The Split of the Islamic Movement in Israel: Minority Dilemmas in the Jewish State

Abstract

The Islamic Movement in Israel split in 1996 due to a disagreement over whether or not to stand for national elections. It has since had two branches referred to as the Movement of Shaykh Ra’ed Salah (called the ‘Northern Movement’) and the Movement of Shaykh Darwish/Sarsur/Daabes (after the current leader, called the ‘Southern Movement’). A question for the Palestinian minority inside Israel is whether to act from the inside of Israeli state and society institutions or from the outside of these institutions in their activities aimed to improve their predicament. This dilemma is well illustrated by examining the reasons for and consequences of the split in the Islamic Movement.

It is common to describe the branch that refuses to participate in national elections as ‘radical’ and the branch that has representatives in the Knesset as ‘moderate’. While appreciating the description of a movement with internal room for diversity, the present analysis challenges this dichotomous description based on the facts that both branches are non-violent; their activism in their mirror institutions does not violate Israeli law; and both participate in local elections and thus interact with Israeli state institutions using the democratic tools available to them.

Introduction

The present article investigates the political participation of the Islamic Movement in Israel. The question for the Palestinian minority inside Israel is whether to act from the inside of Israeli state and society institutions or from the outside of these institutions in their activities aimed to improve their predicament. Palestinian citizens of Israel are today largely the descendants of the one-eighth of the total number of Palestinians in 1948 who remained after the war (Morris 1989) and today they constitute more than twenty per cent of the Israeli population (Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel 2014). The nature of their predicament as a native national minority lies in the vacuum between their instrumental Israeli citizenship and Palestinian national belonging. Although Palestinian citizens of Israel formally enjoy civil and political rights as individuals, as non-Jewish citizens they are excluded from equal membership of the political community. According to the law they are equal citizens, and they can vote for
and be elected to the parliament, but according to the recent Inequality Report by Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (Adalah 2013):

Inequalities between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel span all fields of public life and have persisted over time. Direct and indirect discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel is ingrained in the legal system and in governmental practice.

The definition of the State of Israel as a Jewish state makes inequality and discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel a reality and a political project. The pairing of “Jewish” and “democratic” both codifies discrimination against non-Jewish citizens and impedes the realization of full equality.

The dilemma for Palestinian citizens is how to relate to this reality and this is well illustrated by examining the reasons for, and consequences of, the split in the Islamic Movement in 1996 due to disagreement over whether or not to participate in national elections. The split resulted in two branches referred to as the Movement of Shaykh Ra’ed Salah, also called the Northern Movement/branch, and the Movement of Shaykh Darwish/Sarsur/Daabes, named after the current leader\(^1\), also called the Southern Movement/branch\(^2\). Based on interviews with leaders and activists from the Movement and observations made between 2008 and 2012, in addition to written material from the Movement and other sources, the following analysis investigates the split and its consequences.

The present article also questions the dichotomous description used to describe the two branches – one as ‘moderate’ and the other as ‘radical’. This is a dichotomy often used to describe Islamist movements, and based on this case, the present article questions the benefit of this labelling, and examines the reasons behind this categorisation in the case of this Movement. While appreciating the description of a movement with internal room for diversity, the present analysis challenges this dichotomous description based on the facts that, on the one hand, both branches are non-violent; their activism does not violate Israeli law; and both participate in local elections and thus interact with Israeli state institutions using the democratic tools available to them. Furthermore, the two branches have the same goals, and since the split they have operated in a similar manner with what can be described as mirror organisations. Whereas none of these can be described as representing a radical version of Islamism, in order to reflect the different styles of the leaders of the branches, it is here suggested that the Southern branch be described as ‘pragmatic’ and the Northern branch as ‘idealistic’.

Before discussing this further, a detailed description of the actual split and its consequences is necessary.

A Note on Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic material collected in Israel between 2008 and 2010 and on written sources from the Movement, including one of its official websites. In particular, the

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\(^1\) This branch was first headed by Shaykh Abdalah Nimr Darwish, the founder of the Islamic Movement in Israel, then by Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsur, and today this branch is headed by Shaykh Hammad Abu Daabes who was elected in 2010.

\(^2\) The division into ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ refers to the localities of the towns from which the first leaders of the respective branches live — Salah in Umm al-Fahm, and Darwish and Sarsur in Kufr Qassem. This terminology does not represent a real geographical correlation of the supporters of the two branches among Palestinians in Israel.
following investigation is based on interviews with leaders and other individuals working on behalf of the Movement; fieldwork observations from the town of Kafr Qasim; and material from the website of the Eqra student organisation. By utilising primary material from interviews and written sources in combination with secondary academic and media sources, this analysis relies on the triangular methodological approach (Esposito 1999; Hroub 2000; Gunning 2008).

The three components that make up the triangular approach are direct observation, interaction (interviews) and study (of both primary and secondary written and other sources, such as media). John L. Esposito has contended that this approach is particularly appropriate for the study of Islamic movements because many Islamic activists do not produce many writings, and many of the texts produced are ideological tracts or public relations documents that do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the movements' wider agenda or activities (Esposito 1999). Based on this observation, the approach used in this research is to interpret what spokespersons and activists of the Movement write and say within the context of their activism practice.

All of the interviews for this research were conducted in the offices or homes of the interviewees, or at an alternative venue chosen by them. Most were conducted in Arabic with a translator present. Most interviews were recorded on audio equipment, depending on the preference of the interviewees. In addition to interviews with leaders and activists of the Movement, I conducted in-depth, and in many cases follow-up, interviews with ten student activists from the two branches’ student organisations at the universities in Haifa, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in 2008, 2009 and 2012.

The Split of a Movement

The Islamic Movement in Israel was established in the mid-1970s by Palestinian citizens of Israel as a grass-roots movement with the focus of strengthening the faith and observance of Muslim individuals and the community at large. Its tripartite goals are to protect the Palestinian people, land and religious sites mainly in Israel, but also in occupied East Jerusalem and beyond. Gradually the Movement built a country-wide network of religious and social institutions catering for the needs of its constituency not provided satisfactorily by the state. To illustrate the discrimination in budgeting and state support of Palestinian citizens, Palestinian families are over-represented among Israel’s poor; unemployment rates are significantly higher among Palestinian citizens; Palestinians citizens are by law deprived of access to and use of nationalised land; and the state provides three times as much funding to Jewish schools when compared with Arab schools (Adalah 2013). Through its network of self-reliant institutions, the Islamic Movement quickly grew into a local political power centre, and from the mid-1980s participated in local elections.

