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THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL:
WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

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THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL: WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

INTRODUCTION

After the 1949 armistice agreements the minority population in Israel, which was mainly composed of Arabs, was 156,000. Today, the latest Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reports indicate that Arab citizens of Israel make up 20 percent of the Israeli population. Israel's total population is 7.5 million, with the Arabs constituting of 1.5 million of this figure.¹ Geographically, Galilee is the hub of Arabs in Israel. Although their population is dispersed throughout the country, the majority of Arabs in Israel live in the cities, towns and villages of the Galilee such as Nazareth, Haifa, and Umm al-Fahm. With having the highest population growth rate in Israel, Arabs are seen as a growing strategic threat to the Jewish character of the State of Israel by many.² The Arab demographic growth has become a source of fear for some Israeli strategic planners and has provided fuel for conspiracy theories. However, International Crisis Group states that Arab citizens of Israel are largely cut off from the geographical, cultural, economic and political mainstream.³ The problems the Arabs face can be considered a threat to Israeli democracy.

The vast majority of Arabs in Israel (80 percent) are Muslim and nearly all of them are Sunni. According to the census reports, there are 1.2 million Muslims in Israel that equates to 16

¹ "Central Bureau of Statistics: Last Produced for Monthly Bulletin of Statistics," March 2010, http://www.cbs.gov.il/www/yarhon/bl_e.htm, (accessed April 10, 2010).

² Barak M. Seener, "The Threat From Israel's Arab Population," Spring2008, <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/113/the-threat-from-israels-arab-population>, (accessed March 15, 2010).

³ "Identity Crisis: Israel and its Arab Citizens" *ICG Middle East Report No:25*, International Crisis Group, March 4, 2004: i.

per cent of the country's population.⁴ The population of Muslims in Israel has been affected not only by high birthrates but also exogenous factors such as the 1967 War. Similarly, the identity formation of Muslim Arabs is the product of both Israeli policies towards the Arab minority and Islamic identity, and regional developments. Nadim Rouhana correctly mentions that deprivation of Arabs in Israel has been the main factor in the development of their identity.⁵ Mohammad Amara puts an emphasis on the exclusion of Arabs by saying that the Jewish character of the state and the central public sphere are far from the inclusion of Arabs.⁶ Additionally, traumatic events in the Middle East such as the 1967 War, the defeat of Arab nationalism, Lebanon War, the foundation of Hamas, the first and the second Intifada, the Oslo Peace Process and the Israel's army attack on Gaza in 2008 affected the identity formation and political thoughts of Arab citizens of Israel. Since the Islamic Movement in Israel was less visible in the 1960s and the 1970s, the Arabs in Israel began to politicize through the communist and nationalist parties until the mid-1980s.⁷

Given the above-mentioned statistical information and the main reasons behind the development of Arab identity, the Islamic Movement in Israel deserves consideration since it is one of the platforms, in which the Islamic-Arab identity has been crystallized since the mid-1980s. Although the growth of the Islamic Movement dates back to the 1960s, its political journey started with the 1983 local elections and continued with the 1989 local elections. Many studies began to shed light on the Islamic Movement thanks to the rise of Islamism in global

⁴ "CIA: The World Factbook," April 21, 2010, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>, (accessed April 24, 2010).

⁵ Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "Arab Citizenship in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21.3 (1998): 585.

⁶ Muhammad Amara, "The Collective Identity of the Arabs in Israel in an Era of Peace," *Israel Affairs* 9.1&2 (2003): 249.

