

## The Dynamics of Palestinian Contention in Israel

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### I. Introduction

The Palestinian citizens of Israel have endured many structural challenges as an indigenous, national minority in a nationalizing state<sup>1</sup>. As citizens, they face a unique set of political opportunities unavailable to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora. But despite these relative advantages, the Palestinian citizens of Israel's political-organizational patterns have not been oriented toward maximizing their potential impact in the last three decades, most conspicuously as a result of organizational fragmentation<sup>2</sup>. Both the results and the run-up to the Israeli general elections, held on 9 April 2019, illustrate this process: popular enthusiasm expressed by the Palestinian citizens of Israel for the "Joint List" (the JL; a unified list of predominately-Palestinian parties established ahead of the 2015 elections)<sup>3</sup> was ultimately overcome by fragmentary pressures within the Palestinian leadership, and it split into two separate lists months before the 2019 elections. Consequently, Palestinian voter turnout was much lower in 2019, and some pundits have already linked this to popular disappointment with the Palestinian leadership's inability to present a united front<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, instead of expressing the general will towards greater coordination, Palestinian civil society organizations (CSOs) continue to reflect the same ideological and interpersonal schisms prevalent within the political sphere – despite structural-material incentives placed upon them by both donors and their own community to create a coordinated framework of political action<sup>5</sup>. Why does the Palestinian leadership in Israel continue to show signs of organizational fragmentation in both the political and civic spheres, despite broad popular consensus over key political issues, and despite both structural and material incentives toward coordinated political action? What variables can we offer in explaining the Palestinian leadership's resistance to these incentives?

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<sup>1</sup> Oded Haklai, *Palestinian Ethnonationalism in Israel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Amal Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel: The Politics of Indigeneity* (London: Routledge, 2011); Shany Payes, *Palestinian NGOs in Israel: The Politics of Civil Society* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Amal Jamal, *Arab Civil Society in Israel: New Elites, Social Capital and Oppositional Consciousness* (Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Eglash, "Israel's Arab political parties have united for the first time," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 2015, accessed September 14, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/israels-sparring-arab-political-parties-have-united-for-the-first-time/2015/03/09/6f6c021a-c660-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israels-sparring-arab-political-parties-have-united-for-the-first-time/2015/03/09/6f6c021a-c660-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3_story.html).

<sup>4</sup> Jacky Khoury, "לא הערכנו את היקף התסכול: במפלגות הערביות מכים על חטא," *Haaretz*, April 10, 2019, accessed April 10, 2019, [https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/elections/hayom/.premium-1.7108924?utm\\_source=dldr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_campaign=haaretz](https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/elections/hayom/.premium-1.7108924?utm_source=dldr.it&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=haaretz).

<sup>5</sup> Haklai, *Palestinian Ethnonationalism in Israel*; Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*; Jack Khoury, "Israel's Only Arab Majority Party in Danger of Collapse After Lawmaker Convicted," *Haaretz*, July 31, 2017, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.804303>.

Although the literature on the Palestinian minority is growing, only a few authors have written specifically on the prevailing patterns of political mobilization within it. In this study, political fragmentation will be assessed and weighed against material incentives and political opportunity structures faced by the Palestinian leadership in Israel. Special attention is paid to the establishment of the JL, which, it is hypothesized, should have created new spaces for cooperation among various Palestinian political actors in Israel today. Employing a Gramscian analytical framework, it is first argued that within the exclusive institutional framework of a nationalizing state, the Palestinian political agenda in Israel has necessarily been counter-hegemonic in its nature, regardless of ideological affiliation. Indeed, the Palestinian struggle in Israel can be described as a counter-hegemonic *war of position* with Zionism – the dominant, hegemonic state ideology. It is further argued that, in recent years, the Palestinian political and intellectual leadership have reframed the minority’s political demands, resulting in a new, widely agreed upon discursive framework hereby delineated as “indigenous minority nationalism”. Lastly, this paper concludes that despite strong popular will towards greater unity, despite the creation of a common discursive framework, and despite material incentives towards greater coordination within and between the civic and political spheres, the Palestinian leadership remains fragmented due to: 1) Increasing external structural pressures exerted on it by state institutions, and 2) interpersonal rivalries between the dominant political actors in both the civic and political spheres. As a result of these processes, meaningful cooperation between disparate actors remains sporadic, discontinuous and disorganized.

