

## Arab Political Parties in the Occupied Lands of 1948

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### Introduction

The 1948 Nakba was a major turning point in the lives of the Palestinian people. The Zionist gangs had occupied 78% of Palestine's lands and established the so-called 'Israel' state. The Israeli occupation displaced a huge part of the Palestinian people, but an equally great part survived and clung to their own cities and villages, or moved to nearby cities inside the occupied land to establish new communities away from the ones targeted by the occupation.

The Palestinians suffered from disconnectedness as a result of the occupation's measures against them. It practiced all forms of oppression against the Palestinian people for the purpose of erasing their identity and eliminating their existence.

The Palestinians in the occupied lands realized the occupation's attempts to dissect the Arabs' presence and oppression of their identity through its racist measures. Therefore, the people started working on establishing and organizing a Palestinian Arab community to save their identity and culture, and exercise pressure on the occupation for the protection of the Palestinians' rights.

This study examines the main endeavors for and reasons behind forming Arab parties in the occupied lands of 1948, these parties' accomplishments and the ways the occupation dealt with them considering them a strategic threat against the occupation and its project. The research ends with a glimpse of the possible future of the Arab parties in the Israeli political system.

### **Topic One: Palestinians' Conditions inside the Occupied Lands after 1948**

Since 1948, the Palestinian people has been suffering from the occupation's atrocities, massacres and targeting of civilians; children, women and elderly. The Palestinian people tried to live in safer places, so some sought refuge inside Palestine in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; and outside Palestine in Egypt, Lebanon and

Jordan. Nevertheless, a great part of the Palestinian people continued to live in the occupied lands of 1948 whether in their own cities or in nearby villages<sup>(1)</sup>.

Although these Palestinians live in the occupied lands of 1948 and are under the rule of the Israeli occupation, the latter has not recognized their existence nor considered them an important part of the community. The population of Palestinians in the areas under the occupation's control reached 156,000 Palestinians; i.e. about 10% of the Palestinians who were displaced, targeted or killed by the occupation<sup>(2)</sup>.

The occupation started to refer to these Palestinians as the 'Arab citizens of Israel', but they have suffered from all forms of racism and discrimination. They are alienated politically, economically, socially and culturally<sup>(3)</sup>.

**Politically:** The Israeli occupation has imposed on the Palestinian people a military rule for over 20 years, depriving them from any political, economic, social and cultural rights. The military rule was abolished in 1966, and the police became responsible for the security and life affairs of the Palestinians while continuing its discrimination against them<sup>(4)</sup>.

**Economically:** The occupation's measures led to the deterioration of the economic conditions of the Palestinians, so they could not work nor have respectful jobs. The majority worked in agriculture and livestock-raising. The unemployment rate among Arabs reached 13.9% while 3.6% among Jews in 1960. The rates rose in 1967 to 19.4% for the Arabs and 9% for the Jews<sup>(5)</sup>. In 2012, the unemployment rate increased to 25% among Arabs and decreased to 4.5% among Jews<sup>(6)</sup>.

**Socially:** The occupation enacted several racist laws that allowed the seizure and theft of Palestinian lands which resulted in disconnecting the families and creating a gap

<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Thani, Ali and Al-Zu'bi, Mai, Inhabitants of Historical Palestine, Al-Jazeera Net, 2005.

<sup>(2)</sup> Haim, Malka, "Chapter 2: Demographics and Politics in Israel," in Crossroads: The Future of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011, p.6.

<sup>(3)</sup> Firwana, Ahed, Centralist Parties in Israel, MA thesis – Al-Azhar University, Gaza, 2014, pp. 11-12.

<sup>(4)</sup> Al-Jaish, Mohammed, Internal Situation in Israel and Its Impact on 1967 War, MA thesis – the Islamic University, Gaza, 2008.

<sup>(5)</sup> Ibid: p.238.

<sup>(6)</sup> Jaraisi, Barhoum, the Political Map in Israel – 2013 Elections, Madar, Ramallah, 2013, p. 140.

within the community. Any communication among the Palestinians and Arabs financially or morally led to interrogations and punishments.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Educationally:** The Arab community suffered from discrimination in the educational field as well. They were treated differently. In 1961, universities included 2.2% of Arab students and their numbers decreased in 1965 to 2%<sup>(2)</sup>.

**Culturally:** The Palestinian people suffered from a horrific war in which their heritage, culture and identity were targeted. All Israeli media outlets, both official and unofficial, worked side by side with the schools' curricula on destroying the Arab intellect, culture and identity<sup>(3)</sup>.