⁷ Elia T. Zureik, *Palestinians in Israel: A study in internal colonialism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 166-187.

politics and the Middle East in particular. In addition, the Islamic Movement's challenge to the state-controlled Islamic establishment and demand for communal autonomy has contributed to its importance in current Israeli politics.⁸ Many studies in the Israeli academic circle are concerned with the Islamic Movement's and its members' loyalty to the State of Israel. In their discussion of the Movement, these scholars have placed great emphasis on the internal debates within the Movement over the participation of the Knesset elections, which resulted in the split of the Movement in 1996.⁹ Superficially, these studies categorize the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement as radical and extremist whereas the Southern Branch of the Movement as moderate.¹⁰

Israeli officials define the Arab population in Israel and Islamists in particular as a demographic bomb and fifth column.¹¹ In other words, Israeli officials perceive its own Arab citizens as a threat to the state. This study aims to question the attitude of Israel towards the Islamic movement by focusing on the political discourse and activities of the Islamic Movement.

⁸ Alisa Rubin Peled, Debating Islam in the Jewish State: the development of policy toward Islamic institutions in Israel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 1.

⁹ Southern Branch of the movement, leaders of which are Adballah Nimr Darwish, Ibrahim Sarsur and Tawfiq Khatib, supports participation to the Knesset elections. Kafr Qasim, Kafr Bara and Jaljulia are main bases of the southern branch. Whereas, Northern Branch of the movement, though not boycott, does not support the participation to the Knesset elections. Ra'id Salah and Kama Khatib are the leading figures. The supporters of the northern branch densely populate Kafr Kana and Umm al-Fahm.

¹⁰ Elie, Rekhess, "The Islamic Movement in Israel, The Internal Debate Over Representation in the Knesset", Data and Analysis, *The Moshe Dayan Center No.2*, April 1996: 1-3.

¹¹ Ibrahim Sarsur, Personal Interview, March 15, 2010.

Q&A
TIP
www.cbs.gov.il

Map: Arab population in natural regions (% of total population in region), 2000¹²

RESEARCH QUESTION

Problematizing the relations between the Islamic Movement in Israel and the official Israeli state discourse is the primary objective of this research. This study intends to understand the political activities and the discourse of the Islamic Movement in Israel and to answer the question of whether the Islamic Movement in Israel is a threat to the very existence of the State of Israel. In other words, whether the Islamic Movement is a threat or opportunity for Israel is going to be analyzed in regard to its political discourse and activities. In addition to the aforementioned main concern, this study involves other sub-questions: 1) What do the Movement's members think about the sensitive issues for Israel? 2) To what extent do the

¹² Nurit Yaffe and Dorith Tal, "The Arab Population in Israel," Central Bureau of Statistics Center for Statistical Information, No:27, November 2002, <http://www.cbs.gov.il/statistical/arabju.pdf> (accessed April 2010).

Movement's members differentiate in regard to the legitimacy of the State of Israel?

The hypothesis of this research is that contrary to common belief the Islamic Movement in Israel is not a threat to the State of Israel. Rather, if its messages and political discourse are examined properly it can be a good opportunity for the development of Israeli democracy. Moreover, the services provided by the Islamic Movement can strengthen the democratic institutions in Israel. Although the movement's discourse involves radical elements, focusing on this rather than taking the wider social context into consideration leads to the exaggeration of the Islamic Movement and the reproduction of Israeli security discourse.

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the relations between Israel and the Islamic Movement in Israel, I began by researching the literature necessary to understand the majority and minority relations. I came to the conclusion that the relations between Israel and its Arab citizens are somewhat unique and different from the other minorities. The relations between the Islamic Movement and Israel are the nucleus of the tension between the two. I further examined specific conditions of the Islamic Movement in Israel using primary and secondary sources. My initial research led me to focus on the political discourse and activities of the Islamic Movement.

Moving from the idea that the current political position of the Islamic Movement is only understood by the dynamics that resulted in the emergence and growth of the Movement, I examined the reasons behind the emergence of the Movement.

Furthermore, I conducted a field study in Israel. This field study has two main parts. First, I interviewed both the members of the Islamic Movement and the scholars who study the Movement. In order to present the right balance, my interviewees were composed of members

from both the Northern and the Southern branches of the Movement. Furthermore, I included not only influential members and leaders of the Islamic Movement but also outside supporters or sympathizers. In addition, I talked with both Jewish and Arab scholars.