This paper starts by presenting a theoretical-analytic framework, relying on Gramscian hegemonic analysis and political opportunity theory. Second, a brief overview of Palestinian mobilization in the last three decades will be presented, focusing on recent shift in political discourse. Third, an overview of the existing literature on Palestinian mobilization in Israel will be presented, paying close attention to the independent variables suggested by past scholarship with respect to Palestinian political fragmentation in Israel. Lastly, up-to-date information on the present internal dynamics within the Palestinian leadership will be presented, based on interviews conducted in the summer of 2017 with five Members of Knesset (MKs; members of parliament) and six prominent directors and organizers from leading Palestinian CSOs. Interviews will be utilized to determine the resilience and durability of existing “connective tissues” between parties, civil society organizations, and grassroots voluntary activists, to shed light on recent developments not yet explored in the literature.

## **II. Analytic and theoretical frameworks: contentious, counter-hegemonic politics in Israel**

The question addressed in this paper lies at the intersection of political science and sociology. This makes establishing a methodological framework rather difficult, since there is a variety of approaches one could choose from within each discipline. In his 2011 book “Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel: The Politics of Indigeneity”, political scientist Amal Jamal identifies two separate theoretical frameworks – minority nationalism and subaltern studies – that are most often utilized in studies of Israel’s Palestinian minority.

Political scientists tend to utilize minority nationalism in their analyses, emphasizing ideology, political process, and political opportunity. Within the paradigm of minority nationalism studies, authors associated with the new-institutionalist tradition suggest a link between minority cohesion and state cohesion: in certain cases, institutional fragmentation on the national level

opens spaces for national-minorities to diversify and amplify their political demands<sup>6</sup>. Yet the process of ideological diversification does not, on its own, explain the persistence of inter-factional animosity, interpersonal rivalries and a general inability to coordinate political action *despite structural and material incentives to the contrary*. Other political scientists operating within this paradigm emphasize leadership style<sup>7</sup>, historic grievances<sup>8</sup>, and the role of third-party actors<sup>9</sup>. However, none of these frameworks provide a concise causal mechanism for explaining *organizational fragmentation* among national minorities specifically – indeed, the phenomenon we are primarily concerned with in this paper.

On the other hand, Jamal notes, sociologists tend to utilize subaltern studies in their analyses of Palestinian political mobilization in Israel, which is “a theoretical and methodological approach ... an attempt to re-read the sociology, history and politics of post-colonial areas, away from the elitist bias that characterized previous studies ... [seeking to] connect to Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci and to emphasize the role of peasants and people of inferior rank in insurgencies and in fighting injustices caused by colonial rule”<sup>10</sup>. This postcolonial (and, as some may argue, *decolonial*)<sup>11</sup> approach to the study of minority politics emphasizes individual agency; the role of ordinary, disenfranchised people – the “subaltern”, in the words of Antonio Gramsci – in mass political movements, shifting the attention away from political elites. Though an examination of the role played by ordinary people in mass-movement building can be helpful in uncovering the historical causal mechanisms leading to organizational fragmentation today, such an analysis goes far beyond the scope of this paper. The question at the heart of this study requires an analysis at the level of political leaders, parties and institutions, in addition to voluntary grassroots activists.

And so, while subaltern studies is a welcome lens – which will hopefully find its place as part of a full, robust, future study of Palestinian mobilization in Israel – it cannot presently constitute our primary theoretical framework. Similarly, minority nationalism alone does not provide a full explanation of state-minority interactions on the tactical level, nor the discursive level, and though it can explain the underlying political motivations behind minority mobilization, it does not offer satisfactory answers as to how fragmentation occurs in this case. Furthermore, none of the major paradigms within minority nationalism studies adequately account for the role of context-dependent cultural factors such as patriarchal and traditional social structures which, as we shall see, play a greater role than previously accounted for in explaining organizational fragmentation in the Palestinian case. Complementary theoretical approaches are necessary for the critical analysis of the organizational structure of Palestinian political activism in Israel on the one hand, and the relationship between Palestinians and the state on the other; to critically examine the way the political and civic leaderships of the Palestinians in Israel interact with one another – as well as the state – and to uncover the fragmentary/unificatory pressures that result from those interactions. Two interrelated frameworks were chosen for these purposes:

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<sup>6</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).; Haklai, *Palestinian Ethnonationalism in Israel*.