In 1996, the leaders of the Islamic Movement and representatives of all Palestinian towns, villages and cities inside Israel gathered in the Movement’s National Consultative Assembly (Shoura) headed by the Movement’s founder, Shaykh Abdallah Nimr Darwish, to discuss whether or not to enter national elections for the parliament, the Knesset. The recollections of this meeting vary among the sources interviewed. According to one source associated with
what became the Southern branch, which favours participation in national elections, the majority was in favour of participation in national elections (Spokesperson Southern branch 2008). However, another source associated with what became the Northern branch, claimed that the vote was rigged, and that many new faces came to the meeting alleging to represent villages and towns, but in fact their presence was requested by the Southern branch to vote for participation (M. Khatib 2010). Below is the description by Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsur, the former head of the Southern branch and a Member Knesset (MK) for this branch, of the Shoura meeting (Sarsur 2008a):

*With a slight difference, the results favoured participation in the parliamentary elections under a unified list. The leadership met at Shaykh Darwish's and we vowed to carry out the decision. However, a while later, we were surprised by four members from the regional consulting council, led by Shaykh Salah, who announced their split from the Islamic Movement because they were against participation in the elections. What shocked us most is that the four brothers issued a declaration that took a revolutionary character in the newspaper Voice of Right and Freedom. They announced a ‘Correction revolution’ through which they took over the relief, press, scientific and financial societies and institutions. They even used the same name as the mother movement. All attempts to dissuade them failed. There was no reason for this split, but I think some extremist elements from outside the country pushed for it. Our loss because of this split is great.*

From the point of view of Ra’ed Salah and those against participation in national elections, the main argument has to do with the non-Muslim character of the Israeli state. This has two implications: from a religious point of view they argue that the Movement should not participate in a political system that is not based on Shari’ah; and from a political point of view they argue that participation in these elections, with resulting representation in the Knesset, would force them to accept the Zionist character of the state. This was unacceptable to Salah and his followers, as it would force the Movement to swear allegiance to the state, and to its (Jewish) symbols and (Zionist) agenda (Aburaiya 2004). Furthermore, they argued that it would make the Movement dependent on government resources and thus provide the state with control over its activities. Thus, participation in national elections would weaken the Movement’s unique contact with the people by ‘making it just like the other Arab parties in the Knesset’ and ‘party politics itself constitutes “dirty business” that would inevitably divide the Muslims in Israel’ (Aburaiya 2004, 450). The Northern branch enlisted support for its position from religious leaders outside Israel and obtained fatwas from Shaykh Muhammad Abu Faris from Jordan and Shaykh Yusuf al-Qirdawi. The latter stated:

*The Shari’a position toward the Zionist entity is [based on its] total rejection, continuous resistance and constant jihad. The correct stand, from the Shari’a point of view, makes it obligatory to disapprove of the entry into the Zionist enemy’s parliament, because [such a step] would inspire a potential recognition of their [the Jews’] right to exist and remain on usurped land and this is what we should consistently, and emphatically deny (Rekhess 1996, 3).*

In our conversations, while confirming unhappiness with the split, the leaders of the Northern branch still draw the line at national elections. Salah’s deputy Shaykh Kamel Khatib explained further that he thought Israel wanted the Islamic Movement to join the elections in order to boost its image as a democracy, and he refuses to be what he considered to be a fig leaf:
Israel was, in fact, interested in the entry of the Islamic Movement into the Knesset. It sought to make the Islamic Movement a bridge to connect with other Muslim peoples. This would contribute to the normalisation of relations between Israel and the Muslim and Arab peoples. In addition, another of the benefits of our entry into the Knesset would be to beautify Israel's ugly face, as if it is in actuality a democracy (K. Khatib 2008).

Khatib further emphasised the independence of the Movement and its institutions when he explained why he does not consider it appropriate for the Movement to join the Knesset:

The Islamic Movement primarily concerns the service for our people through associations that we established and these associations set up institutions all over the country. For example, this place we are in here [the interview took place in Kufr Kanna] is a complex in which there is a public library for the residents of the village and a kindergarten and nearby we have a new elementary school. We have a clinic, ambulances, and a sports club for karate and for football. This exists in many Arab villages. We seek to serve our people through the establishment of these institutions and this is what Shaykh Ra’ed Salah called for. I am sure he told you about what is called a 'self-reliant society', that is, we do not expect to cry on the doorsteps of the ministries. We seek, with the abilities of our people, to build our own institutions to maintain our identity (K. Khatib 2008).

It is puzzling that Khatib argues that the furthering of a self-reliant society is part of the reasoning for not participating in Knesset elections, because both branches work according to the same approach of self-sufficiency, and both accept state support for their institutions at the municipal level. As shown in a previous article, the approach of a self-reliant society is not unique to the Islamic Movement in Israel, but is a key feature of most Islamic movements and is adopted from its parent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Rosmer 2012). Similar to the 'parallel Islamic sector' in Egypt, as characterised by Wickham, the Islamic Movement in Israel constitutes a conglomerate of semi-independent institutions and organisations that foster Islamisation from the bottom up (Wickham 2002).

It has been suggested that there was a connection between the Northern branch’s decision not to participate in national elections and the refusal of Hamas to participate in the 1996 elections for the Palestinian parliament in the occupied Palestinian territory. According to a document entitled 2007 Ruling about participation in the Israeli Parliamentary elections (High Council for Legal Opinion, The Islamic Movement 2007), provided by Sarsur (MK for the Southern branch), both Hamas and the Northern branch decided to refuse to partake in elections, based on the belief that as Palestinian Muslims they should not take part in a non-Muslim system that denies the legitimacy of Islam and that is directly or indirectly colonising Palestine. Whereas for the Northern branch this meant that participation in the Knesset elections would mean recognition of what they consider Israel's colonisation and occupation of Palestine, for Hamas, the very existence of the Palestinian parliament was considered an outcome of the Oslo agreement, which recognises the state of Israel. Thus, the leaders of Hamas argued that participating in Palestinian parliamentary elections meant recognising Israel and its continuous occupation and colonisation of Palestinian land.

Conversely, the Southern branch and those in favour of participation argued that there is room for a political compromise to be made with non-Islamic actors if this constitutes the local context in which politics is conducted (Aburaiya 2004, 449). According to Darwish, the Movement’s founder, the Islamic Movement in Israel should, according to Shari’a, be able to
engage in national politics if this is the best way in which to promote and protect the interests of the Palestinians in Israel. As stated in the Southern branch’s document, *2007 Ruling* (High Council for Legal Opinion, The Islamic Movement 2007, 4):

> The Islamic Movement differs from other Arab parties when dealing with the parliamentary elections on two issues: first, according to our methods, political work is part of a large group of activities that have one goal; appealing for Allah (God), building the human and the good society and the protection of the land and the identity. As a result, there is no contradiction between our policies and the parliamentary work and the Movement’s activities. Second, what makes us differ from others is that we have a message that goes beyond the political goals of all political parties: we have a project that we believe is the path to our and the nation’s revelation. When we get involved in politics, we do not forget our goals. Thus, politics in this sense is part of a comprehensive legal understanding under the slogan, 'Wherever the Muslims' interest is, lies God’s law.'

The *2007 Ruling* continues by stating that (High Council for Legal Opinion, The Islamic Movement 2007, 5):

1. As Islamists, we cannot stand still about what our society is going through because of the racist Israeli policies. Field work and appeal (*dawa*), in addition to municipal and parliamentary work, are tools that put the IM side to side with other waves that face ignorant political politics, whether on the Palestinian or Israeli scenes.

2. Inter-societal relations are mostly dependent on mutual interests. This leads to some lining up in these societies, which could take a political character but may also be extended to have ideological and loyalty dimensions. This requires us in the IM to occupy representative and service positions, which would be our legitimate entry point towards proposing the Islamic solution to our masses.

3. We are a part of the blessed Islamic awakening in the world, which achieved many victories everywhere through channels of participation. So why wouldn’t we follow suit?

