believe the way the other Arab parties operate is unacceptable. They gave up, they don't want to fight, and they don't want rights or equality. For them, the battle is over, and they want to take from Israel what is given them and say "thank you". They don't want justice, freedom, or an end to the occupation and all the major issues because they don't believe all of this can be achieved. They give up the right to justice and equality, and anything they receive is seen as more than they deserve. When a person is psychologically defeated and a *fait accompli*, they call it the politics of realism. But this is a surrender to reality, since they accept that the Jewish citizen is better and entitled to more and accept that Israel is Jewish and will remain Jewish, and that the Jews have rights and they do not. Mansour Abbas solved a serious problem for them. They were ashamed and felt that they were doing something wrong [voting for Zionist parties] until Mansour came and said: Come, I am an Islamic party, talk like the Zionist parties.

Still, Magadleh criticized Abbas on this point, saying that with the United List, Abbas had voted on a 90 million NIS budget in favor of the homosexual population and did not object to sitting in a coalition that would include four prominent gay individuals.

However, if Islamic law is a red line, as expressed by Dahamsheh, and if the reason, or one of the reasons, for the IM dismantling the JAL was its support of gay rights, why did the IM enter a Zionist coalition that supports gay rights and allocates money to gay people? Dahamsheh strongly rejected the idea that the IM was responsible for the break-up of the United List, explaining the disagreement on the gay issue: "We are against the gay issue, and this was one of the reasons for the disagreement and conflict between us within the community on this issue. As for them, they support them on the basis of freedom, democracy, and other reasons. But our departure from the joint was decided by the joint itself, as they met, the three parties, and left us before the penultimate elections and did not invite us to the session. They gathered in Shaf'amr and the statement was ready. They

agreed to work against us, and they expected or desired that if they stood together and expelled the Islamic movement, we would fall”.

Explaining the gay controversy with JAL, Dahamsheh further said, “We entered the coalition, but the government is not ours. It is an agreement between contracting parties to meet on certain lines and vote together to preserve the government that emerged from this coalition. This does not mean that the government has become an Islamic movement. This government has parties that support homosexuals, and just as they cannot force us to vote against our religion and conscience and against the red lines we have set, we cannot force them and prevent them from supporting homosexuals. Does it mean that we have become a gay government?”

Whether the reason for the cast-away of the IM from the other Arab parties was political or based on religion, the IM sailed far away from the Arab consensus, and it seems extremely hard, but not impossible, for unity to happen. Nosiba Darwish said,

I was the campaign director of the women’s work in the Joint. A deep rift has occurred between the United and the Joint List and this is not because of us. It is difficult to ally again with them. We wanted to unite the Arab community in order to get the largest representation, and regardless of the number of seats won by the Joint was not qualitative or influential, and when we got four seats, their impact was much greater than 15 seats. The reason we didn’t continue with them was that they didn’t compromise on a set of agendas. If we are in the coalition or in the opposition, we do not follow slogans, we came to serve the people. United has come a long way. The Arab parties are better fragile, and without mentioning names, after five or 10 years, some parties will disappear, and in return the Islamic movement will strengthen.

Abu Shehadeh also thought that unity with the IM and Abbas as its party’s leader was impossible. He said, “As long as Mansour is present in the political stream in which he is right now, he cannot sit with NDA, this is out of the question. This man proposes a political program that is different from all the consensus that existed among the Palestinian parties inside. We (Arab parties) are different political parties and streams, and there are matters that are debatable. We do not agree on everything, but on the issue of the Jewishness of the state, for example, there is agreement that there is a problem when Israel defines itself as a Jewish state; This has dangerous implications for the Palestinians’ status in the inside. This was an agreement and a consensus between the Arab parties. Mansour broke with this consensus”.

Abu Shehadeh continued:

The discussion between us, DFPE and Tibi (The Arab Movement for Renewal—*Ta’al* in Hebrew) was about the political program and the political reading, and much more with Mansour. We are very far from it. If Mansour leaves, they have to revise their political line. It’s not about seats and chairs. We are a political party with a political platform. We don’t want the existing situation to turn into a hostile one. We came to serve our people and society and if we can convince them of our political program, unity is possible, and Mansour if he considered himself, it is possible, but my assessment is that he will not back down. There are many people applauding Mansour Abbas locally and internationally. He is happy with the polls: they applaud him that he is a brave political leader and he is happy with this illusion and he will remain in it.

While Sarsour blames DFPE the most for the break of JAL, his tone, however, was more unifying:

DFPE and the Communist Party, and less are the rest of the components of the Joint, worked to tear the unity of the Joint by fabricating crises, and trying to imposing their vision on the rest of JAL’s components, feeding conflicts between them, and disrespecting the religious and national constants of the Arab community inside, which ended with conspiring against the JAL and pushing it outside

the joint, which we consider the beginning of the countdown to the disappearance of JAL.