<sup>7</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Erin Jenne, "A Bargaining Theory of Minority Demands: Explaining the Dog That Did Not Bite in 1990s Yugoslavia," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (December 2004):.

<sup>10</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Nadim N. Rouhana, "Decolonization as Reconciliation: Rethinking the National Conflict Paradigm in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, June 07, 2017, doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1324999.

### a. A war of position

The first component of this work's theoretical foundation relies on the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramscian hegemonic analysis is prominent in scholarship on national and indigenous minorities, and indeed, most of the reviewed literature on the Palestinian citizens of Israel utilizes the rich analytic language it offers to a certain extent. Unfortunately, the scope of this study only affords us a brief overview of Gramsci's writing as it pertains to minority mobilization, leaving more to be desired. Nevertheless, we can certainly benefit from the application of key Gramscian concepts to the matter at hand, at the very least, for even the basic tools in the Gramscian repertoire can substantially sharpen analyses of majority-minority interactions – especially for national minorities in nationalizing states. Though this study is highly influenced by Gramsci's work generally – and utilizes Gramscian terminology widely – it most extensively relies on three specific Gramscian concepts.

First, Gramsci's conception of *hegemony* will be utilized throughout this study. Defined as “[t]he ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group”<sup>12</sup>, hegemony refers to the ‘normal’, commonsensical or socially acceptable values, practices, and beliefs a given population *consents* to, propagated by a dominant class of traditional intellectual and moral leaders – a “historic bloc” – associated with state elites<sup>13</sup>. Gramsci argues that though hegemony is reached by consent, consensus must be manufactured and maintained, and is therefore actively promulgated by state elites and challenged by “organic intellectuals” representing political opposition groups<sup>14</sup>. In a 1993 comparative study titled “Unsettled States, Disputed Lands”, political scientist Ian Lustick explores the techniques of hegemonic control utilized by states to justify territorial expansion. He argues that:

*Ideologically hegemonic conceptions provide stabilizing distortions and rationalizations of complex realities, inconsistent desires, and arbitrary distributions of valued resources ... That hegemonic beliefs do not shift fluidly with changing realities and marginal interests is what makes them important. That they require some correspondence to ‘objective’ realities and interests is what limits their life and the conditions under which they can be established.*<sup>15</sup>

As Lustick argues, hegemonic control is justified (and maintained) by “rationalizations of complex realities”. This study is at least partly an exercise in hegemonic analysis, as we shall consider the rigid “distortions and rationalizations” of the highly complex reality in Israel-Palestine as conceived by the ideologically hegemonic framework of Zionism, as well as the evolving counter-hegemonic political discourse of Palestinian challengers. Though it is no simple task to delineate hegemony in a given society, Israel's case is rather special, since Zionism is not only a well-defined, clearly dominant state ideology, but is also deeply hegemonic in that the vast majority of Jewish Israelis self-identify with it, as well as virtually all predominantly-Jewish political parties (including all predominately-Jewish left-wing parties)<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, Palestinian political

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971), 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 121.

<sup>16</sup> Travis Mitchell, "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, March 08, 2016, accessed August 7, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society>.

discourse in Israel is easily delineated as counter-hegemonic since, as we shall see, virtually all in the Palestinian leadership consider themselves non- or even anti-Zionists. Indeed, this is the ‘lowest common denominator’ that links the different Palestinian political streams in Israel, informing the question at the heart of this essay: why is the leadership so persistently fragmented, despite this broad ‘lowest common denominator’? This is what makes Gramscian hegemonic analysis indispensable to our case, and indeed, to many other cases of national minority / titular majority interactions, since such confrontations are so clearly delineated as hegemonic confrontations.