4. Refraining from political work will instil the wrong idea among the masses, such as the Muslims’ inability to take responsibility. This includes the claim that Islamists are not involved in anything but purely religious tasks and are not capable of doing anything else.

Mixing religious and political arguments, the *2007 Ruling* draws comparisons with the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic groups in Pakistan, Malaysia, and Turkey. The Southern branch also mentioned Islamist groups in Jordan, the Rafa party in Turkey and the Islamists in Sweden who in 1995 formed an alliance with the Swedish Socialist Party (*Rekhess* 1996, 2). Additionally, they relied on the historical precedents of the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin, Jhafar Ibn Abli Talib, who lived peacefully in non-Muslim Abyssinia for twelve years. This success is based on the ruler ensuring the minority’s rights to practice their religion and the minority’s obedience of the law of the land. Furthermore, the *2007 Ruling* mentions the support of international...
ulama. According to Rekhess, the Southern branch obtained a fatwa from Shaykh Taha al-Barakati, Director of Religious Guidance and Preaching at the Haram al-Sharif Mosque in Mecca, which stated that Muslims are allowed to participate in the Knesset elections if they vote for Muslim candidates (Rekhess 1996, 2).

By participating in national elections and consequentially in the national assembly (the Knesset), the 2007 Ruling further argues that the Movement can object to laws that contradict Shari’a; fight against corruption and oppression; fight for socio-economic equality; utilise the freedom provided by parliamentary immunity of its representatives; strengthen the Islamic Movement vis-à-vis its opponents; make ministers accountable by questioning them; and use the powers accorded to it by withdrawing votes in parliament. In the conclusion of the ruling, it states that there is no clear argument for or against participation, and that this is an issue of ijtihad [interpretation of the Holy Scriptures]. It concurs that legal opinions on the issue differ, and it states that ‘Participation must be directed by interests and the Islamic Movement allowing for participation, must review these interests every now and then for the purpose of evaluation and decision-making’ (High Council for Legal Opinion, The Islamic Movement 2007).

It is worth noting that representatives of the Southern branch admitted that they were disappointed with their inability to make any changes to the political system after having joined the Knesset. Both Kamel Rayan and Sarsur stated in our conversations that, with hindsight, they did not think that their presence in parliament had made much of a difference for their constituency. However, they both consider it important to keep the parliamentary positions of the branch and to continue to voice their opinions and protests. According to Sarsour, their aim is to relay a message to the (Jewish) Israelis:

> There is no alternative for you but to accept us. We are here. We were here. And we will go on living here. And we will never quit the parliament. Whether you like that or you do not like that. Whether you love it or you do not love it. We are a part of this country. You have really to decide that you accept this reality and you are ready to live with this reality. Going on living in a confrontation in the parliament will never serve what you always say or speak about – coexistence. Coexistence is really based on mutual respect. Without mutual respect do not think... that we, the Arab population, may raise the white flag... may submit and so on. We go on struggling within the limitations of your law. And we hope one day that our cause will come to a certain kind of solution (Sarsur 2008a).

As regards the rejection of entering national elections by the Northern branch, it is significant that even though this branch opposes such participation, its leaders do not directly encourage individuals not to vote in parliamentary elections. In brief, under military rule, until 1966, Palestinian citizens voted mainly for Zionist parties, and the turn-out was high, but reflected dependency rather than choice; then from 1967, they began voting for parties representing the Arab Palestinian minority and the voter turn-outs for national elections ranged between sixty-eight (1981) and seventy-seven (1999) per cent, until 2001 (Peleg and Waxman 2011, 99).

In 2001, the majority of Palestinian voters boycotted the elections for Prime Minister and only eighteen per cent voted. The direct reasons were disillusionment and disappointment after the

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3 Such as Hasan Al Banna, Imam Abu Ali Al Mawdoudi, Shaykh Ali Khafeef, Shaykh Manna’ al Qattan, Dr. Yousef Kardawi, Dr. Mohammad Abdel Kadir Abu Farsi, Sheikh Abbas Madani, and Dr. Salim Bahnasi.
brutal crack-down on demonstrations inside Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory at the beginning of Intifadat al Aqsa, and in particular with the subsequent killing of thirteen Palestinian citizens by Israeli police and security forces in October 2000 (Adalah 2006). The Committee for the Bereaved families encouraged a boycott, alongside the Islamic Movement and the secular nationalist Ibnaa al-Balad (Sons of the Village), who have advocated a boycott of national elections since the early 1970s. Additionally, and perhaps surprisingly, the Arab Members of the Knesset also supported boycotting these elections for Prime Minister. By not voting, most Palestinian citizens were expressing anger with the then Prime Minister Ehud Barak, whose nomination was secured by their votes in 1999, but who did not repay his voters, and was ultimately in charge of the October 2000 events.

Since then, Palestinian citizens have returned to the ballot box, but in lower numbers than before the boycott, and in the last elections (2013) fifty-three to fifty-six per cent voted (Ben Solomon 2013). Currently, not enough research has been done on the reasons for the non-participation in, and/or boycott of, national elections, to reach any conclusions as to how much impact the boycott policy of the Northern branch has on individual voters and on recent developments. However, whereas before 2000 this branch was more or less alone in advocating non-participation in national elections, today they are joined by other protest movements.

What can be said with certainty is that since the Islamic Movement began participating in local and national elections, Israeli society began to pay serious attention to the Movement as a political actor. As Alisa Peled observed in 2001:

...with mounting electoral success at municipal and national levels, the Movement has become a force to be reckoned with on the Israeli political scene, one with an ability to draw international attention to issues of Muslim concern (Peled 2001, 155).

Somewhat ironically, it is the leader(s) of the Northern branch, who are not represented in the Knesset, that get most attention in Israeli media and from Israeli public figures. As will be discussed in detail below, this is because of the differences in the leadership style and in the rhetoric of the two branches. Next to Hanin Zoabi, Member of Knesset for at-Tajamu/Balad (the National Democratic Assembly), Ra’ed Salah has taken over the role formerly held by the now exiled Azmi Bishara, as the recipient of harsh criticism from the Israeli right that dominates both Israeli politics and public discourse today. Zoabi and Salah both participated in the Mavi Marmara flotilla for Gaza in 2010, and are exposed to harsh retaliation for their criticism of Israeli policies in Israeli media and by Israeli politicians. As alluded to by Peled above and to be discussed further below, Salah is also the leading Arab Muslim figure in the ongoing ‘battle over the holy sites’ in Jerusalem, and this puts him in the forefront of attention from Israeli media and right-wing politicians and religious activists. Another indication of the level of concern caused by the Northern branch with the current government is the recent move to try to ban this branch, also to be further addressed below.
Consequences of the Split

The Southern branch first participated in national elections in 1996, and has since had representatives in the Knesset on a joint list with other parties representing Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. In the 2013 elections, this list secured 4 (of 120) Members of the Knesset, which makes it the largest Arab Palestinian list in the Knesset at present, and it means that it has maintained its numbers from the previous elections in 2009 (in 1996, the list secured 4 seats; in 1999, 5 seats; in 2003, 2 seats; and in 2006, 4 seats) (Knesset).