Since unity is not only a tactic for the IM, unifying again is not only possible but required as a response to the response to many challenges, including Israel's Jewish nationalist extremism and increasing racism. Sarsour said that despite JAL's complete defection and disappearance from the scene in the 2023 elections, it is not just an electoral political tactic to raise the number of seats of Arab parties—despite its importance—but a strategic project whose objectives go beyond the electoral context to try to organize all the Arab mass national political action in the country and to invest in meeting on the unified and the common, on the one hand, and considering the ideological and political differences between Arab parties and the IM within the framework of legitimate pluralism, where each recognizes the right of the other to be different, and unites with the IM in common grounds.

## 6. Conclusions

There is no theory to explain the uniqueness of the Islamic Movement in Israel. It operates in a Jewish majority state that has no constitution or bill of rights and identifies itself as a Jewish state for the Jewish people, leaving no room, at least in the foreseeable future, for any realistic possibility that the IM will be in power. Based on interviews with all IM leaders, it is clear that the movement is an “institutional” Islamist movement that accepted the rules of the political game imposed upon them in a Jewish state. The IM also does not call for the creation of an Islamic state in Israel, and the leaders who issued statements on this matter were quick to refute it or to explain that the reality of Palestinians in Israel does not allow such a scenario.

During the two and half years of political chaos in Israel that resulted in a situation where there was no possibility of forming a government without major ideological compromise (Jerusalem Post Staff 2006), a unique opportunity was created for the IM to become part of a Zionist coalition.

“I don't think so”, Sarsour replied on whether the experience of entering a government coalition can be repeated. He explained that he previous experience, with its “pros and cons, did not reflect the conviction of the Islamic Movement and its political arm (the United Arab List) as much as it was an investment in a golden opportunity to influence”. The sharp division in the Israeli political party map two years ago, he added, “provided the opportunity not only to enter the coalition, but to impose an agenda that would result in qualitative achievements for the Arab community that would not have been achieved without the need of the Zionist parties to unite and to establish a Government of Change. There is no doubt that entering the coalition in addition to its qualitative achievements in terms of budgets and preferential policies, it imposed a political reality that greatly torpedoed the exclusionary tendency adopted by the majority, if not all, of the Zionist parties, which refused under any circumstances to rely on the Arab voice in resolving many national issues that, according to them, affect sensitive Zionist issues. For the first time in Israel's history, this axiom has been defeated, which Netanyahu's right-wing parties have spoken out about explicitly. In other words, the entry of the United Arab List did not reflect the conviction of the two parties as much as it expressed a “need” that imposed itself from which there was no escape. In sum, I don't think that an opportunity like this one could be repeated in the foreseeable future”.

But opposing Arab parties who were very critical of the IM entering the coalition thought that: “the only thing that they got is a few budgets that were declared by the government. So it's bargaining our national and civil rights with some budgets that we might get and we might not get”.<sup>36</sup>

Abdullah Nimr Darwish, founder of the Islamic Movement in Israel, described the peculiarity of the situation of Palestinians inside Israel, such as those who live in the belly of the whale, and this required stepping down from jihad and the use of violence to the adoption of legal methods for their political action. Entering the Knesset aimed to protect itself and the Islamic *d'awa* for which it was established. Living in the belly of the whale

also required the adoption of what Sheikh Sarsour described as the “gray zone”, a foggy area in which tactical matters can sometimes be waived to protect the national and Islamic strategic interests of the movement. This is the same tactic that prevented the movement from disintegrating after entering the government coalition despite the protests of some of its members.

Sheik Ibrahim Sarsour reiterated that the Palestinian Arabs in Israel do not stand between the choices of good and bad but always stand between the choices of bad and worse, suggesting that the Palestinians in Israel live in the gray zone. He said: “The gray zone” as we understand in the Islamic movement means “foggy” or more precisely “ambiguity”, not in the general supreme constants, principles, and purposes, which must be clear and unambiguous. . . . Perhaps the principle adopted by the Islamic movement, which is “firmness in constants and flexibility in means”, is the closest to explaining what I asked about. . . . Finally, for a deeper understanding of the Islamic landscape: There are two things in life that go hand-in-hand: strategy and tactic. Tactics may sometimes force you to make some non-essential concessions in order to serve the strategy, which you should not reveal all at once. On the contrary, most of them should remain mysterious (close to the chest, as they say), revealing only what serves the goal. He further explained the Palestinian and Islamic reality in Israel: “Our Palestinian reality inside Israel should invite us to adopt the theory of the “gray zone” and the “pragmatism/lofty realism”, especially since we live in a vacuum that cannot be ignored in terms of the Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic leadership’s erasure of our national group as part of a future solution with Israel. Everyone has recognized that we are an integral part of the state of Israel and therefore we must “take off our thorns ourselves” and not wait for the Savior of our borders!