Second, Gramsci makes the distinction between *wars of position* and *wars of maneuver* – different tactical methods of counter-hegemonic confrontation within a territorial state – the former describing a primarily nonviolent struggle for hegemonic influence and the latter a violent or non-legal one. Lustick encapsulates the essence of this dichotomy succinctly:

*[Both terms] refer to political struggles within a territorial state. A ‘war of position’ entails political competition over which ideas and values will be accepted by leading strata of a state as the ‘concrete fantasy’ that will achieve hegemonic status. Though such struggles are subtle, nonviolent, and conducted as much in the press and in educational and religious institutions as in the political arena, their outcome is of far-reaching importance ... ‘Wars of movement’<sup>17</sup>, on the other hand, refer to the direct clash of interests that surround acute crises, where governments or regimes can change hands as a result of illegal or semi-legal actions by political groups.<sup>18</sup>*

One of Gramsci’s most notable innovations is his assertion that successful revolutionary struggles are fought in *both* the civic and political spheres. In other words, the symbolic struggle for legitimacy and consensus is just as important as the struggle for physical control within a given territorial context. Conversely, state elites use both material and ideational mechanisms of coercion to maintain hegemonic control. These insights will serve us well in understanding Palestinian political activism in the civic sphere, as well as Israel’s modus operandi vis-à-vis its Palestinian citizens. As we shall see, the formal political leadership of Israel’s Palestinian citizens has actively engaged with state elites in what is best described as a counter-hegemonic *war of position*. The dichotomy between wars of position and wars of maneuver serves as an invaluable analytic foundation for the study of Israel’s Palestinian citizens, for they have never engaged – nor ever sought to engage – the state of Israel in an armed war of maneuver as did the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora.

Third, this study extensively employs Gramsci’s conception of *civil society*, which he defines together with *political society* as follows:

*We can now fix two major superstructural levels—one that may be called ‘civil society’, that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’, and the other that of ‘political society’ or the State. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of ‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of ‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the State and ‘juridical’ government.<sup>19</sup>*

<sup>17</sup> “Guerra di movimento” is most commonly translated as “war of maneuver”, though some authors prefer “war of movement”.

<sup>18</sup> Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands*, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12.

Despite Gramsci's somewhat loose definition, civil society – the social sphere wherein the war of position is 'fought' – is of conceptual importance to this study. As we shall see, Palestinian political mobilization occurs largely in the civic sphere, since Palestinian access to the political institutions of the state (the political sphere) is highly limited, by design. Therefore, an account of Palestinian political mobilization in Israel is incomplete without a thorough overview of civil society organizations and their counter-hegemonic role in the war of position with the state. Though skeptics question the ability of civil society organizations to drive counter-hegemonic change in the neoliberal age<sup>20</sup>, the case of Israel's Palestinian minority is somewhat of an exception, due to the inherent counter-hegemonic position of many (if not most) Palestinian civil society organizations<sup>21</sup>. And though there are some noteworthy concerns regarding the efficacy of foreign-funded civic activism in Israel, the contribution of Palestinian civil society organizations to Palestinian mobilization is, as we shall see, non-negligible (to say the least). This view is reiterated by Jamal, who argues that Palestinian civic associations play a counter-hegemonic role in Israel, though he questions their ability to go beyond mere social empowerment towards impacting structural democratic change through the civic sphere alone<sup>22</sup>.

### **b. Political opportunity theory and the Palestinian repertoire of contention**

Political opportunity theory, also known as political process theory, will be utilized as the second component of this study's theoretical framework. Sidney Tarrow's "Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics" is of particular interest, as a relatively recent overview of the most important concepts in political opportunity theory. Regarded as a seminal text in social movement studies generally, it synthesizes several past approaches to the study of social movements – including collective behavior theory, resource mobilization theory, framing and collective identity theory. It expands on the work of Charles Tilly (whose ideas will also be utilized in this section), who is regarded as a founding father in political opportunity theory. Tarrow argues that the political opportunity framework excels, more than other approaches, in explaining the specific mechanics of collective action in a given time and place:

*The political process/opportunities approach proposed an answer to the questions that had dogged previous approaches: Why does contentious politics seem to develop only in particular periods of history? Why does it sometimes produce robust social movements and sometimes flicker out into sectarianism or repression? And why do movements take different forms in different political environments?*<sup>23</sup>

Tarrow argues that this framework cannot answer these questions on its own. There is a need to incorporate ideas from other disciplines and frameworks when appropriate, to sufficiently explain the "dynamics of contention" in a given situation. In our case, Gramscian hegemonic analysis will be utilized together with the political opportunity framework in a complementary manner.