Competition and Factionalism

The consequences of the split for the Movement in practical terms is that the two branches are providing the same services in what can be described as mirror organisations and institutions in villages and towns across Israel. For example, before the split there was one organisation called the Al-Aqsa Association which was established in 1989 and directed by Kamel Rayan. The Association works to document and preserve Palestinian religious sites inside Israel and in East Jerusalem. Through the Al-Aqsa Association, the Islamic Movement tries to protect existing religious sites, such as Al-Aqsa, and to fight for the right of Muslims to have access to sites that have been demolished and/or appropriated by the state. In 2000, the new Al-Aqsa Association of the Movement of Salah was established with the same focus and agenda as the original association. It is not clear to what degree the two associations cooperate or compete, but Rayan, representing the Southern branch, appeared critical of the establishment of the Northern branch’s association (Rayan 2008). Clearly two such similar organisations compete over supporters and funding, thus causing rivalry at institutional and grass-roots levels.

Another example of such mirror activities is the ‘Al-Aqsa is in Danger’ festival. The most well-known is arranged every year in Umm al-Fahm by the Northern branch. This festival draws thousands of supporters from all over the country who come to listen to the speeches about the presumed dangers that face the third holiest mosque in Islam. These assumed dangers involve archaeological digs near the mosque arranged by Israeli settler groups; right-wing Israeli politicians (such as Ariel Sharon who made his infamous walk in the area around Al Aqsa in October 2000); and aggressive military forces (such as the forces that accompanied Sharon) (Dumper and Larkin 2012). In 2009, the Southern branch organised its first similar festival in Kufr Qassem. According to Adel Badeer, it drew several thousand Palestinians from across Israel (Badeer 2010). Again, the split and the resultant mirror activities are causing competition over supporters and funding.

Also the pupil and student organisation of the Movement split as result of the general split, and today Iqra (‘read’) represents the youth of the Northern branch and al-Kalam (‘the pen’) the youth of the Southern branch. Ibrahim Hijazi, the national manager of al-Kalam, explained that before the split of the Islamic Movement all its students were represented under the name of the Arab Student Affairs Committee, and that the belated split of student activities into al-Kalam and Iqra occurred only in 2000 (Ibrahim Hijazi 2012). The situation at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem took a different trajectory: there all Islamist students were, until 2008, represented by the group called al-Risala. In 2008, Iqra split from al-Risala and formed its own group.
As for the relations between *Iqra* and *al-Kalam*, first of all, most student activists interviewed expressed sadness and frustration over the split in the Movement and said they would prefer a united Islamic Movement. Today’s students were children when the split occurred in 1996 and have therefore grown up with it. They are familiar with the cause of the split and support their branch in terms of participation or not in elections for the parliament. However, when it comes to the student level of activities, and on a day-to-day basis, they do not think the split matters. Most Islamic-oriented students and activists go to activities arranged by both *Iqra* and *al-Kalam*, regardless of their branch affiliation. Also, in terms of individual relationships, they describe the split as not being an issue. Similar to leaders and activists in the parent Movement, as will be further described below, they emphasised the point that they have more in common than not, and that they agree on the most important issues related to religion and the national cause of the Palestinians. As one activist explained, ‘In actuality, we are the same, but we disagree on the [participation in the] Knesset... it is more trends and not Islamic thoughts or principles that we differ on’ (Female student 2012). Muhammed Farhan, the national manager of *Iqra*, explains students’ discomfort with the split further:

> Working with two Islamic voices at the universities is uncomfortable for students ... for the leaders [of the Movement] it may not be as difficult, but for the students it is very embarrassing while speaking to other students... they always try to hide it or find room for cooperation and participation, showing the split is not acceptable to students and detrimental to the Islamic student work.

According to Farhan, this is the reason why at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem the two branches worked together under the umbrella of *al-Risala* until as late as 2007. He also stressed that as the manager of *Iqra* he tries to coordinate with Hijazi (the national manager of *al-Kalam*). Such cooperation is described as successful sometimes and less so at other times, depending on the issues.

Overall, from a practical point of view, a consequence of the split is that Palestinians in Israel now can, or, depending on one’s perspective, are forced to, choose between the organisations of the two branches. From the perspective of the two branches, they are competing over clients and active supporters. In addition, they are competing over financial support for their institutions and events from local and international donors. Furthermore, according to the student activists and their leaders, the split is considered unnecessary and detrimental to the Movement, as it steals attention and resources that could have been used on their shared goals.

At an ideological level, the younger generation seems to think that as a minority and a religious movement they and their cause would be better served by unity, and thus the split is considered to make them and the Movement look weak. Abbas Zakur, who previously represented the Southern branch in the parliament, described the Movement as a whole as having lost public support and trust in the shaykhs due to the split (Zakour 2008). He further claimed that there had been a withdrawal from a religious way of life among its supporters since 1996, presumably due to this development. There are no other data to verify these claims.
**Cooperation and Shared Goals**

In terms of actual cooperation between the two branches, the only joint activity of the two is their work in the Hajj and Umra Committee (Badeer 2010). It is composed of five people, three from the Southern branch and two from the Northern branch. According to Adel Badeer, mayor of Kufr Qasem for the Southern branch, there were suggestions to split the committees, but the representatives from the Southern branch refused.

In addition, the two branches are both represented in political forums representing all Palestinian citizens of Israel, such as in the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens in Israel. The High Follow-Up Committee for the Arab Citizens in Israel was established in 1976 after the first Land Day demonstrations and is a non-partisan organisation representing all Palestinian citizens of Israel. Khatib emphasised this joint participation to make the point that, notwithstanding his criticism of the Southern branch's participation in the Knesset, they can still share the presence in such other bodies (K. Khatib 2008).

It is difficult to assess the exact size of the Islamic Movement, as the two branches do not operate with any type of membership registration, and for the same reasons it is difficult to assess the number balance between the two branches. As the Northern branch only has participated in local elections in Umm al-Fahm and not in national elections, election results do not give a good picture of the relative size of the two branches, nor does the participation of the various organisations and institutions in large-scale events, or their usage of facilities, as there are no statistics available (and individuals do not typically identify their use of facilities or participation in events by branch, but partake regardless of which branch is managing the organisation or hosting events).

Despite the split over participation in national elections and the continued existence of two branches of the Movement since 1996, in our conversations the Movement's leaders on both sides downplay differences and emphasise cooperation and similarities. To illustrate, Ra’ed Salah minimised the significance of the difference between the branches and noted that in the Hebrew media the branches are presented as opposites (Salah 2008):

> The press exaggerates things so that it will have some material. This is not strange or new, but in fact, we have many things that bring us together that are principles we have agreed upon. [...] The main difference is the political position, not the fundamentals.

By 'the fundamentals', Salah is referring to the goals of the Movement described by him as:

> The Islamic Movement aims to mainly build an Islamic way of life in the people's understanding and daily behaviour so that the Islamic lifestyle becomes a strong basis through which we preserve our identity and affiliations, as well as through which we build our organizations with overall goals for all the matters of our Arab Palestinian society inside the Green line. This, in itself, would give us the components to maintain our presence in our land, to preserve the holy sites, the present and future for us and for our children and remain steadfast in the face of all the policies of the Israeli establishment that has practiced injustice against us since the beginning of the Nakba of Palestine until today, and has even exceeded that with an explicit and public call for our transfer, particularly these days.

