

# Bayan بیان ביאן The Arabs in Israel הערבים בישראל

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## From the Editors' Desk

We are pleased to present the February 2017 issue of *Bayan*. This issue contains two essays. The first, by Ariel Ben Solomon, deals with current developments in the ranks of the southern faction of the Islamic movement in Israel. The second, by Roaa Khater, focuses on the political campaign of a woman from the Druze villages in the Golan Heights during the municipal elections.

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**The Editors**

## Ariel Ben Solomon\* / Traditional Muslims opposition to the Islamic Movement in Israel: Kafr Qasim as a case study<sup>1</sup>

Since 1996, the Islamic Movement in Israel has been divided between northern and southern branches. This division was prompted by an internal disagreement over whether to participate in the national elections held that year; prior to that time the Islamic Movement confined itself to participating in local authority and municipal elections.

During numerous interviews conducted in the Israeli Arab city of Kafr Qasim, located east of Tel Aviv and near the 1967 green line, I encountered many traditional Muslims who voiced criticism and concerns regarding the southern branch of the Islamic Movement, despite the fact that it is strongly based in that city. The northern branch has no known organized presence in the city. The Islamic Movement in Israel was founded by Kafr Qasim native, Sheikh 'Abdallah Nimr Darwish, in 1972 and the city is a good location to study because of the prevalence and strength of the group.

The northern branch, under the leadership of Sheikh Raed Salah, has taken a more radical approach; it has refused to participate in national elections and have its members serve in the Knesset. While it had initially gained power in local municipalities, by 2003, the northern branch had withdrawn from participating in local politics, save from its stronghold of Umm-al-Fahm.<sup>2</sup> Then, in 2013, it did not contest even those elections. The southern branch, on the other hand, is considered more pragmatic; it participates in national politics and has representatives in the Knesset. Today, the division between the two branches is, in many ways, over the willingness to interface more broadly with the Israeli state and its Jewish majority. The northern branch is less willing than the southern branch to fully comply with the "rules of the game" both politically and culturally.

The Islamic Movement in Israel is an offshoot of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) and which remains active in states throughout the world. The movement works within its local context and national framework, but is also Pan-Islamic, seeking to eventually Islamize society on its way to take transnational political power.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By "traditional" Muslims, it is meant to refer to the majority of Muslims in Israel that practice Islam yet are not identified as Islamist.

<sup>2</sup> Nohad Ali, "Doing God's Work: A Look at the Islamic Movement in Israel," +972 Magazine, March 13, 2015 Accessed January 15, 2017, <https://972mag.com/doing-gods-work-a-look-at-the-islamic-movement-in-israel/104201>

<sup>3</sup> Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State* (The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, The Brookings Institution, no. 19, March 2015); Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred W. Wenner. "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt." *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 36 no. 3 (Summer 1982): 336-361.

The decision by the government to ban the northern branch in November 2015 – largely because of its Hamas connection - has given the southern movement a bigger role in organizing social welfare and other *da'wa* activities. *Da'wa*, pioneered by the Muslim Brotherhood, is the socio-economic method used by Islamist groups to build grassroots support through missionary activity. It often includes charities, youth clubs, Quran study groups, and so on. It is meant to attract members of the community and inculcate them in the Islamist group's ethos.

Police and Israel's Shin Bet domestic security agency gathered evidence demonstrating the ideological affinity and close public relationship between the northern branch, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>4</sup> Hamas is the offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories. Despite the above divisions between the northern and southern branches, both movements share much common ground. Sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood and criticism of Egypt's current regime are quite strong among individuals affiliated with the southern branch, as evidenced by personal interviews with them.

Despite the southern movement's ostensibly more pragmatic approach, it is nevertheless opposed by many Muslims in Israel, even those who consider themselves to be religiously observant. This opposition stems from factors that include a disapproval of the movement's Islamist ideology, its ambitions for power, and alleged corruption and nepotism within the group.

In an interview I conducted on September 21, 2016 with Imam 'Adnan 'Amr Abu Firas, a respected religious leader and former Islamic Movement leader, he said, "I tried to influence, but I didn't succeed because politics is stronger today. We can't follow the religion exactly and the Islamic Movement tries to navigate a midway – *wasat*."