Second, I visited the main hubs of the Islamic Movement in Israel to understand the socio-political atmosphere within which they live. I visited Haifa, East Jerusalem, Nazareth, Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Kafr Kanna. The visual and written materials that I collected during the visits to the cities and villages contributed to the research.

Apart from the qualitative data, I used quantitative data to support my ideas. My quantitative data included the works of Sammy Smooha of Haifa University¹³ and Israeli official statistics.

In the next section, I will rely on different perspectives to provide the background of the Islamic Movement. Afterwards, I will then proceed to discuss the discourse of the Islamic Movement and its social and political activities. This section also presents the main arguments of the Israeli official state discourse in regard to the Islamic Movement. The final section argues that given the political discourse and activities of the Islamic Movement, the official Israeli state discourse is not convincing.

BACKGROUND OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL

Many of the studies on the Islamic Movement in Israel are usually centered on its participation in elections. However, the Islamic Movement has a rich history that dates back to the 1960s. After the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, Israel set up a military government to control the Arab population and to prevent the formation of regional or countrywide Arab

¹³ Sammy Smooha, Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2004 (Haifa: University of Haifa Publications Department, 2005).

political associations.¹⁴ The political pressure from Israel, the loss of spiritual leaders after the massive exodus in 1948, and Israel's emphasis on secularism during its first three decades impeded the emergence of the Islamic movement until the end of the 1960s.¹⁵ In his discussion on the impeded emergence of the Islamic Movement, Jacob Landau highlights the lack of public support for Islam among younger generation Israeli Arabs. For instance in the 1960s, some of these Arabs did not hesitate to declare publicly their non-observance or even their irreligiousness.¹⁶

The political structure among the Israeli Arabs began to change towards the end of the 1960s as a result of ideological, regional, and domestic factors. Israeli Arabs were disillusioned with Arab nationalist, secular parties, and ideology.¹⁷ Israeli pressure on the nationalist political bodies was influential on this disillusionment as well. For instance, Israeli authorities outlawed Al-Ard (the Land), the nationalist Arab political organization of Israeli Arabs in 1964.¹⁸ Furthermore, the failure of Arab states to solve the Palestinian problem deepened their disillusionment. They realized that the existing political organizations did not solve their serious basic concerns such as housing, education and employment. Ori Stendel argues that these factors resulted in the growth of popularity of Islam, which began to occupy a significant place in their political discourse.¹⁹ Sarah Lazar defines the political atmosphere of the late 1960s and the 1970s as an ideological crisis, which brought the identity problem for the Israeli Arabs to the forefront.

¹⁴ Nadim N. Rouhana, Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 95.

¹⁵ Rouhana 99.

¹⁶ Jacob M. Landau, The Arabs In Israel: A Political Study (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) 214.

¹⁷ Ori Stendel, The Arabs in Israel (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996) 135.

¹⁸ Rouhana 98.

¹⁹ Stendel 135.

In experiencing the failures of socialism, capitalism and pan-Arabism, a new motto, ‘Go back to the roots of Islam’ rose among the Israeli Arabs. This trend affected not only Israeli Arabs but also religious people in Turkey and Egypt. The Iranian revolution in 1979 also influenced Islamists in Israel. An attractive slogan for Islamists in Israel is “Islam is the solution.”²⁰ Ibrahim Sarsur, an Arab deputy in the Knesset, viewed the end of the 1960s as a reawakening period for Israeli Arabs.²¹

After the 1967 War, Israeli Arabs’ Islamic identity strengthened after interactions with the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israeli Arabs began to access the religious institutions in the occupied territories. Interestingly, the Israeli government did not interfere with the Islamists because it believed the Movement would weaken the secular leadership of the Palestinian national movement. For example, when Israel imprisoned the members of Islamic paramilitary organizations, it allowed them to disseminate their teachings in prisons.²²

Relying on the above-mentioned reasons, by the early 1980s the Islamic Movement in Israel began to emerge as a political force. Their activities focused on serving the needs of Arab towns. Triangle and Galilee were the core regions of the Movement.²³ In the 1989 elections, the Movement was successful in six towns.²⁴ Since the mid-1980s the Movement has become one of the major political forces among Israeli Arabs, along with the communist party Hadash and the national democratic Balad parties.²⁵ Since the mid-1980s, scholarly circles have been trying to

²⁰ Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, Personal Interview, March 14, 2010.