Salah thus reiterated the main goals of the Islamic Movement in Israel: to encourage a Muslim lifestyle; and to preserve and to protect the land, religious sites and people. The slogan of the Islamic Movement in Israel is: ‘Islam is the Solution’, similar to other Islamist movements.
However, the specific goals of this Movement go beyond the expected aim to Islamise the Sunni Muslim Palestinians in the country, and include national and liberational aspects specific to this part of the Palestinian nation. These goals are direct outcomes of the reality in which Palestinian citizens of Israel have found themselves since their Nakba (Catastrophe) in 1948 and their predicament as a national native non-Jewish minority in the Jewish state. The focus is on what has been lost, and on attempts to retrieve and protect (what remains of) the land, people and religious sites. This message is consistent and is the same from both branches.

‘Radicals’ and ‘Moderates’

‘Radical Islam’ or ‘radical Islamists/ism’ are labels usually used to describe groups who promote and conduct violent actions in the name of Islam. Jihad is ‘the struggle’ to follow God’s will, which originally has two connotations: for the individual Muslim to live a virtuous life, and for the ‘community to spread God’s rule and law through teaching, preaching and, when necessary, armed struggle’ (Esposito 1994, 36–7). There are three main uses of armed jihad: resistance to occupation or suppression from non-Muslims powers; rebellion against regimes in countries with a Muslim majority; and, since 2011, there has also been the global jihad against the West and Western-friendly regimes (Utvik 2010, 59–60). ‘Moderate Islam’ or ‘moderate Islamists/ism’ are used to describe non-violent groups that focus on reform (islah) through peaceful means. The main moderate groups are usually associated with the reform Islamism of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Jama‘at al-Ikhwan al-muslimin), that Bjorn Olav Utvik labels as ishali-ikhwani, the ‘reform brotherhood’ (Utvik 2010, 74).

In 1996, the Israeli academic Elie Rekhess made the observation that ‘The Islamic Movement in Israel is deeply divided ideologically and politically and is in no way monolithic’ (Rekhess 1996, 5). Rekhess described the Northern branch that refuses to participate in national elections as ‘radical’ and the Southern branch that has representatives in the Knesset as ‘pragmatic’. Alisa Rubin Peled also describes the Northern branch as ‘radical’ and the Southern branch as ‘moderate’ (Peled 2001, 121), as does the more polemical Raphael Israeli (Israeli 1999). Apart from these academics, Israeli media also frequently use this terminology to describe the two branches (Times of Israel staff 2014; Gazzar 2008; Khoury 2011).

However, if applying the criteria outlined above to the branches of the Islamic Movement in Israel, both fit the ‘moderate’ description: both branches associate themselves with the Muslim Brotherhood and its type of Islamism. They are non-violent, and keep their activities and organisations within the legal framework of Israel.

Furthermore, since the split in 1996, both branches have continued to participate in local elections and thus in the Israeli system of democratic representation. Local authorities among Palestinians were established from the 1950s onwards, and following the 1966 abolition of the military rule of Palestinians in Israel and the consolidation of Arab local government since 1975, this has been the most important channel of social and political development among Palestinian citizens of Israel (Ghanem 2001, 138). Local authorities provide important services, such as social services, water, sewage, rubbish disposal, road maintenance, public gardens and parks, and are responsible for the infrastructure for education and the cultural, sport and health services provided by the central government. Local politics is especially important to
Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are excluded from full participation in national politics due to their status as second class citizens as non-Jewish Israelis. Thus, local authorities constitute one of the few political arenas where Palestinians in Israel can exert actual direct influence over their own lives.

Through their participation in local elections, in holding positions in local councils and in running local councils and municipalities, both branches of the Islamic Movement take an active part in the political process in Israel and its democratic system of representation. This participation refutes claims in Israeli media that Salah and the Northern branch refuse to partake in Israeli democracy, as for example stated in this article Jerusalem Post:

In 1996, the movement split into two factions over the question of whether to participate in the general elections. The result was the creation of a more moderate Southern Branch, which is represented by Arab Knesset members. The Northern Branch, under Salah’s leadership, refuses to partake in Israeli democracy (Lappin 2010).

The ability of both branches to professionally partake in and run local political institutions is confirmed by Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement for Civic Equality in Israel. Sikkuy operates at the municipal level, and according to its former Co-Director, Ali Haidar, the organisation works successfully with both branches of the Movement (Observation by author, 2006). In the context of this cooperation, Sikkuy has found representatives of both branches willing and able to cooperate with all other relevant Palestinians and Jewish bodies. This includes participation in the Forum for Jewish and Arab Mayors, established in 2000 to provide an arena for them to discuss shared concerns, as well as concerns that only related to one of the two communities, in order to learn about each other’s situations. Haidar expressed being particularly impressed by the professionalism of the Islamic Movement, including their budgets, administration and improvement of municipal services.

Based on the above, there does not practically seem to be any significant differences between the two branches in political activism or approach, beyond participation in the Knesset, and therefore no reason to categorise one branch as ‘radical’ and the other as ‘moderate.’ In addition to political participation at local level, leaders of both branches participate in public events to commemorate Palestinian history, and demonstrate against Israeli policies and actions against its Palestinian citizens and in the occupied Palestinian territory. This causes controversy in Israel. For example, leaders of both branches are often present at demonstrations against house demolitions and evictions of families in East Jerusalem, and protests against Israeli military actions in the occupied Palestinian territory. To illustrate, the leaders of both branches were on board the Turkish Mavi Marmara flotilla on route to Gaza in 2010, and previously, Sarsur, then head of the Southern branch, and Salah, were on a boat organised for taking Arab Members of Knesset and other Palestinian representatives from Israel to Gaza with humanitarian aid, food and toys for the Feast of Sacrifice in March 2008 (Roffe-Ofir 2008).

However, there is a difference in the leadership position and style of Salah, head of the Northern branch, who is considered to be controversial by Israeli standards when compared to the more pragmatic style of the leaders of the Southern branch. It might be that the categorising of the Northern branch as ‘radical’ and the Southern branch as ‘moderate’ stems
largely from this difference in rhetoric and leadership style, and from the images of the leaders and branches produced in the Israeli Hebrew media.

**Leadership Style and Rhetoric**

The pragmatic style was first modelled by Shaykh Abdallah Nimr Darwish, the founder and first leader of the Movement. He has emphasised non-violence and political struggle to achieve the legitimate rights for Palestinians as Palestinian citizens, while staying within Israeli law. Darwish was imprisoned as the alleged spiritual leader of the militant group *Usrat al Jihad* (Family of Jihad) in the early 1980s. However, Darwish does not acknowledge that there was a militant group, or that he had anything to do with his supposed role as spiritual leader of it (Benchorin 1988). He described the incidents of burning Jewish-planted forest as the acts of frustrated youths and a few bad apples with bad intentions. Darwish stepped down as leader of the Movement after the split in 1996, and is today considered to be the spiritual leader of the Southern branch, but is also considered to be a spiritual leader by many belonging to the Northern branch.