Abu Firas expressed his frustration with the movement for deviating from the pure religious Islamic path because of political necessity, and that, he says, is why he left. "All of the politics of today come at the expense of religion and the Islamic Movement doesn't do enough *da'wa*, nor [does it perform *da'wa*] in the proper way," he continued. He added that the southern movement's ideology is not strong anymore because of its deep involvement in politics. In other words, the complaint against the southern branch of the Islamic Movement is that it has become more of a political movement with Islamic trappings, rather than an Islamic movement involved in politics.

Indeed, this is precisely the reason for the northern branch's decision to abandon local elections; it wished to concentrate on *da'wa* instead of politics. It seems that Abu Firas wants to practice Islam without the duties or interference of the Islamic Movement, which he considers to be not ideologically strong enough. Yet, he did not join the northern branch, so it could be that his criticism of the movement is based on its corruption and deviation from what he sees as true Islam.

More importantly, these lines of contention are often quite blurred; neither the Muslim Arab public of Israel nor the movements themselves possess a monolithic, one-size-fits all ideology. For example, there is disagreement within the northern branch over the direction of the movement. As sociologist Nohad Ali stated, based on interviews with members of the northern branch: "politics has diverted the movement's attention from its main goal: the [Islamization] of the masses, developing new believers and

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<sup>4</sup> Itamar Eichner, Hassan Shaalan, Yoav Zitun, "Israel bans northern branch of Islamic Movement," *Ynetnews.com*, November 17, 2016. accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4726750,00.html>

establishing a society 'able to stand on its own two feet' [...]"<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Salah is supported by many Kafr Qasim residents as a political figure and as the leader of Israel's Arabs, even among those who are affiliated with the southern movement or who do not otherwise support Islamist groups. This seems to be because they see him as honest, uncorrupt, and ideologically pure. Overall, Salah's northern branch, which is synonymous in the minds of many of Israel's Arabs with the Islamic Movement as a whole, enjoys the support of around 57% of the Arab public at large.<sup>6</sup>

Other Kafr Qasim residents appear to be coming to the same conclusion about the southern branch's quest for political power. Iyad Badir, who owns a printing shop in the city, considers himself to be a traditionally observant Muslim, and said he had previously been a part of the movement at a lower level. He believes that in local elections "the Islamic Movement goes with the strong candidate; they don't want to lose," and compared the movement to an army with one leader: "If you don't follow orders, you are removed."

The Islamic Movement's quest for power and its immersion in politics has alienated many traditional Muslims, said Rodayna Badir, a doctoral candidate at Bar-Ilan University who considers herself to be traditional. "The Islamic Movement is all about politics and increasing its economic power and control. It is nothing about ideology," she argued. Rodayna continued by alleging that the newly elected mayor, 'Adil Badir, himself a member of the southern branch of the Islamic Movement, has appointed fellow members to most key municipal positions. Rodayna, who considers herself to be a traditional Muslim despite her non-religious dress (Unlike religious Jews, most Muslims in Israel define themselves as traditional Muslims even if their dress and appearance are not traditional), said, "The Islamic Movement is like a state within a state," suffering from corruption and nepotism.

One individual, who wished to remain anonymous, is well connected in the city and has access to information coming from both the Islamic Movement and the municipality. The source alleged that the Islamic Movement had infiltrated the city's educational institutions and was funneling money from the city budget to affiliated organizations and companies.

The source, who has children in local schools, said that the movement has an NGO called *qalam*, which operates inside the schools. Sheikh Safwat Freij, who lives in the city and is the deputy leader of the southern branch of the Islamic Movement "is seen all the time in the schools and nobody can say anything or tell him to leave," said the source, who added that "he [Freij] is the actual mayor." In other words, the national figure and religious authority from the Islamic Movement is allegedly dictating policies and decisions to the mayor, 'Adil Badir.

The source explained that Freij owns a business which has received many government contracts from the municipality. Around 95% of the licensed day care centers in Kafr Qasim are allegedly operated by his firm. The source also claimed that Freij chose the manager of the city's community center, and that Freij's company or other affiliated subsidiaries under his control are frequently hired by the municipality to provide infrastructure repair and other services.