**Generally:** The Palestinian people continued to live in the occupied lands of 1948 and hence received the 'Israeli' nationality, but they did not gain any rights like other 'citizens'. They lived in the Israeli community as second-degree citizens, without the ability to engage in politics, build institutions or form parties to represent them. However, the representation part changed when the military rule was abolished as mentioned earlier<sup>(4)</sup>.

## **Topic Two: Endeavors for Political Palestinian Organization after 1948 Nakba**

### **First: Objectives of Engaging in Israeli Political Life**

The Israeli occupation imposed restrictions on the Palestinians living in the occupied lands of 1948. However, they rejected and condemned such measures fully understanding the severity of the Zionist attacks on them<sup>(5)</sup>.

The Palestinians tried all means possible to exercise pressure on the occupation to obtain their rights and end discrimination against them. They formed their own

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(1) Khatib, Shawqi, Envisioning the Future of the Arab Palestinians in Israel, National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities, 2006, p. 10.

(2) Ibid: Al-Jaish, Internal Situation in Israel and Its Impact on 1967 War, p. 238.

(3) Ibid: p. 239.

(4) Kabha, Mustafa, the Arab Palestinian Minority in Israel, Al-Jazeera Net, December 22, 2004.

(5) Nasasra, Mansour, the Politics of Exclusion and Localization: The Palestinian Minority in Israel and Oslo Accords, Mada Al-Carmel Conference, Haifa, 2020, pp. 11-12.

organizational structures and institutions to be their representatives in the official institutes of the entity. Their main objectives were:

- Forming parties and building institutes that adopt the Arab issues and seek to win them their political and civil rights as they constitute 20% of the population.
- Participating officially in the struggle and national Palestinian work that supports the establishment of a Palestinian state and forces the occupation's full withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Palestinians in the 1948 occupied lands did not consensually agree on engaging in the politics of the Israeli occupation<sup>(2)</sup> as such act would implicitly mean the recognition of the legality of the occupation and adherence to the Israeli regulations and laws. Those in favor of engagement consider this as an opportunity to exploit the official platforms and institutes such as the Knesset, parties and ministries<sup>(3)</sup>.

Until this day, a large group of the Palestinians refuse to participate in the politics of the occupation basing their rejection on religious and national constants. They consider political practice as being under occupation not in their own country, and such practices would embellish the ugly truth of the occupation to the world. The (northern) Islamic Movement under Sheikh Raed Salah's leadership and Abnaa Al-Balad are the two most prominent powers that reject political participation in the official Israeli institute; including any participation in the Knesset elections<sup>(4)</sup>.

## **Second: Arabs' Endeavors to Engage in the Political Israeli Arena**

As mentioned earlier, the Palestinians have suffered from all forms of violations and atrocities after the 1948 Nakba, yet they tried to overcome such circumstances and to engage in the political structures and bodies that do not have the banned Arab identity. One of the very first attempts was to join Maki, the Israeli Communist Party,

<sup>(1)</sup> The Political Parties in Israel, Ebdaa for Research, Studies and Training, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>(2)</sup> Al-Attari, Ramz, the Arab Parties in the Knesset from A to Z, Raya Network, July 29, 2019.

<sup>(3)</sup> Badwan, Ali, the Arab List in Israel: Electoral Coalition with Limited Impact, Jazeera Net, February 26, 2015.

<sup>(4)</sup> Ibid.

that was formed in 1948. Maki party went through several changes; sometimes parties split and other times parties joined. It was later known as Rakah and Hadash<sup>(1)</sup>.

The political program of the Israeli Communist party managed to embrace the Palestinians' ambitions and offered them an alternative that could meet their expectations. The party worked actively in the Palestinian cities and villages<sup>(2)</sup>. The party continued to use anti-Zionism and imperialist slogans in adherence with its support to the Soviet Union and Communist positions. It, however, believed in Israel's hegemony and the importance of granting the Palestinians their rights, recognizing the refugees' right to return and compensating them, and establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza<sup>(3)</sup>.

The Israeli Communist party participated in the first Knesset elections in 1949 and won 4 seats, in the second elections in 1951 and won 5 seats, and in the third elections in 1955 and won 6 seats<sup>(4)</sup>.