Darwish is perceived as accessible, and also to a degree acceptable, to the Jewish public through his participation in Israeli public life in interviews in Hebrew newspapers and participation in inter-faith events and other kinds of events, such as the President’s *iftar* annual meal for Palestinian leaders in Israel. In an portrait article in *Maariv* newspaper from 1988, he is described as a new type of religious leader with good communication skills in Arabic, Hebrew and English, and who is open for discussions and is open to being challenged (Benchorin 1988). The article describes Darwish as a man who leads a simple life in an austere home. He is further described as someone who talks about the dialogue and similarities between Islam and Judaism. He does not hide the fact that his dream is of an Islamic state, but he considers this an unrealistic goal in a Jewish majority state.

Similarly, Ibrahim Sarsur, who became the leader of the Southern branch after Darwish, responded in this manner when asked about the goals of the Movement:

*Let me answer this question in an ironic way. Once, a journalist asked me: “What do you, as an Islamist and a leader of the Islamic Movement, think about creating an Islamic state within the state of Israel?” Maybe he expected me to say “No,” directly. I said to him, “Yes, but on one condition. If I wake in the morning and switch on the radio and hear that 75% of the Jews embraced Islam. Only in those circumstances might I think of having an Islamic state inside of Israel.” So, it is a naïve idea to think about creating an Islamic state or looking forward to having an Islamic state inside Israel. Because we are aware of the limitations – we are aware of the realities on the ground. We are aware of the fact that we are a part of the Israeli Jewish state. The vast majority of the inhabitants of this state are Jews. The Israeli State was established to be the aspiration of the Jewish people in the entire world, especially those who immigrated to this part of the world – they created the state and they want to live in a Jewish state. We are aware of this fact, but regardless of this fact, we want to be a part of this state, but not a part of the identity of this state* (Sarsur 2008b).

Darwish explains that he draws on Gandhi and Martin Luther King for his non-violent approach (Benchorin 1988). When asked about the Iranian revolution, he replied that in accordance with his approach he believes in revolution through humane means, such as cultural social, economic and political means. He opposes violence and he does not consider
Khomeini an honourable leader after the war with Iraq. Moreover, he does not accept that non-Muslims are to be viewed as Satan, declaring that all humans are the creation of God.

Even though Darwish has become known for his moderate position vis-a-vis Israel, he is also clear in his views on the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the unequal situation of Palestinians in Israel. In the interview for Ma'ariv, he described the latter as a situation of oppression and humiliation, stating that it is impossible to have co-existence between workers and masters – between the weak and the strong. When asked by the journalist if he wishes that his Arab brethren will win a war over Israel, he admits that this is the ultimate dilemma, but that for him justice is the most important, and that anyone who wants to 'have his cake and eat it too', meaning anyone who wants historical Palestine to themselves today, are not truly seeking peace (Benchorin 1988).

Darwish’s non-violent approach has been consistent, as exemplified in an interview with Time in 2001, where he described his view of Islam: ‘Islam is a religion of love, cooperation and for the good. The origin of Islam is peace, stability’ (Hamad 2001). The interviewer asked about his position on jihad, suicide bombers, the 9/11 attacks, and Muslim hatred of America. Darwish replied that martyrdom is a greater thing than being killed in war, and that too many radical Muslims and others focus too much on the military side of jihad, neglecting the other and more numerous ways of jihad as a struggle for God. He stated that he is against suicide, whatever the reason, because it is forbidden in Islam, and he cautioned that there were Muslims, Jews and others in the World Trade Centre, and explained that Palestinians understand very well the anger that the American people feel because of these attacks, since Palestinians suffered from a lot of destruction by the Israeli military. However, he noted that Palestinians do not feel that other people get angry on their behalf when their lives are destroyed. When asked about presumed Muslim hatred of America, Darwish replied:

There is a misunderstanding. Muslims and Arabs do not hate America or the Americans. He who claims that is a liar. Arabs and Muslims hate the unfair policies of the American administrations. There is a big difference between those who hate a policy and those who hate a people (Hamad 2001).

The message in this response is similar to Darwish’s message to the Jewish Israeli public – we do not hate you but we do hate (many of) your government’s policies.

Testifying to Darwish’s emphasis on interreligious and communal dialogue, today Darwish is an advisor to the Palestinian Adam Centre for Dialogue of Civilisations; in 2008, he participated in the World Congress for Rabbis and Imams for Peace in Paris; in 2007, Darwish condemned the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust denials when appearing at the Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism in Jerusalem (Barkat 2007); and in 2008, Darwish participated in the Peace Sukkah set up in Acre as a place for its inhabitant to meet after the riots and seek understanding. Darwish said this to the people present and to the press:

Bless all those who have come here to help and strengthen the coexistence in Akko, but those who have come from outside Akko – whether they be big or small, bearded or not – those who have only come to

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4 A sukkha is a hut built as part of the Jewish holiday Sukkot commemorating the wandering of Moses in the Sinai desert.
incite and come between the residents is an unwelcome presence in this city. We have learned from you, Akko, how to live together (Einav 2008).

Compared with Darwish, Ra’ed Salah, who has been the head of the Northern branch since the split in 1996, causes controversy among Israeli Jews. Salah’s prominent position and radical image is largely due to his vocal protests in speeches and his grass-roots activism in Israel and in East Jerusalem.

Salah is frequently present on the ground in East Jerusalem, fighting for Palestinian control of the al-Aqsa mosque and partaking in demonstrations against house demolitions and evictions of Palestinian families from their homes misappropriated by settlers. His regular presence in Jerusalem has earned him the informal titles as ‘Shaykh of al-Aqsa’ and (the) ‘Palestinian Mayor of Jerusalem’ (Dumper and Larkin 2012, 44). His image among Palestinians is that of a leader who meets the people, participates in their local protests and supports their daily struggles. One observer described him in these words:

Admired by Islamists, secular Muslims and Christians alike, Salah is the nearest thing the country’s Palestinian citizens have to a spiritual leader. This, and his increasingly fiery warnings that the government cannot be trusted to protect al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock mosques, has made him deeply unpopular with the Shin Bet security service and Sharon (Cook 2003).

In interviews and speeches, Salah, and also his deputy Kamal Khatib, use candid descriptions against the occupation and Israeli policy towards Palestinian citizens that cement their position as courageous and outspoken among their supporters, and radical among the Jewish Israeli population. Salah uses terminology such as ‘the occupying establishment’ to describe the state of Israel and ‘Palestinians of 1948’ when he talks about Palestinian citizens, thereby clearly distancing himself from the state.

In addition, during his time as leader of the Northern branch, Salah has been taken in for questioning by the police, arrested and imprisoned repeatedly, and this adds to his image of being ‘radical’. Salah has also been injured in interactions with the authorities, such as in 1998 when he was hospitalised after being beaten by police during a protest, and in 2000 when he was wounded by a rubber bullet during the October demonstrations when thirteen unarmed Palestinians citizens were killed (Dakwar 2007).

After what has been called the October 2000 events, the authorities set up an official inquiry commission called the Or Commission. In its report, the Commission criticised the police for using live ammunition, and recommended improving the general status and situation of Palestinians in Israel (Adalah 2012). It also sent ‘warning letters’ to some Palestinian leaders, including Salah (along with then Palestinian Members of Knesset Azmi Bishara and Abd al-Malik Dahamsha). In the letter, Salah was accused of ‘supporting violence as a means to attain the goals of the Arab sector in Israel’ and ‘denying the legitimacy of the existence of Israel’ (Dakwar 2007, 67). In response to these warnings, the Palestinian community in Israel reacted with outrage at what they consider to be ‘blaming the victim’, especially as no-one has to date been charged with the killings of their co-citizens (Adalah 2012).