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<sup>5</sup> Nohad Ali, "Doing God's Work: A Look at the Islamic Movement in Israel."

<sup>6</sup> Ariel Ben Solomon, "17% of Israeli Arabs support ISIS, expert says," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 22, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Parts-of-Arab-population-support-ISIS-despite-official-opposition-expert-says-434969>.

One recent event that angered many traditional Muslim residents of Kafr Qasim occurred during the recent march held on October 29 to memorialize the 1956 massacre of local residents at the hands of Israel Border Police. The organization of the memorial march was handled by the city. Because of the fact that the city is essentially controlled by the Islamic Movement, the group was able to impose its values onto the event.

For example, there was a budget for the event, explained the source, and the people that had organized it for years were pushed out in favor of Islamic Movement members or allies. "There are suspicions that the Islamic Movement took the money allocated for the event and then cheaply held it so that a profit would be made." The source also alleged that the mayor allowed the Islamic Movement leadership to decide how to distribute the city's funds. "It is like if Bibi [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu] told the Likud party to manage the state's budget for Independence Day."

"It was supposed to be for the city and the victims, but instead it was for the Islamic Movement," charged the source. For example, the Islamic Movement wanted women to dress modestly and without makeup, "but in the end women put on full makeup, tight jeans, and many did not wear head covers. The Islamic Movement wants their norms to obligate everyone like a dictatorship and the Israeli media give the movement support by interviewing its members." In other words, the movement sought to turn the memorial rally from an Arab national event to one dedicated to the Islamic Movement.

However, the source, whose opinion represents those that oppose the Islamic Movement in the city, went on to state, "The ceremony is not theirs! They use the religion as power. Nobody can argue with Muhammad or the Quran and they use it to promote their political purposes." Using the language of religion gives the Islamic Movement special legitimacy, forcing those that oppose the group to avoid appearing to be countering Islam itself. This appears to create a difficulty for traditional Muslims that oppose the movement. "The Islamic Movement is doing great. They have all of the power in Kafr Qasim," concluded the source.

However, Sheikh Kamil Ahmad Rayan, the former mayor of Kafr Bara, located adjacent to Kafr Qasim, said he remains close to the leadership of the southern branch. He said that politics necessitates compromise, but that there are red lines. Sheikh Rayan is also chairman of the NGO AMAN Center- The Arab Center for a Safe Society. "The Islamic Movement knows it has to give up things, but there is a spine – some basic things that cannot be compromised. Some people fight the state and some assimilate to it – the Islamic Movement is in the middle. There is a need to remember our history and values," he said.

The southern branch of the Islamic Movement has generated opposition as it seeks to apply its agenda in the city of Kafr Qasim, and the Islamist group, at the same time, uses the tools of the modern state to promote its interests. As Emanuel Sivan stated, "The logic is crystal clear: one has to keep the essentials of state-centralized authority intact in order to make it eventually into an instrument for the implementation of Islamic law."<sup>7</sup>

This willingness to use state institutions comes despite the fact that the group ideologically rejects the legitimacy of Israel because it was ostensibly established on Muslim land, and despite the fact that the group's leaders are careful not to explicitly

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<sup>7</sup> Emanuel Sivan, "The Islamic Resurgence: Civil Society Strikes Back," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 25 no. 2 (April 1990): 353-364.



state this directly in public. The southern branch of the Islamic Movement now struggles to balance its long-term strategic goal for power and Islamization of the Arab sector with its short-term tactical policy of finding a middle path that does not push things too far too soon. Some current and former southern branch members in Kafr Qasim downplay the differences between the northern and southern branches, calling the differences “political” or based on personal struggles for power. Though the southern branch publicly participates in politics and follows “the rules of the game,” behind the scenes the group is working diligently to build its grassroots power based on its Islamist message.