From 1948 and until the abolition of the military rule in 1966, the Palestinians tried to form several movements and organizational structures in the occupied lands of 1948, yet they failed. Such failure was either due to the internal disputes among the parties such as the Arab Front in 1958, or due to the Israeli bans. For example, the Al-Ard Movement was launched in the early sixties but was officially banned in 1965 along with Abnaa Al-Balad that was not even recognized<sup>(5)</sup>.

### **Topic Three: Palestinian Political Organization in the Occupied Lands after 1967**

#### **First: Structuring and Forming Arab Commissions**

The abolition of the military rule in December 1966 introduced the beginning of new political work for the Palestinians in the occupied lands of 1948. The Palestinians started structuring their own organizations in the occupied lands and protecting their

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<sup>(1)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(2)</sup> Razuq, Asaad, *Insight of Israel's Parties*, PLO Research Centre, Beirut, 1966, p. 69.

<sup>(3)</sup> Nakhla, Khalil, *Future of the Palestinian Minority in Israel*, Madar, Ramallah, 2008, pp. 11-12.

<sup>(4)</sup> Ibid: Al-Jaish, *Internal Situation in Israel and Its Impact on 1967 War*, p. 50.

<sup>(5)</sup> Mansour, Kmail, *the General Survey of Israel*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 2011.

social and political rights. The occupation did not disapprove them because it considered their work as part of the Israeli Foreign Ministry<sup>(1)</sup>. The most prominent commissions which were established are:

- Palestinian Student Committees in 5 Israeli universities from 1970-1975 during which the Arab Student Union was formed in the Israeli universities.
- High School Students Regional Union in 1974.
- Lands Defense Committee in 1975.
- National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in 1974.
- Village committees such as Ennahda Movement in Tayibe, Acre's Arab Women Society, and Deir Al-Asad Front.
- Regional Committee for Arab Local Authorities (also called Arab Israel Parliament) for its role in bringing together the Arabs in the occupied lands of 1948<sup>(2)</sup>.

## **Second: The Formation of the Arab Parties in the Occupied Lands of 1948**

The Arab parties' political work started in the occupied lands of 1948 as part of joint parties that combined Palestinians, and Communist or leftist Jews. Arab political work, however, appeared late. The Islamic Movement, led by Abdullah Nimr Darwish, was established in 1971, but it refused to exercise political work under the occupation's rule, so it focused on dawa and offering services only<sup>(3)</sup>.

The formation of Hadash is deemed as the first official political representative that represented the Palestinians overtly in the Israeli elections. It comes from the Communist parties, such as Maki and Rakah, which were formed in the earlier years of the occupation. Hadash emerged in its renewed form in 1977 before the Knesset elections of the same year and had the same principles of the previous parties. It called

<sup>(1)</sup> Bishara, Azmi, Arabs in Israel: View from Inside, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2008, p. 187.

<sup>(2)</sup> Kiwan, Mamoun, Palestinians in their Homeland not Their Country, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, Beirut, pp. 188-189.

<sup>(3)</sup> Arab Parties in Israel, Wafa News Agency, 2020.

for equality between Jews and Palestinians in the occupied lands and achievement of peace<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Progressive List for Peace appeared before the 1948 elections. It encompassed Jews and Palestinians, and brought together some figures who split from Hadash and Abnaa Al-Balad. Mohammed Miari is deemed as the most prominent leader of this party. It successfully won the votes of Arabs and Hadash. In 1988 elections, the Arab voters were clearly inclined towards the parties with Arab representation<sup>(2)</sup>.

The Arab Democratic Party was formed in 1988 as the first purely-Arab party. It was led by Abdulwahab Darawshe who split from the Labor party in a protest against inciting confrontations between the occupation and the Palestinians in the 1987 Intifada. In the first elections, the party won 1 seat, but in 1996 it aligned itself with the Islamic movement and won 5 seats<sup>(3)</sup>.

Gradually, more Arab parties were being formed; they even went through alliances and coalitions to win the biggest number of Palestinian voters in the occupied lands and to have a real representative amidst the continuous Israeli practices that aimed at their marginalization and exclusion.

Still, some Arabs were aligned with Israeli right lists. For example, Ayoob Kara was with the Likud, Majalli Wahabi with Kadima and Hamad Amar with Yisrael Beiteinu<sup>(4)</sup>.

Some of the most famous Arab parties that engaged in the Israeli political arena and still has a voice there are:

- Hadash.
- The National Democratic Alliance (Balad).
- The Islamic Movement – the southern branch.
- The Arab Movement for Renewal (Ta'al).

<sup>(1)</sup> Ibid: Kiwan, Palestinians in their Homeland not Their Country, p. 191.