²¹ Ibrahim Sarsur, Personal Interview, March 15, 2010.

²² Rouhana 106.

²³ Stendel 136.

²⁴ Rouhana 106.

²⁵ Shaykh Ra’id Salah, “The Islamic Movement Inside Israel: An Interview With Shaykh Ra’id Salah,” Journal of Palestine Studies 36.2 (Winter 2007): 66.

define the Islamic Movement. Stendel states that this is a large movement with a special character. It's neither a party nor a list. It is multi-faceted phenomenon that involves all these definitions in a complex combination.²⁶ In this regard, a quote from Masoud Ghanayem, an influential figure in the Moment and an Arab member of the Knesset would be useful: "*We are more social movement than a political party.*"²⁷

THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY: WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

Socioeconomic changes played a role in the political radicalization among the Arab population of Israel in the 1980s.²⁸ Arabs began to participate in political activities more than before. The political affiliations of Israeli Arabs²⁹ faced the dilemma of how to secure necessary support for the current needs of the Arabs while not reifying the legal stance of a state.³⁰ It can be argued that the Islamic Movement has been more successful in serving the needs of the Arabs thanks to its strong institutional body and effective charity network than any other Arab entities in Israel.

The political aim of the Islamic Movement is to defend the idea that Arabs should achieve equality and that any struggle for change should be carried out within the framework of the Israeli law. Unlike the Islamic movements in Palestine, majority of the members of the Movement believe in achieving social and political change through education, not physical

²⁶ Stendel 134.

²⁷ Masoud Ghanayim, Personal Interview, March 15, 2010.

²⁸ Elie Rekhess, "The Politicization of Israel's Arabs," Every Sixth Israeli: Relations Between the Jewish Majority and the Arab Minority in Israel, ed. Alouph Hareven (Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, 1983) 135.

²⁹ See Zureik 166-186 for the political orientations of Israeli Arabs are: Zionism, Communism, nationalism, nonideological and Islamism.

³⁰ Rouhana 107.

coercion.³¹

In regards to identity, from 1973 to the present the Islamic component has been one of the main elements of the identity of Arabs in Israel.³² In other words, the rise of the Islamic identity among the Arabs in Israel has been one of the characteristics of the previous three decades. Recent statistics show that 47.6 percent of Arabs in Israel chose religion as the most important part of their identity. According to Rouhana's findings, Islamists' ideology in Israel is based on a three-circle conception of identity. These are the Islamic, the Arab and the Palestinian circles.³³ However, according to my interviews, although they consider it at the bottom of their identity list, Israeli identity is another component of the Islamists' identity in Israel.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Chart 1: Percentage Choosing the Most Important Personal Identity³⁴

The Islamic Movement's main concern is preserving the above-mentioned components of their identity.³⁵ It can be inferred from some of their activities that they manifest their identity over

³¹ Rouhana 106-107.

³² Amara 254-255.

³³ Rouhana 134-135.

³⁴ Smoha 47.

³⁵ Salah 68.

sacred places such as al-Aqsa Mosque.

Amina Minns and Nadia Hijab argue that the Islamic Movement was the most potent force on the political scene at the close of the 1980s.³⁶ The Movement joined the political mainstream of Israel with its participation in the municipal elections in the 1980s. In those years, the Islamic Movement had distanced itself from the idea of participating in parliamentary politics. The Movement's rejection of parliamentary elections was based on the idea that Israel was an illegitimate state. However, after the 1980s, contradictory ideas began to emerge in regards to the Knesset elections. Nimr Darwish, the leader of the Movement, announced the formation of the United Arab Party. Its aim was to involve all Arab Political groups except for the Communist Party.³⁷ Why did he form a new party? It can be argued that he tried to find support for his idea of participating in the Knesset elections. Also he might have wanted to strengthen his position against his potential opponents in the Movement.