## **Roaa Khater\* / A Light in the Dark: A Druze Woman's Campaign for Representation in Local Government**

The status of women in Druze society has improved in the last two decades. A multitude of Druze women sought post-secondary degrees, received driver's licenses, pursued employment outside the home and even applied for executive positions. These pacesetter women returned to their villages and set an example for other women of how gender roles can be changed and how traditional boundaries can be broken. Druze teachers became role models, and tried to use their position to influence societal norms – to eradicate marriage at an early age, and to encourage study at university and working outside the home. Their profession lent them the legitimacy to promote change (Weiner-Levy, 2011).

Nevertheless, Druze women still face numerous obstacles which mainly stem from the fundamental values of Druze society. The story that follows details the candidacy of 'Aida (her name has been changed), a Druze woman who ran for mayor of her local council in the Golan Heights, and focuses on the existing gender-related practices and their alternatives, which accompanied the duration of her campaign for office.

'Aida's candidacy is first owing to the education she received from her upbringing. Although her determination to blaze a trail for Druze women in society was carried out legally, and without broad support, in spite of this, she met with resistance from prominent figures in the religious community and from parties with influence in the political arena. The gender practices that were utilized against 'Aida were closely related to the religious-cultural-political background of Druze society, and were expressed through thinking patterns, behavior, and actual actions. Alongside these practices alternative measures were taken, including the recruitment of supporting parties and persuasion.

'Aida's candidacy for public office testifies to the nature of the processes of gender change in society: when the process is complex and touches upon religious-cultural aspects, broad forces must be recruited to institute the change, like women's organizations who can assist in opening the "black box" of social practices deemed to be gender taboos.

### **Local Politics in the Golan Heights**

Subsequent to the Six Day War, with the occupation of the Golan Heights, the minority group of the Druze therein came under Israeli rule. The Druze are an ethnic minority in a politically contentious region, replete with internal conflicts and influenced by external factors. In Israel, the Druze are concentrated mainly in the Galilee, and have been citizens for generations. Conversely, the Druze of the Golan Heights are permanent residents with the right to obtain Israeli citizenship. However, few have opted for naturalization, and the Druze community of the Golan Heights and the Syrian Druze community continue to intertwine their family networks through marriage. It's fair to say that the identity of the Druze of the Golan Heights is unclear.

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\* **Ms. Roaa Khater** is an MA candidate in the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Tel Aviv University. Her thesis deals with the consolidation of personal and political identity among Druze women of the Golan Heights in a bicultural society.



After Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights under the Golan Heights Law of 1981, the Druze who lived there were offered Israeli citizenship. The Druze treated the law with gravity, especially since it would force them to become Israeli citizens instead of Syrian citizens, as they had been until then (Shalev, 1993). Accepting Israeli citizenship was tantamount to burning bridges with Syria, and they feared for their fates, as well as the fates of their family members who lived in Syria. Few chose to become Israeli citizens, and those who did were ostracized by their community which prevented them from participating in their activities and ceremonies.

For these reasons, there has apparently never been a process of democratic elections in the Golan Heights. Approval of the local council was handled by submitting a nomination through an open call, which was then approved by the Minister of the Interior.

### **'Aida: The Practice of Change**

The conversation with 'Aida reflected the complexities of gender-related practices: 'Aida is not only a woman, but a woman in traditional society. The attitude toward her is dictated by the specific social-cultural context. Women are affected by this attitude, and their lives are led in the shadows (Martin, 2006).

'Aida is in her forties, a married mother of five, from a large and respected clan in the Golan Heights. She has a bachelor's degree in education, and worked in education for several years. In the early 2000s, 'Aida decided to submit her candidacy for the local municipal council in her village. In her opinion, her candidacy to the council was perceived as an attempt to control men, "an embarrassing thing, a woman-man," as she put it. In order to avoid embarrassment, a woman should stay in a safe place, namely, her home. Women who heard of 'Aida's candidacy for the position saw a stark contradiction between personal and professional spheres, a contradiction which was expressed in one of the questions directed to her: "How will you manage a household and promise everything to your family and manage the council at the same time?" According to 'Aida, each of her detractors justified his opposition in keeping with his image, practices which at their core, exclude women: "The religious wave the flag of religion and tradition and the seculars wave the flag of family values and motherhood."