Salah was arrested in May 2003, together with other leaders of the Northern branch, accused of ‘supporting terrorism’ by funding Hamas and also of having links with Iran. The latter charge
was dropped and the former ‘scaled back’, and in the end Salah entered a plea bargain consisting of three and a half years’ imprisonment (Dakwar 2007, 67). He was in prison during the year and a half long trial, and was released in July 2005. His release was celebrated at the large football stadium in Umm al-Fahm, where several tens of thousands of Palestinians from all over the country gathered to welcome their leader (Observation by Author 2006). When questioned about the charges, Salah replied that ‘... to this day I do not know the real reason for my arrest and imprisonment’ (Dakwar 2007, 69).

Salah has also been detained and arrested by the police for his activism in Jerusalem, where he often participates in demonstrations against what he considers threats to religious sites or against the treatment of Palestinians residents. In one such instance, he was arrested for having incited people to violence and for waving the Syrian and PLO flags, accusations his lawyer refutes.

The court has, at different times, ordered him to stay outside of the Old City in Jerusalem (where the al-Aqsa mosque is located), and he has been prohibited from appearing in Jerusalem in the company of more than eight people (Lis and Stern 2007). In 2010, Salah was accused and found guilty of spitting at a police officer during a demonstration, for which he served five months in prison in 2010 (Khoury, Hasson, and Lis 2010). Salah denies having spat at the officer.

Another controversial case involves the 2007 accusation against Salah of incitement to racism and hatred because of a speech which contained anti-Semitic remarks according to the Hebrew press (Stern 2008). Salah was found not guilty. In April 2014, Salah was convicted of ‘obstructing police duty by a Jerusalem court on Thursday, for attempting to prevent a bodily search being performed upon his wife at Allenby Bridge crossing’ (Khoury 2014a). Salah's lawyer said the case itself was proof that he was persecuted, saying that the ‘relatively trivial offense was handled by district prosecutor – rather than by a police prosecutor – [which] strengthened that assertion'(Khoury 2014a). Salah was also given a travel ban that prevents him from entering Jerusalem and the West Bank, and from travelling abroad, and that is in effect until December 2014 (Baruch and Dvorin 2014).

Adding to these cases involving Salah personally, the Israeli authorities’ actions against the Northern Movement have added to its image as radical, for the Israeli audience, and as a defiant, for Palestinians. Judging by actions taken against the two branches, the Northern branch seems to be more closely monitored by the Israeli authorities than its counterpart. To illustrate, its offices in Umm al-Fahm have been raided and closed, and its newspaper, Sawt al-Haq wal-Hurriyya ('Voice of Truth and Freedom'), has been closed by administrative order several times (Dakwar 2007), such as in the autumn of 2008, when documents and computers were confiscated by Israeli police, apparently as a result of suspicions that the Movement had been cooperating with Hamas (Stern and Ashkenazi 2008).

Due to his prominence, his participation and speeches at demonstrations and other events are reported in the Israeli press, and he receives comparatively more attention at events even if he participates alongside leaders of the Southern branch. Cementing his image, Israeli newspapers often use adjectives such as ‘saboteur’, ‘hard-liner’, ‘anti-Israeli’, ‘anti-Semitic’,
‘extremist’ and ‘militant’ to described Salah. For example, in an article in the Jerusalem Post, senior terrorism expert Ely Karmon from the Institute for Counterterrorism in Herzliya’s Interdisciplinary Centre, described Salah as ‘... a saboteur who seeks the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state. His incitement is very severe, and his movement is very dangerous’ (Lappin 2010); another article in Ha’aretz was entitled ‘Salah calls for “intifada” against Temple Mount excavation’, which reported that Israel Radio claimed to quote Salah saying ‘Israeli history is drenched in blood’ and ‘They want to build their Temple while our blood is on their clothing, on their doorposts, in their food and in their water’ (Lis 2007); and in the article entitled ‘Radical Muslim leader freed from jail after five months’, it is stated that ‘The sheikh, who heads the Islamic Movement’s northern branch, is known for his hard-line stance against Israel’ (Khoury 2010).

Thus, the picture that emerges is one in which, in terms of rhetoric, the leader of the Northern branch, Salah, and also his deputy Khatib, are confrontational in their speech and are also quoted more often than Southern leaders in the media. In addition, their activism and in particular that of Salah, is often intercepted by Israeli police. However, even though the leaders of the Southern branch do not use the same provocative language as Salah and Khatib, or are quoted in the media as often, or indeed arrested as often when participating in demonstrations, they are equally outspoken in their critique of the state.

As a Member of the Knesset, Sarsur uses this platform to voice his opinions and protest. Sarsur described the reactions to protests voiced by himself and others Palestinian members of Knesset against the war in Lebanon during the summer of 2006 (Sarsur 2008b):

> When the Israelis launched the second Lebanon War in 2006, the vast majority of the members of the parliament supported the Israeli government in that bloody war. The only members of parliament who declared their opposition to this kind of war were the Arabs. The vast majority of the members of parliament, even the government, did not deal with this position of the Arab members of Knesset as legitimate. They accused us of betraying [Israel].

In sum, it seems fair to say despite different rhetoric, the leaders of the two branches of the Islamic Movement in Israel send the same message out to the Israeli government and society: they demand equality for Israel’s Palestinian citizens, control over Muslim and Palestinian religious property, and an end to the occupation. However, Salah and other leaders of the Northern branch deliver this message in a much more outspoken way, and this is more controversial.

**Towards Unity?**

Since 2011, interviewees from both branches have described the Movement as being in the process of reuniting. However, the question remains as to why the movement is still split. In interviews with leaders of the Northern branch in 2011, I was informed that the two branches are expected to reconcile and reunite soon (Leading activist Northen branch 2011). However, this has not yet occurred. The question is why?

In addition to the disagreement over participation in parliamentary elections, the chief obstacles concern the leadership of a potential reunited Movement. According to the current deputy leader of the Southern branch, Shaykh Safwat Freij, the main issue is the different styles
of leadership. The Southern branch has regular elections for its leadership, whereas the Northern branch has had the same leadership since the split in 1996.

This is related to the next obstacle, which is the struggle over the leadership of a future united Movement. There are many strong personalities involved in powerful positions, and they might not like to abdicate their positions in order to facilitate a reunification. The greatest issue connected to this obstacle is of course who will head the Movement and also its main organisations. This is furthermore related to the style of leadership and succession, pointed out by Freji above. How will a potential leader of a united movement be chosen? And how difficult will it be to come to terms with the different internal political cultures in the two branches?

Related to the issues of leadership and internal political cultures is the institutionalisation of the two branches that over the years has become cemented and would be difficult to change. It would probably cost a lot of effort to deconstruct the mirror systems of organisations and activities, such as the Al-Aqsa Association described above.

Another problem is the different approach in terms of openness to cooperation with other Palestinian groups. Freij indicated that the Southern branch is open to cooperation with secular and national parties and groups representing Palestinian citizens of Israel, and also to join one party that represents all Palestinians in Israel across religious and political divides. Freji indicated that the Northern branch did not espouse such openness (Freij 2012).