The question of what motivated Darwish to participate in the Knesset elections should be answered. According to Majid Al-Haj's information, while in the 1983 elections only one mayor was affiliated with the Islamic Movement, in the 1989 elections it gained the mayorship in five local governments. Furthermore, the Islamic Movement's candidate received 75 percent of the vote in Umm al-Fahm in the 1989 local elections.³⁸ Therefore, it can be inferred that political successes at the local level encouraged the Islamic Movement to run for the Knesset elections. Political gains via elections not only increased the probability of the Movement's integration in

³⁶ Amina Minns and Nadia Hijab, Citizens apart: a portrait of the Palestinians in Israel (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1990) 18-19.

³⁷ Majid al-Haj, "The Changing Strategies of Mobilization among the Arabs in Israel: Parliamentary Politics, Local Politics, and National Organizations," Local Communities and the Israeli Polity: Conflict of Values and Interests, ed. Efraim Ben-Zadok (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 77.

³⁸ al-Haj, 80 ed. Zadok.

the Israeli system but also made Israeli authorities reconsider the concept of Israeli citizenship and democracy.

In 1996, the Movement finalized its decision of joining the Knesset elections. The moderate wing of the Islamic Movement lead by Nimr Darwish joined with Abd al-Wahab Darawshe’s Democratic Party to form the United Arab List (UAL) to run for the parliamentary elections.³⁹ What were the main premises of the UAL? Similar to the other Arab parties in Israel, the UAL’s manifesto mainly focused on Israel’s Arab citizens demands that they be recognized as a national minority. Furthermore, its demands to liberate Islamic waqf property and establish independent Shari’a courts show not only the UAL’s uniqueness but also the Islamic Movement’s dominance in the party.⁴⁰ In order to understand how the Arabs in Israel have responded to the UAL’s political agenda, it’s voting base should be presented.

Party	2003 Elections		2006 Elections	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
UAL-AMC	65,551	28.4	94,786	37.5
DFPE	93,819	40.7	86,092	34.0
NDA	71,299	30.9	72,066	28.5

Table 1: The Distribution of votes between UAL-AMC, DFPE and in NDA in the 2003 and 2006

³⁹ As’ad Ghanem and Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, “Israel as an Ethnic State: The Arab Vote,” The Elections in Israel, 1999, ed. Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) 125.

⁴⁰ Elie Rekhess, “The Arab Minority in Israel and the Seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a New Era?” The Elections in Israel, 2006, ed. Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (NewBrunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008) 161.

elections.⁴¹

The statistical information above reflects the growing dominance of the Islamic Movement among the Arab political parties.⁴² From 2003 to 2006, the Islamic Movement increased its voting base by 44.6 percent. It clearly indicates that any discussion on Israeli democracy without taking the Islamic Movement into account is useless. Elie Rekhess supports this argument and agrees that the Islamic Movement cannot be ignored.⁴³ He also highlights the differences between the Southern and Northern branches of the Islamic Movement. Mentioning the negative attitude of the Northern branch towards the Knesset elections, he quotes Sheikh Raid Salah: “*The Knesset is no more than an ineffective opposition platform.*”⁴⁴

At the discourse level, the Islamic Movement plays a significant role for the Arabs in Israel. Instead of offering a radical alternative to the national identity, the Movement promises to provide a more empowering way to cope with the humiliation and oppression of daily life under occupation.⁴⁵ In the Islamic Movement’s political discourse Islam comes into play as a cure for the Arabs’ displeasure, not as an alternative to the Israeli political system.