<sup>(2)</sup> Metz, Helen Chapin, Israel: A Country Study, Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1990, pp. 227.

<sup>(3)</sup> Salem, Ahmed, the Israeli Political Parties, Al-Jazeera Net, October 3, 2004.

<sup>(4)</sup> Mahmoud, Khalid, Knesset Elections: Israel Chooses Extremism, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, February 14, 2009.

## Topic Four: Most Prominent Arab Parties in the Occupied Lands of 1948

### First: The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash)

Hadash was officially established in 1977, and can be defined as a mixture of a leftist alliance that encompasses Arabs and Jews in the occupied lands and has roots in the Israeli Communist party among other leftist groups, such as the Black Panthers; movements calling for peace; human rights activists; and academics. In present time, Mansour Dehamshe is leading the party.

The Front adheres to leftist principles and believes in joint cooperation between the Palestinians of the occupied lands and the Jews there. It has 5 seats in the Knesset as part of the Arab Joint List. It mainly:

- Calls for the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation from the occupied Palestinian lands in 1967, evacuation of Israeli settlements and establishment of a Palestinian state alongside 'Israel'.
- Adopts issues related to social justice and equality, and provision of social, health and popular housing services.
- Defends democratic freedoms and laborers' rights.
- Calls against the discrimination and ethnic segregation against the Arab citizens.
- Calls against the sectarian discrimination against the easterners in all fields.
- Calls for offering women equal rights<sup>(1)</sup>.

### Second: The National Democratic Alliance (Balad)

The National Democratic Alliance was established in 1995<sup>(2)</sup>. Several intellectual Palestinians were responsible for its establishment; mainly Dr. Azmi Bishara from whom the party won its popularity and support. Others were Haneen Zoabi and Jamal Zahalka<sup>(3)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(2)</sup> Sultani, Nemr, the National Democratic Alliance, the Palestinians in Israel: Review of History, Politics and Society, Mada Center for Applied Social Research, Haifa, 2015, p. 359.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibid: Badwan, the Arab List in Israel: Electoral Coalition with Limited Impact.

This party reflects a more advanced model of Arabs' involvement in political work in the occupied lands. Although it shared Hadash the same aims, it focused on national and Palestinian objectives<sup>(1)</sup>.

It mainly called for:

- The establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with Al-Quds as its capital.
- The dismantling of all Israeli settlements established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- The guarantee of the Palestinian refugees' right to return.
- The prevention of Arab lands' confiscation, recognition of Arab communities, establishment of new Arab cities and villages on the lands controlled by the occupation.
- The granting of cultural self-rule to the Palestinians, and their enablement to manage their own affairs in several fields such as education and upbringing.
- The abolition of all laws and practices that strengthen the Zionist characteristics of the state, and incite national and political discrimination against the Arab citizens<sup>(2)</sup>.

### **Third: The Arab Joint List (The Southern Islamic Movement)**

The Islamic Movement was first established in the early seventies by Abdullah Nimar Darwish. Its activities were mainly focused on dawa, and charity social work. It, however, did not meet the expectations of the movement's supporters who aspired to have a stronger political presence and representation in the official Israeli institutions. This resulted in internal disparity among the members (dividing them into conservatives and renewals)<sup>(3)</sup>.

The movement was split into two parts: Northern branch led by Sheikh Raed Salah and a southern one led by Hamad Abu Daabas. The dispute between them was

<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Shrouf, Nasser, Arab Parties in Israel: Symbolic Representation and Limited Political Influence, DW News network, March 27, 2006.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibid: Arab Parties in Israel, Wafa.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibid: Nakhla, Future of the Palestinian Minority in Israel, pp. 22-23.

clear after the occupation and the PLO had signed the Oslo Accords in 1993, and mutually recognized the other. The dispute grew bigger on the support of the Accords and participation in the Knesset elections. The northern branch called for boycotting the elections while the southern one called for participating in them<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Southern Islamic Movement, later known as the Arab Joint List, was headed by Abdulmalik Dehamshe. This party has been participating in the elections since 1996, during which it won 4 seats. Dehamshe continued as the representative of the movement in the Knesset several rounds. He also served as Deputy Speaker for the Knesset twice, and was member in several committees<sup>(2)</sup>.