This point is particularly important today, as at the moment the Southern branch’s ability to be represented in the Knesset is threatened by decision of the Knesset earlier this year to raise its threshold for election to the parliament from 2 per cent to 3.25 per cent (Lis 2014). This will make it difficult for all the small parties representing the Palestinian minority to secure representation in the parliament in the upcoming elections, planned for March 2015. The decision was protested by all three Arab Palestinian parties in the Knesset (Lis 2014). They had a very unusual meeting recently, to discuss potential unification in the Knesset. It is doubtful if the unification will be successful across ideological divides and after many years of rivalry. However, based on surveys, sociologist Nehad Ali argues that this is a push in the right direction, because the Arab community in Israel wants unity in representation (Khoury 2014b).

Also, the Northern branch is under direct threat from new legislation instigated by the current right-wing government, who, including the current Prime Minister, Benyamin Netanyahu, wants to ban it. He is reported to have argued that the Northern branch should be treated like the extremist Jewish Kach movement, which was declared a terrorist organisation in 1994, and to have formed a ministerial team that is looking into outlawing the Northern branch of the Movement (Ravid 2014). A few days after this was reported, veteran Likud politician Moshe Arens wrote an op-ed in Ha’aretz entitled ‘Israel’s Islamic Movement: the enemy within’, where he asked if ‘it is reasonable and sensible to permit the northern branch of the Islamic Movement to function when their activities are obviously aimed at the destruction of Israel?’ (Arens 2014). In August this year (2014), when Salah led what is reported as a protest of 10,000 Palestinians in northern Israel against the war on Gaza, Yisrael Katz (Likud), the transportation minister, called on the government to outlaw the Islamic Movement, saying that
‘[Hamas leader] Ismail Haniyeh is in a bunker, and [the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt Mohammed] Morsi is in jail, and only Salah is still running free in Galilee campaigning for Hamas against Israel… As I have proposed on several previous occasions, we must outlaw the Islamic Movement’ (Lawent and Dvorin 2014).

In addition, with the current right-wing government, the conditions for the Palestinian minority is worsening rapidly: more than fifty new laws have been initiated that directly and indirectly discriminate against them (Adalah staff 2014); the Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman calls for a population exchange (Ravid 2010); the recent Jewish nation-state bill has been initiated by the Prime Minister and his cabinet; and there are other suggested measures to control this minority, which augments their position as, at best, second class citizens. In addition, they face increasingly hostile attitudes from Jewish citizens, expressed in so-called ‘price tag’ crimes (Mossawa Centre 2014); in rabbinate decrees calling on Jews not to rent property to or associate with Arabs (Campos 2014); and in verbal and physical attacks on Arabs that have occurred since the beginning of the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in the summer of 2014 (Maan News Agency 2014; Hasson 2014).

Whether these recent and imminent political changes will further cement the split of the Islamic Movement in Israel, or push it towards unification, only time will tell. It is also possible to view the unsuccessful unification from another perspective: can the two branches be described as one Movement with a fragmented leadership? If we hypothesize that this is one Movement with two branches, as such the Movement has the opportunity to manoeuvre across the entire political spectrum. It can partake in politics at the local and national levels, while simultaneously be very critical of, and protest against, the state and its policies. Even though the interviewees from both branches confirmed the split, and also express unhappiness because of it, they also confirmed that the two branches have common goals and a methodology of self-reliance, and overall emphasised cooperation and downplayed differences. Are they in fact maintaining the split in order to continue their activism in all the various arenas and at all levels, in order to broaden their political field? This might be a conscious and calculated political strategy or, and perhaps more likely, a result of the unforeseen developments that have led to the current situation. Either way, it can be argued that we are now dealing with one Movement with a fragmented leadership and a large, loosely connected network of institutions across Israel.

This hypothesis is supported by the Wendy Pearlman’s research on the Palestinian national movement, and the effect of a movement’s internal organisational structure on its protest strategy (Pearlman 2011). She argues that the prevalent path to nonviolent protest is internal cohesion. Since the Islamic Movement in Israel has remained a non-violent movement since its split in 1996, this can be understood to support the theory that in fact we are dealing with one Movement with internal differences expressed by two branches, but nevertheless a cohesive leadership vis-à-vis the Israeli state and society.
Conclusion

Both branches of the Islamic Movement have, since its split in 1996, continued to partake in the Israeli state and institutions of society. Indeed, from the present analysis we can conclude that the two branches of the Islamic Movement in Israel have more in common than that which separates them: both branches of the Movement practice a non-violent political behaviour that confines itself within the legal boundaries of Israeli law; both branches focus their activism on the local Palestinian community and operate institutions that provide services for this community based on their principle of self-reliance; both branches participate fully and successfully in the political process at local and municipal levels; both branches have the same tripartite goals of protecting Palestinian land, holy sites and people in addition to the overall emphasis on Islamising Muslim Palestinians in Israel; both branches participate in activism aimed at ending the siege of Gaza and assisting the Palestinians in the occupied territories; and leaders of both branches voice their protests against what they consider unjust actions by the state of Israel.

The main difference between them, as their representatives interviewed for this article emphasised, is the disagreement over participation in the elections for the Knesset, or in other words, the degree with which they choose to partake in the Israeli state system. These differences are related to the ideological stance of their understanding of the ramifications of partaking in a state system not based on Shari’a, and the real political issue of how this participating contributes to the well-being of Palestinian citizens of Israel and the effectiveness of their Movement. Whereas the Northern branch chooses to stay clear of any formalisation of its relationship with the state at this level, arguing that this would force it to compromise on its non-Zionist stance, the Southern branch considers such formalisation one of the ways in which to try to change the conditions of its constituency. Thus, both are participating in the Israeli political system, as boycotting elections is also a form of engagement with this system, and does not represent a withdrawal from this political sphere, but rather a critique of it.

For the Movement, the consequences of the split are largely negative, and in practice it means that the two branches compete over supporters, activists and funding. In addition, as mostly related by the younger generation and student activists, the split has caused ideological damage, as it diverts attention and energy away from the shared and important issues of concern, and leads to competitive attitudes.

In addition to disagreeing on the issue of national elections, there is a difference in the rhetoric and style of the leaders of the two branches, as well as the media attention given to them. It is here suggested that the branding of the Southern branch as moderate and the Northern branch as radical largely stems from the impressions given by the different rhetoric and style of the leaders, and not by examination of the similar practical undertakings of the leaders and of the branches.

Neither branch fits the definition of a ‘radical Islamist’ organisation, as they are both non-violent, and both confine their activism within the legal framework of the state. Therefore the present study challenges the dichotomous description of the two branches of the Islamic Movement as ‘radical’ (Northern branch) and ‘moderate’ (Southern branch). As emphasized
above, it is here appreciated that this is a Movement with internal room for diversity, and to better describe this diverse nature of this Movement it is here suggested that the term ‘pragmatic’ be used to describe the leadership style and general approach of the Southern branch, and the term ‘idealist’ to describe style and general approach of the Northern branch.

The New Middle East: Emerging Political and Ideological Trends (NewME)

A research project based at the University of Oslo, comprising researchers from PRIO and the UiO. There are several researchers on the project, each working on their own sub-projects within a common framework. The project started in 2011 and will be completed by the summer of 2016. The project is founded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.