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<sup>20</sup> Malin Arvidson, Håkan Johansson, and Roberto Scaramuzzino, "Advocacy Compromised: How Financial, Organizational and Institutional Factors Shape Advocacy Strategies of Civil Society Organizations," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29, no. 4 (2017); Chiara Cordelli, "How Privatization Threatens the Private," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (January 2013): , doi:10.1080/13698230.2011.640482.

<sup>21</sup> Amal Jamal, "The counter-hegemonic role of civil society: Palestinian–Arab NGOs in Israel," *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 3 (2008): doi:10.1080/13621020802015446.

<sup>22</sup> Jamal, "The counter-hegemonic role of civil society: Palestinian–Arab NGOs in Israel".

<sup>23</sup> Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 28.

Conceptually, Tarrow's work revolves around *social movements* and the *repertoires of contention* they employ; on the networks formed by political actors and the means they employ to attain political goals. "The most forceful argument of this study", he writes, "will be that people engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change, and then by strategically employing a repertoire of collective action, creating new opportunities, which are used by others in widening cycles of contention"<sup>24</sup>. This "repertoire of collective action" – the repertoire of contention – refers simply to the "learned conventions" of collective political action: strikes, petitions, demonstrations, and so on<sup>25</sup>. The repertoire of contention is "culturally inscribed": it is a set of *learned* collective practices used by groups of people in their political campaigns, growing larger over time. For example, the Palestinian repertoire of contention is – and has been – strikingly different in Israel and elsewhere, and has changed considerably within Israel throughout the years, seemingly towards formal political action and away from mass, popular, disruptive action. The conceptual focus on repertoires of contention is particularly useful, then, in the case of Israel's Palestinian citizens: the community's specific structural-historical circumstance as a repressed minority whose political discourse falls entirely outside the bounds of tolerable hegemonic discourse, limits the spaces available for political maneuvering (in other words, limited political opportunities are translated into a relatively narrow repertoire of contention).

In order to fully understand "repertoires of contention" conceptually, we must first fully clarify what counts as *contentious* politics; that is, what sort of collective social behavior can be considered contentious. Indeed, different political opportunity theorists draw different boundaries around the concept of contentious politics. Charles Tilly, for example, defines contentious politics as follows:

*Contentious politics involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics. ... Most contention also occurs outside of politics. We enter the realm of politics when we interact with agents of governments, either dealing with them directly or engaging in activities bearing on governmental rights, regulations, and interests.*<sup>26</sup>

This raises the question of whether formal party politics can count as contentious. In a sense, parliamentary political activity does not necessarily fall outside of Tilly's definition of contentious politics. In the Palestinian minority's case, formal political parties have consistently initiated claims vis-à-vis the government. Yet they have also "dealt directly" with the government, which, according to Tilly's definition, takes us outside the framework of contentious politics and into the formal political realm – an entirely different arena. Indeed, contentious politics have traditionally been understood as extra-parliamentary: strikes, demonstrations, petitions, etc. However, most political opportunity theorists argue that under certain circumstances, formal political actors can act contentiously, if they do so in consortium with other "collective actors"<sup>27</sup>. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly provide another definition of contentious politics that stresses the relational rather than institutional context:

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5-6.

<sup>27</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 4.

*...episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants. Roughly translated, the definition refers to collective political struggle.*<sup>28</sup>

As we shall see, since Palestinian politicians in Israel often act together with collective political actors as part of a collective political struggle, in making political claims directed at the state, their actions can certainly be seen through the lens of contentious politics. Furthermore, the special case of national minorities in nationalizing states – where minorities’ formal political parties are necessarily outside the boundaries of tolerable hegemonic discourse – renders formal minority participation necessarily contentious, since titular-majority governments are always claimants in those cases.