#### **Fourth: The Arab Movement for Renewal (Ta'al)**

The Arab Movement for Renewal was established in 1996 as a political party and was headed by Dr. Ahmed Tibi, who worked as a political advisor to the late President Yasser Arafat. The Movement successfully participated in the 1999 Knesset elections under a coalition list with Balad party. The coalition won 2 seats, and Tibi was assigned one of them<sup>(3)</sup>.

Ta'al is considered as a contributor rather than an independent party because ever since its establishment, it participates in the elections under other coalitions and alliances. It first participated with the Balad party, but today it participates with the United Arab List coalition as what happened in the most recent elections<sup>(4)</sup>. Movements generally seek making coalitions to ensure passing the threshold<sup>(5)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(2)</sup> What are the Components of the Arab Joint List in the Israeli Knesset and its Principles? BBC, September 24, 2019.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(4)</sup> Jaraba, Mahmoud and Ben Shetrit, Lihi, the Arab Political Powers in Israel: Fruits of Unity and Dangers of Disconnectedness, Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, October 27, 2016.

<sup>(5)</sup> Ben Shitrit, Lihi and Jaraba, Mahmoud, The Joint List That Could, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 27, 2015.

## Topic Five: Influence of Arab Parties on Israeli Politics

The Arab parties participated in the Israeli politics. However, it was very minimum and had a limited impact. Most of the time, the Arab representation was excluded from key decision-making positions. The occupation did so for two main reasons: One that is strategic, as they rejected non-Jews assumption of the 'state's' important institutes; and the second is tactic, as they wanted to prevent any Jewish institute from containing Arabs, and punished those who did<sup>(1)</sup>.

The Palestinians suffered from discrimination in the Knesset. Their propositions could hardly be approved for preliminary reading and never reaching the drafting of an act. The Arabs' demands have always been focused on the daily-life requirements of the Arab citizens in the occupied lands and the improvement of the living conditions without ever engaging in national and major strategic issues<sup>(2)</sup>.

The Arab parties have adopted strong positions at times of conflict with the occupation whether during wars, or in important incidents such as the normalization endeavors, and agreements with the PA and Arab states<sup>(3)</sup>.

The Palestinian representatives are in continuous dispute with the extreme right parties, which seek restricting the Palestinians' freedoms, because of the occupation's continuous targeting of the Palestinians. The Arabs in the Knesset also keep fighting for obtaining equal privileges, facilitations, tools and opportunities offered to their counterparts<sup>(4)</sup>.

**Finally**, the Arab Knesset members have always adopted a semi-opposition role. Since their first participation until this day, they have confronted the extremist policy of the official Israeli institutes, and have conveyed the Palestinian citizens' voice in official platforms in what refutes the occupation's propaganda.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Al-Ostaz, Yusuf, Arab Parties in Israel and their Role in the Knesset 1967-2009, MA thesis – Al-Azhar University, 2010, p. 98.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibid: pp. 101-114.

<sup>(4)</sup> Ibid: p. 99.

## Conclusions and Recommendations:

### First: Conclusions

This study has come to the following conclusions:

1. The Palestinians suffered from the absence of political representation after the 1948 Nakba.
2. The Israeli occupation exercised all forms of discrimination against the Palestinian people inside the occupied lands and deprived them from their basic rights through imposing a military rule for about 20 years.
3. The Palestinian people have worked on obtaining their rights through forming political parties, structures, bodies and organizations, and civil institutes to function as their representatives, protect them and call for their rights.
4. The occupation tried to prevent the Palestinians from having a cultural and intellectual identity in the occupied lands of 1948.
5. The establishment of Arab parties was hindered by several obstacles such as ideological and national disparities within the Arab community, which were also incited by the occupation.
6. The Arab community managed to have a group of distinguished figures as representatives who defied the occupation's crimes and discrimination, and managed to make achievements in favor of the Palestinians in the occupied lands of 1948.
7. Despite the successes of the parties, their role and political activity remained limited as a result of discrimination and Israeli measures to minimize their abilities.

### Second: Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

1. The establishment of a political representation that unites the Palestinians in the occupied lands of 1948.

2. The establishment of a political representation that connects the Palestinians in the occupied lands of 1948 with other Palestinians everywhere else, and that agrees on a political program that can defy the occupation's racist policies.
3. The agreement on political and social structures that represent the Palestinian people in the occupied lands to avoid having unfocused efforts and endeavors.
4. The agreement on a vision that brings together the different components of the Palestinian people and prioritizes the national identity and interests.
5. The development of Arabs' party work in the occupation's official institutes to become more effective through creating a network whose interests intersect with other components of the Arab community.

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