Ideologically, the IM continues the legacy of its leader, Darwish, of rejecting a hard ideological line, fearing Muslims in Israel would reject it, and as a result, the IM would lose support mainly among Muslims who emphasize religiosity and conservatism but reject extremism.

Although the movement’s achievements within the government coalition were limited, not only because of the coalition’s short life but also because of the movement’s priorities, which gave up its constants and traded it with some material benefits, it seems that the movement’s audience looks positively at this issue and continues to support the IM entry into future Zionist coalitions (This assessment was before the recent war on Gaza), this is a matter not decided by the IM or its party’s audience alone, as many Zionist parties and the Israeli public opinion do not want this experience to be repeated. Based on several polls conducted in 2022, an overwhelming majority of Israelis (70 percent by Jerusalem Post poll and 50 percent by Channel 12 poll) said that they do not want to see an Arab Party in any future government (See [Hoffman 2022](#); [MEMO 2022](#)). While it is too early to assess the impact of the current war on the future of the IM, it seems that the IM will continue in two parallel lines: the first is the continuation of the Islamic call among its electorate and the Palestinian citizens, which has proven to be effective in attracting this audience against secular and Zionist Arab parties at the same time, and the second track is its continuing emphasis on moderation in the political aspect and dealing with the state and its institutions to avoid possible persecution and incitements that are expected towards all Arab parties in Israel.

There is widespread scholarly literature and media accounts that Islamist movements have political advantages over their opponents, appealing to the masses and winning elections ([Cammett and Luong 2014](#)). But [Esposito \(2001\)](#) argued that in the next few decades, we will witness more Islamization from below as well as the possibility of Islamists coming to power through elections and that, if governments do not open up the system, Islamists in the long term will weaken. I believe this is also true in the case of the IM in Israel. Even if it joins a coalition in the future, a scenario that looks so far away after 7 October 2023, it will not be able to influence any major state’s policies, but it will continue to widen its electoral base and achieve some concrete limited material goals. Hence, it seems that the only solution in the near future is to restore the cohesion of the Islamic Movement with

the rest of the Arab parties and restore JAL, especially in the face of the serious challenges facing the Palestinians in Israel following the recent war on Gaza on 2023.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use Political Islam and Islamism interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the works of Gudrun Krämer, Shadi Hamid, Tariq Ramadan, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Wael Hallaq, Sami Zubaida, among many others.

<sup>3</sup> Also, *shari‘ah* or *sharia*; as Islam makes no distinction between religion and life, Islamic law covers not only ritual but many aspects of life. See (Campo n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> It means “*The House of Islam*”. Dar al-Islam is a concept used in medieval Islamic legal and political thought to differentiate territories under Muslim rule where the sharia is followed from those that are not. In the dar al-Islam, the sharia was observed, and non-Muslim residents were to be given “protected” (dhimmi) status as long as they paid their taxes and did not act to subvert the Islamic religious and political order. See (Campo n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Many official documents do not recognize the Palestinians but rather refer to them as “non-Jews”.

<sup>6</sup> Also spelled Darweesh.

<sup>7</sup> Was jailed for four years and was released in *al-Nawras* Prisoners Swap (also called Jebreel Prisoner’s Swap) between Israel and Jebreel in 1985. See (Al-Quds Al-Arabi 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Usrat al-Jihad included 60 youths from four cities: Umm el-Fahm, Baqa el-Gharbiyya, Qalansawa, and Kufr Qare’. They formed a military group, bought weapons, and regarded themselves in a war against Israel’s injustices. Darwish was the symbol of this group and one of the initiators, and thus, the name of the IM became attached to him as the founder. See (Abu Helal 2018, pp. 42–43).

<sup>9</sup> Darwish passed away on 14 May 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Similar layers of identity were made by Nosiba’s father, Nimr Darwish (see Wittes 2015). Nosiba, though, adds another layer of being a woman (interview by the author).

<sup>11</sup> DFPE is a mixed Arab–Jewish list. It was created in 1977 under the dominant leadership of the Israeli Communist Party of Israel (CPI).

<sup>12</sup> Political pluralism among Palestinian citizens developed in the 1980s with the emergence of the Islamic Movement, the Progressive List for Peace, the Arab Democratic Party, and a number of regional and local organizations. For more on the political Arab parties in Israel, (see Daoud 2009; Ghanem and Mustafa 2018; Neuberger 1997; Odeh 2023; The Israel Democracy Institute n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> The *Oslo Accords* are a set of agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993. According to these agreements, Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel’s right to exist.