Tarrow defines *social movements* as a set of “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in *sustained interaction* with elites, opponents, and authorities”<sup>29</sup> And while we can certainly assert that Palestinian politics in Israel contains “common purposes”, “social solidarities”, and “interactions with elites, opponents and authorities”, the extent to which these activities are *sustained* is questionable. Indeed, Tarrow stresses that for a true social movement to arise out of disparate instances of political mobilization, we need to observe *sustained* activity through dense social networks, with *effective* mechanisms connecting different actors together:

*Contentious politics emerges in response to changes in political opportunities and threats when participants perceive and respond to a variety of incentives: material and ideological, partisan and group-based, long-standing and episodic. Building on these opportunities, and using known repertoires of action, people with limited resources can act together contentiously – if only sporadically. When their actions are based on dense social networks and effective connective structures and draw on legitimate, action-oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions even in contact with powerful opponents. In such cases – and only in such cases – we are in the presence of a social movement. When such contention spreads across an entire society – as it sometimes does – we see a cycle of contention.*<sup>30</sup>

As elaborated upon later in this paper, while “action-oriented cultural frames” are easily identified in the social network of Palestinian political actors in Israel, neither effective nor sustained *connective structures* are presently identified. Instead, we observe ineffective, sporadic, ad-hoc interactions between discrete actors. Indeed, our core question is *why* those structures appear so ineffective. To address this question, we will evaluate the effectiveness and durability of these “connective structures”; the informal relations between different kinds of actors at different levels of political organization (civil society organizations, politicians, popular activists, etc.)<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

### **III. The Palestinian politics of contention in Israel**

#### **a. Paradigm shifts**

Until the 1990s, the Israeli Communist Party (ICP) constituted the sole political representative of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Until the 1990s, when new Palestinian political parties emerged, the dominant political discourse employed by the Palestinian leadership emphasized redistributive rather than collective rights: dubbed by author Nadim Rouhana as the “equality paradigm”, the dominant Palestinian political discourse in Israel until the 1990s focused on redistribution “in areas such as education, local government budgets, state services, and economic opportunities”<sup>32</sup>. Rouhana traces the development of this paradigm as follows:

*Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 has had what, on the face of it, appeared as contradictory effects. On the one hand, it made possible the renewal of contacts between the isolated Palestinians in Israel with other Palestinians, revived the dormant nationalism among Palestinians in Israel, and ended the hermetic isolation of the Arab community within Israel, providing a window – narrow as it might be – to the Arab world through the West Bank and Gaza. On the other hand, it made the rights they had acquired as citizens salient in comparison to the glaring absence of civic rights of Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories. The uniqueness of Palestinians in Israel as ‘citizens’, albeit with settler-colonial citizenship, was underscored by the dominant Arab political leadership within Israel – that of the ICP, which emphasized their political status in comparison to Palestinians under occupation. It is in this context that the ‘equality paradigm’ championed by the ICP dominated the discourse from the 1970s through the early 1990s.*<sup>33</sup>

This discursive and operational paradigm was challenged in the ‘90s, when new predominately-Palestinian parties were established for the first time, reframing the dominant counter-hegemonic discourse employed by the Palestinian leadership in Israel. Three distinct ideological “camps” emerged. As stated, until the mid-‘90s, the ICP and its successor, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE), constituted the sole formal political representatives of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. By the mid-‘90s, the Islamic Movement emerged as a major political player in both the formal-political (municipal and parliamentary) and the civic spheres, acting as an umbrella organization for many NGOs and unregistered local religious organizations<sup>34</sup>. Additionally, the “National Democratic Alliance” party (NDA)<sup>35</sup>, led by notable political figure and intellectual Azmi Bishara, split from the DFPE in 1995, representing a strictly-nationalist alternative to DFPE socialism. The NDA emphasized collective rights and cultural autonomy instead of redistributive rights, advocating a “state of all citizens” in Israel (while still supporting a two-state solution), and calling for a recognition of the special status of Palestinians as an *indigenous* minority<sup>36</sup>. As Rouhana argues:

<sup>32</sup> Nadim N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, "Settler-colonial citizenship: conceptualizing the relationship between Israel and its Palestinian citizens," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (October 14, 2014): 213.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>34</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians: a History of the Palestinians in Israel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 125.