There is no doubt that this practice relates differently to each gender in the specific political system: it attempts to keep women in a safe space, in her familiar environment, while men belong to the public sphere, in short - presence and representation for the men, and absence and non-representation for the women. In terms of political organization, the head of the local council is perceived as a leadership role, and the men are firmly opposed to transferring authority to a woman. According to 'Aida, if a woman were to be selected for the position, she would have to be present at conferences and meetings with men, and to work with men, and to be away from the house – just like a man in the position. The content of the work, the method, the power associated with the position, the responsibility and authority, are all meant to be the same for men and women. Nevertheless, 'Aida faced a religious-cultural barrier which she expressed in the question: "How can a woman be at the center of decision making and dictate policy for men?" This barrier resulted in her exclusion from running for the position.

The issue at hand is exclusionary practices on the basis of gender. At the beginning of the process, 'Aida was an equal – she decided to submit her candidacy following an open call for nominations from the Ministry of Interior. 'Aida contends that during the

process, powerful detractors from within the political system and outside of it attempted to hamper her candidacy. She believed in her power and ability to advance from education to politics, and she believed then and still believes now that women should leave the home, gain an education and become economically independent. 'Aida is, in fact, an agent of change in Druze society, but her detractors tried to induce her to undercut her belief in her abilities, and to exclude her from the nomination.

Additionally, in a society as ethnically, religiously, and culturally complex as Israel's, it is difficult to distinguish 'Aida as an agent of change only through the prism of being a woman. In Israel, different sub-identities exist within the gender of women: Jewish women of Middle Eastern descent, Jewish women of European descent, Arab women, lesbians, and more. These female identities combine with other narratives, for example, the Zionist narrative. Palestinian women will certainly feel differently about that narrative than Jewish women, because for them, Israel's Independence is the *nakba*, the great catastrophe. Every sub-gender responds and functions from within its cultural heritage (Herzog, 2005). 'Aida tried to advance herself by breaking the boundaries of gender and transitioning to politics, a territory considered to be masculine: the mayorship was meant to afford her power, authority, and responsibility.

'Aida acted out of a desire to change Druze society's attitude toward the status of women. Her belief in the power and independence of Druze women is resolute, and says she even dreamed of a political career as a young woman. Her candidacy and desire for change originated not only from her being a woman but from her being a Druze woman. She preserved all the elements of her identity: she studied and worked, and at the same time she married, had children, and managed her household.

It is important to note that 'Aida belongs to one of the few families in her village with Israeli citizenship. The connection with Israel exposed her to different possibilities for women and woke in her the desire for change. Thus, the tactic of running for a position in the male dominated sphere of politics was motivated by additional factors.

Despite the exclusionary responses to her candidacy, 'Aida did not try to change her tactics. She did not try to run for another position, or withdraw from the race. Although she will not serve in the role, she brought about a change in the society in which she lives.

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In conclusion, the event of 'Aida's candidacy for mayor of the local council showed it impossible to separate the socio-cultural context from the results. The candidate sought to shatter two glass ceilings: being a woman, and being a Druze woman from the Golan Heights.

'Aida set a precedent, and as she demonstrates, a Druze woman's decision to run for an executive position was a bold one which is not to be taken for granted in the context of Druze society. The measure affected Druze women; even if they disagreed with her actions, 'Aida provided a different perspective on woman's place in society. 'Aida is of the opinion that although the affect may have been nominal, at least women were challenged to "finally come out of their shells." In my opinion, even an act with minimal impact lays another stone on the path for multi-cultured women to advance in society. Although 'Aida was removed from the list of candidates for the local council, her decision to reach for the highest echelons has paved the way for other Druze women to do so as well.

The transformation of gender in Druze society is highly complex. Not only are the perceptions surrounding the place and status of women in society anchored by deeply

engrained thought systems - religion, history and culture add additional barriers that complicate changing the status quo. Consequently, the struggle is complex, slow, and requires patience. Even though the Druze religion accords its women many rights – it requires Druze men to treat women as equals, prohibits polygamy, and compels divorced men to pay alimony (Falah, 2000), however, the status of Druze women still requires change, as proven by 'Aida's unique journey.

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