If analyzed properly, the discourse of the Movement can play an important role for the Israeli democracy as well. The Israeli government views the Movement much like other Islamic

⁴¹ “The Elections in Israel, 2006” Knesset Elections, 2006 <http://www.knesset.gov.il/elections17/heb/cec/CecIndex.asp> (accessed April 2010)
(DFPE: Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash), UAL: United Arab List, NDA: National Democratic Assembly (Balad))

⁴² Elie Rekhess, “The Arab Minority in Israel and the Seventeenth Knesset Elections: The Beginning of a New Era?” The Elections in Israel, 2006, ed. Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008) 166-167.

⁴³ Rekhess 180, ed. Arian and Shamir.

⁴⁴ Rekhess 177, ed. Arian and Shamir.

⁴⁵ Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker, Coffins on Our Shoulders: The experience of the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 115.

movements in the Middle East as being fundamentalist. However, understanding the basic differences between the Islamic Movement and the other Islamic movements in the Middle East is a key factor for correcting the Israeli government's view and incorporating the Movement into the system. For instance, Sheikh Nimr Darwish avoids Khomeinism, rejects the doctrine of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and criticizes the Jihad group in Egypt.⁴⁶ Another key factor in regards to the discourse of the movement is their attitude towards the State of Israel. Contrary to belief, the Islamic Movement tends to recognize the legitimacy of Israel. Ra'id Salah says that the Movement recognizes the reality they live in.⁴⁷ However, Ibrahim Sarsur, one of my interviewees, says the State of Israel exists but whether it is legitimate or not depends on its recognition of an independent Palestinian state. If it is to recognize the legitimacy of an independent Palestinian state, Israel will become a more legitimate state in the eyes of the Movement.⁴⁸

Another important component of the Movement's discourse is its attitude towards the West. Members of the Movement recognize the difference between Western governments and their people. While criticizing the former, they have very positive attitude towards the latter. Ra'id Salah asserts that he and his followers are standing against destructive Westernization in order to preserve their values and code of behavior.⁴⁹ Ibrahim Sarsur states that rejecting all Western ideas is a mistake and an irrational thing.⁵⁰

Activities of the Islamic Movement are the reflections of its ideology, political discourse,

⁴⁶ Stendel 136.

⁴⁷ Salah 70.

⁴⁸ Ibrahim Sarsur, Personal Interview, March 15, 2010.

⁴⁹ Salah 73.

⁵⁰ Ibrahim Sarsur, Personal Interview, March 15, 2010.

and pragmatism. Rouhana argues that the Islamic Movement, through the local governments and other local institutions it controls and guided by the pragmatism of its leaders, seems to have reached a modus vivendi of a smooth relationship with the Israeli authorities.⁵¹ Similar to other Islamic movements in the Middle East, the strong point of the Islamic Movement in Israel is its grass root support, which they gain through social services. For instance, the Islamic Movement in Umm al-Fahm formed the Committee of Mercy and created a drug center and a clinic that deals with drug problems among the Israeli Arab community. Until the Movement's initiative, other Arab groups in Israel did nothing about this issue.⁵² Also the Movement provides educational institutions for the Arabs in Israel. During my visit to Kafr Kana, I saw the Movement's schools and witnessed how organized they are in the educational field. There is no doubt that an efficient charity network lies behind these social service provisions. In regard to the Movement's social activities, the mosques play an important role. Khawla Abu Baker says that many of the Islamic Movement's organizations center their activities in the mosques.⁵³ The Islamic Movement's social activities can be seen as a contribution to the Israeli institutions since they fill an ignored space.

Although the followers of the Movement sometimes express their displeasure towards the State violently, the leaders are very careful about not breaking the law. For instance, the Islamic leadership plays an important role in averting the violent activities on 'Land Day'.⁵⁴ Although not very vital, this role can be understood as a testament of cooperation between the leadership

⁵¹ Rouhana 107.

⁵² Minns and Hijab 19.

⁵³ Khawla Abu Baker, "Social and Educational Welfare Policy in the Arab Sector in Israel", The Israeli Palestinians: an Arab minority in the Jewish State, ed. Alexander Bligh (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003) 83.