<sup>35</sup> Sometimes referred to in the literature by the transliteration of its Hebrew acronym, “Balad” or by its Arabic shorthand name, “Tajamu’a”,

<sup>36</sup> Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury, *Settler-colonial citizenship*, 216.

*[The NDA] placed the transformation of Israel into a 'state for all its citizens' at the center of its political platform. It was an alliance of leading political activists who left the ICP after self-criticism instigated by the Glasnost policy in Moscow during the late 1980s and the pursuant fall of the Berlin wall, factions of the Abnaa al-Balad Movement, cadres of the National Progressive Movement, and a number of members of other nationalist organizations.<sup>37</sup>*

The NDA's emergence in 1995 contributed greatly to the formation of a new political discourse, redefining Palestinian politics in Israel. This emergent discourse has been given several different names by different authors<sup>38</sup> but would be referred to in this essay as the "indigenous minority nationalism" paradigm. Its defining characteristics are a reorientation towards collective rights and cultural autonomy, and a reframing of Zionism as a settler-colonial movement (and the Palestinians, consequently, as an indigenous group). Indeed, the DFPE would later modify its platform to reflect these emphases<sup>39</sup>.

The Second Intifada and the "October 2000" events catalyzed this paradigm shift. Shortly after its eruption, the High Follow-Up Committee – an umbrella organization that coordinates between various Palestinian actors in both the civic and political spheres – called for a general strike to protest Israeli aggression in the Occupied Territories and Al-Aqsa Mosque<sup>40</sup>. In the following days, Palestinian demonstrators took to the streets on a scale not seen before, resulting in violent clashes with security forces that cost the lives of 13 unarmed Palestinian demonstrators and one unarmed Jewish citizen of Israel<sup>41</sup>. The "October 2000 events" were dubbed by historian Ilan Pappé as an "earthquake", fundamentally disturbing the relationship between the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the state. These events catalyzed the aforementioned paradigm shift: Palestinian leaders and academics began to emphasize the incompatibility of Zionism itself – not any particular Israeli government – with both the national aspirations of the Palestinian people generally, and the collective and cultural rights of the Palestinians in Israel specifically. As Rouhana argues, "[The events of October 2000] demonstrated not only that equality was not possible, but also that, at moments of crisis that are perceived to challenge the state's settler-colonial system, Palestinians would be treated as settler-colonial subjects rather than as citizens"<sup>42</sup>. As Jamal demonstrates, this shift ultimately resulted in a contradictory process of ideological fragmentation on the one hand, and the rise of a new common discourse on the other; on the one hand, a strengthening of nationalist and Islamic voices among Palestinian citizens of Israel, and on the other, the rise of a unified discursive lowest-common-denominator that targeted the state's "ethno-national character":

*The Islamic movement began mobilizing social forces to support its ideological and political agenda. On the other hand, secular political forces have adopted a stronger national discourse, pinpointing the inherent relationship between the ethno-national character of the state and its policies toward the entire Palestinian people. Both Islamic and secular national forces began targeting the ethno-national character of the Israeli*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Oded Haklai refers to it as the "ethnonational turn", Nadim Rouhana uses "the state for all citizens paradigm".

<sup>39</sup> Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury, *Settler-colonial citizenship*, 217.

<sup>40</sup> Azmi Bishara, "Reflections on October 2000: A Landmark in Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2001.30.3.54>, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians*, 229.

<sup>42</sup> Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury, *Settler-colonial citizenship*, 220.

*state and simultaneously closing the gaps between the demands of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel and the entire Palestinian people, including the refugees.*<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, despite the ongoing fragmentation of Palestinian society along political and ideological lines, several authors argue that the emergent “indigenous minority nationalism” paradigm acted as a political ‘adhesive’ between the different ideological components of the Palestinian minority, resulting in more unified mobilization in both the civic and political spheres. Azmi Bishara, the founder of the NDA, argues that:

*The general strike of 1 October was called by a leadership generally known for caution in dealing with the Israeli state, but it soon unleashed an unprecedentedly concentrated politicization of the Arab citizenry. In the wake of the events, the unity of the Arab national minority reached levels not known before, including the emergence of a completely unaccustomed solidarity between village and town, as well as a strengthening of national and human bonds spanning the Green Line. In sum, the October events fostered a level of national awareness and a solidity of national identity that the national movement would have required years to develop in ordinary times.*<sup>44</sup>