<sup>14</sup> Prior to the outlaw of the IMNF in 2015, the two factions had separate institutions, ran separately in local elections, and held separate religious and national events.

<sup>15</sup> Former IM MK Ghanayem dismisses the use of “moderate” and “radical”, saying these are “relative terms and that Islam is not an extreme religion but a moderate one”. See (Daoud 2016b).

<sup>16</sup> The Communist Party was the only non-Zionist party that was allowed to function by law in Israel. Reasons include the fact that there was a Jewish element in the party and the desire to maintain a channel to the Soviet Union. For more on the topic, see (Segev 2007).

<sup>17</sup> The Ennahda Party is seen as an example of the balance between modernity and Islam. It won Tunisia’s elections following the 2011 popular uprising. When it took power in 2012, it declared that Islam would not be the primary source of legislation in the

new constitution, abandoning the traditional connection between religion and politics in Muslim contexts. As a result, Ennahda was accused of betraying the Tunisians who gave it their votes, trading religion to gain power.

*fatwa* is an opinion based on knowledge of the Quran and the *sunna* of Muhammad. It is given orally or in writing. See Encyclopedia of Islam.

Al-Bouti was considered one of the most influential Muslim scholars in the world. He wrote more than 60 books on various Islamic issues and was considered an important scholar of Sufism. He was killed in April 2013 during the civil war in Syria. See (Basma Atassi 2013).

See, for example, (Neuberger 1997, p. 200; Dakwar 2007, p. 83; Al-Jazeera 2015).

Netanyahu has been the current prime minister of Israel since 2022 (elections were held in November 2022). He also served as prime minister from 1996 to 1999 and 2009 to 2021, making him the longest-serving PM in Israel. “Netanyahu Bloc” included four right-wing lists, which won a majority of 64 seats.

The Knesset narrowly passed this law, the 14th basic law, with a vote of 62–55.

There are about two million Palestinian Arabs in Israel, 21% of the total Israeli population of 9.506 million people. See (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022). 1 May 2022.

NDA (Balad in Hebrew) was established prior to the elections for the 14th Knesset in 1996. In political terms, it is at the far left of the spectrum of Israeli parties. NDA champions turning the State of Israel into a “state of all of its citizens”. See (The Israel Democracy Institute n.d.). Political Parties-Balad. <https://en.idi.org.il/israeli-elections-and-parties/parties/balad/> (accessed on 28 November 2023).

According to Kana’neh, in March 2021, following a dispute with Raja Ighbaria, the movement split again (unity happened in 2012) mainly over the issue of entering the Knesset, which Kana’neh and others in the movement opposed.

Yair Lapid, former prime minister and leader of “Yesh Atid”. There is a Future Party, a main opposition party to PM Netanyahu’s Likud Party currently in power.

It is worth noting here that the IM was not yet represented in the Knesset, and the NDA and the Arab Movement for Renewal parties were not yet created.

Benny Gantz, head of the Blue and White Party and former Defense Minister of Israel from 2020 to 2021. He is considered Netanyahu’s most viable challenger. Yaer Lapid was Israel’s prime minister in the Bennett–Lapid government formed in June 2021–2022. He was also in opposition to Netanyahu. However, after the October 7th attacks, Gantz joined Netanyahu’s unity government while Lapid refused to join.

Interestingly, all of Abbas’s tweets on Twitter and on X Platform were/are in Hebrew.

Isaac Herzog has been the 11th president of Israel since 2021.

Abu Raghal is an Arab figure described as a symbol of betrayal, so every Arab traitor is called Abu Raghal. The Arabs before Islam had a ritual of stoning the tomb of Abu Raghal after the pilgrimage.

A concept developed by Israeli sociologist Sammy Smootha that describes the Palestinian citizens’ adjustment to their minority status, recognizes Israel’s right to exist, and accepts the Israeli culture as a subculture, accepting Israel’s institutions and democracy, seeing their future as firmly tied to Israel.

For the general reaction of the Palestinians in Israel, see (Arik Rudnitzky 2015). On a tightrope: Israel’s Arab citizens and the War Between Israel and Hamas. The Israel Democracy Institute. November 13. <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/51473> (accessed on 18 December 2023).

All three parties are secular. The IM is the only Islamic party.

This alliance was a result of Israel raising the threshold for the percentage of votes required for a party to enter the Knesset from 2% to 3.25%. All Arab parties, including the IM Southern faction, the Communist and secular DFPE, NDA, and the Movement for Renewal of Ahmad Tibi, formed a united list called a Joint Arab List (JAL). If not united, the Arab parties in the Knesset, which usually win between 2 and 4 seats each, would not have made it under the new legislation. See (Noam Sheizaf 2014).

See interview with DFPE MK Aida Touma-Suleiman (Steve Inskeep 2021).

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