⁵⁴ Ilan Asya, "The Israeli Newspapers' Coverage of the Israeli Arabs during the Intifada," The Israeli Palestinians: an Arab minority in the Jewish State, ed. Alexander Bligh (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003) 202.

of the Movement and the Israeli officials.

Social services of the Islamic Movement also lead to a politicization of the Movement. The Northern Branch of the Movement, which has refused to participate in parliamentary elections, is by far the most formidable extra-parliamentary political organization among the Arabs in Israel.⁵⁵ Even though it does not participate in parliamentary elections the Northern Branch partakes in social services that sustain the politicization of the Movement. It shows that the politicization of the Islamic Movement is not only achieved through participation in the Knesset elections but in other areas such as social services. The Islamic Movement's relations with the Bedouin are a good example of translating the social services into political success. Since 1983, the Islamic Movement has been building mosques, some of which have educational centers, in Negev. Thanks to these social services, a member of the Islamic Movement was elected as mayor of Rahat, the largest of the seven towns the state built to sedentarize the Bedouin.⁵⁶

The religious symbols of Islam in Israel are at the center of the Islamic Movement's social activities. Shlomo Hasson states that the mosque of al-Aqsa serves as an important symbol of ethno-national and religious identity.⁵⁷ Ra'id Salah promotes the Islamic Movement as the true guardian of the Haram al-Sharif. Thus, every year the Northern branch of the Islamic movement organizes a rally called *al-Aqsa Endangered* in Umm al-Fahm. This shows the centrality of al-Aqsa mosque as both a religious and national symbol in the Movement's activism.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Hillel Frish, "Ethnicity or Nationalism? Comparing the Nakba Narrative among Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza," *The Israeli Palestinians: an Arab minority in the Jewish State*, ed. Alexander Bligh (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003) 169.

⁵⁶ Hillel Frish, "The Arab Vote in the Israeli Elections," *Israel at the Polls, 1999* ed. Daniel J. Elazar and M. Ben Mollov (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001) 164.

⁵⁷ Shlomo Hasson, "Territories and Identities in Jerusalem," *GeoJournal* 53.3 (2001): 313.

⁵⁸ Salah 66-67.

Moreover, the Islamic Movement reproduces its discourse by instrumentalizing sports as well. For example, the Movement formed a soccer league that is separate from the official Israeli soccer league. According to the members of the Movement, they make sports into an arena in which the players compete for obedience to Allah and for their places in paradise.⁵⁹

So far the Israeli officials have been treating the Islamic Movement as if it is a threat. Analyzing the political nature of the relationship between the Islamic Movement and the Israeli officials can provide clues that support this argument. In order to keep the members of the Movement under control, Israeli officials implement various strategies such as segmentation, dependence and cooptation.⁶⁰ Another example is the Ministry Welfare Advisory Bureau providing welfare services to Arab youth in order to control them politically. For instance, one of the internal ministry documents states that proper services must be provided for Arab youth to prevent them from joining hostile organizations such as the Islamic Movement.⁶¹ In regard to the perceived threat of the Arabs in Israel, the Palestinian conflict is also in effect. As Amara mentions, the Arabs in Israel will remain a security risk as long as there is not an appropriate resolution of the Palestinian conflict.⁶² In more concrete terms, for some in Israel the Arab citizens constitute a threat not only for Israeli identity but also their security. According to Rekhess, it is evident in the published materials of the radicals of the Movement their intention of eliminating the Jewish state on religious grounds.⁶³ However, none of the leaders of the

⁵⁹ Tamir Sorek, "The Islamic Soccer League In Israel: Setting Moral Boundaries By Taming The Wild," Identities 9.4 (2002): 460.

⁶⁰ Ian Lustick, Arabs in the Jewish State (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980) 79.

⁶¹ Khawla Abu Baker, "Social and Educational Welfare Policy in the Arab Sector in Israel", The Israeli Palestinians: an Arab minority in the Jewish State, ed. Alexander Bligh (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003) 74.

⁶² Amara 251.

⁶³ Rekhess 5.

Islamic Movement with whom I interviewed support this view. It should be noted that because a few members of the Movement are ideologically or emotionally sympathetic to extremist views that are aired outside of Israel does not necessarily make the Islamic Movement as a whole a threat to Israel. The leaders of the Islamic Movement are aware of the fact that they have to work within the Israeli system to achieve their objectives.

Given the growing admiration of its leader, Nimr Darwish⁶⁴, and its solid infrastructure, today the Islamic Movement has become one of the most powerful political actors in Israel.⁶⁵ Thus, labeling the Islamic Movement as a terrorist organization or ignoring its political ideas makes the Israeli democracy far from convincing.

Rouhana's striking explanation of the dilemma between the Muslim minority in Israel and the Israeli democracy is expressed below:

“Greater political cooperation with the existing system runs the inescapable risk of cooptation and long-term subversion of their future inclusion as legitimate partners in the identity and goals of the state, but direct challenge of the ethnic exclusivity of state ideology marks them as outsiders with respect to the existing political structure and, therefore, unable to secure immediate instrumental benefits for their community or direct political influence on the system itself.”⁶⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Although there is an evidence for the idea that Arabs in Israel are a threat to the identity

⁶⁴ He does not hesitate to appear in Hebrew mass media to seek Israeli public approval of his movement.

⁶⁵ Stendel 137.

⁶⁶ Rouhana 94-95.

and security of Israel, it should not be ignored that the self-identity of the Arabs in Israel is dynamic and is influenced by the rewards in societal structure and political conditions.⁶⁷ Furthermore, this idea implies that if the Israeli societal structure continues to perceive them as a threat, the Arabs in Israel and the Islamic Movement in particular will manifest their discontent in more draconian ways. Ilana Kaufman supports this idea by saying the forced assimilation of Arabs into Hebrew culture and language led to violent resistance particularly by the Islamic Movement.⁶⁸

The Israeli government has failed to fulfill the Arabs' expectations of equality so far.⁶⁹ My interviews show that the discrimination of Arabs and inequality within the Israeli society is experienced more in the identity field than the social service provision field. Although he does not mention how it is going to be realized, Izhak Schell suggests that defining anew-political consensus and a more versatile Israeli identity that could apply equally to the Arabs in Israel is necessary.⁷⁰

Mentioning the impact of the establishment of the Palestinian State in the future, Amara defends the idea that Arabs will have vigorous demands for full equality in an era of peace. If their demands are not rejected, it will be a chance to develop a common Israeli super-identity, which equally involves the Arabs of Israel.⁷¹

It is obvious that the relations between the Islamic Movement in Israel and Israeli

⁶⁷ Amara 253.

⁶⁸ Ilana Kaufman, "Jews and Arabs in the State of Israel: Is There a Basis for a Unified Civic Identity?," The Israeli Palestinians: An Arab Minority in the Jewish State, ed. Alexander Bligh (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003) 244.

⁶⁹ Amiram Gonen and Rassem Khamaisi, The Arabs in Israel in the Wake of Peace (Jerusalem: The Floorsheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 1993) 8.

⁷⁰ Izhak Schell, Perceptions of Israeli Arabs: Territoriality and Identity (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing, 1994) 117.

⁷¹ Amara 260.

officials affect the other Islamic movements in the Middle East. Although the social conditions are different for each movement, if the Islamic Movement succeeds in reaching its political aims such as equality of Arabs in Israel by using democratic mechanisms, there is no doubt that this will have a transformative effect on the other Islamic movements in the Middle East.

Since this study sheds light on a limited part of the Islamic Movement in Israel, further research is necessary to answer the question of whether the Islamic Movement challenges the Israeli democracy today with concrete policies like other Arab organizations such as The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (Adalah).

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