Pappé agrees with this account, arguing that “[t]he high level of mobilization of the community, by a leadership that carried very little authority, lacked organizational skills and was not always respected, was remarkable and unprecedented”<sup>45</sup>. An example of this unified political action can be found in the successful campaign to boycott elections in 2001, resulting in a mere 18% Palestinian voter turnout; the lowest in Israeli electoral history<sup>46</sup>. And while this should not necessarily be considered a political victory, it certainly demonstrates the common will of the community in the months following October 2000, and their ability to mobilize collectively at the time. And so, while the literature repeatedly emphasizes the ongoing processes of social and political fragmentation within the Palestinian community in Israel, it also points to the events of October 2000 as a catalyst for an enduring common directive framed within the “indigenous minority nationalism” paradigm; a foundation for a new kind of counter-hegemonic discourse that continues to hold together the different fragments of the Palestinian community in Israel.

Perhaps the most remarked upon manifestation of the unity that emerged from the events of October 2000 is the publication of the three Palestinian “Vision Documents”: documents of political position drafted separately by three different civic associations, outlining the shared political vision of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. These documents include the “Future Vision Document” of the National Committee of the Heads of Arab Local Authorities in Israel, the “Haifa Declaration” of Mada al-Carmel - the Arab Center for Applied Social Research, and the “Democratic Constitution” published by Adalah - the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. These documents, published between 2006-2007, are significant for two main reasons: First, despite the community’s internal fragmentation, the three documents share much in common, showing greater unity within the Palestinian community in Israel. Admittedly, there is an irony inherent in the claim that the publication of three *different* vision documents reflects political *unity*. That being said, pressure was exerted by the community to convince the different organizations – affiliated with different political parties – to publish a single document<sup>47</sup>. Regardless, the fact that

<sup>43</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 278.

<sup>44</sup> Bishara, *Reflections on October 2000*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians*, 233.

<sup>46</sup> Bishara, *Reflections on October 2000*, 66.

<sup>47</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 165.

the documents share a common language and a unified vision – all rooted in the “indigenous minority paradigm” – is indicative of the emergence of a shared political discourse, *in spite of* political fragmentation. As Jamal argues, “the vision documents are an expression of the incremental growth of a ‘general will’ that aspires to homogeneity among all groups in the Palestinian minority in Israel”<sup>48</sup>. Second, it marks the shift towards extra-parliamentary forms of counter-hegemonic politics, reflecting a reorientation in the Palestinian repertoire of contention in Israel towards civil society activism. Indeed, Jamal remarks that “The very publication of the vision documents by civil organizations indicates an interesting socio-political trend that finds expression in the involvement of civil organizations in generating political ideas, thereby taking a political role historically taken by political parties”<sup>49</sup>.

Interestingly, although the move towards extra-parliamentary forms of political activity can certainly be seen as reflecting a grassroots loss of faith in the political system – as exemplified by the boycott of the 2001 elections and the low voter turnout in 2019 – Jamal argues that it is also directly linked to the shrinking spaces for formal political counter-hegemonic activity afforded to the Palestinian community by the state:

*... [B]ecause it is excluded from legitimate political discourse, the Palestinian minority is forced to express its demands by means that do not put its status at risk. The vision documents are a distinctive form of protest. This type of protest is safe in the Israeli reality, where the political power balance is in favor of maintaining the status quo, particularly after the tragic events of October 2000. The writing of the documents is an expression of the balance between the oppositional consciousness among the Palestinian minority and the endurance mechanisms of the Israeli control system.*<sup>50</sup>

Additionally:

*[The Vision Documents] reflected popular ideas that were not fully expressed by the political parties, for reasons that have to do with the legal limitations put on political participation following the amendment of all election laws in 2002. Political parties, which sought survival, feared being declared illegal and being banned from participating in the Knesset elections. This reality was fully used by civil institutions in order to formulize the political consensus accepted in Arab-Palestinian society.*<sup>51</sup>

### **b. The Joint List: a political opportunity?**

The discursive paradigm shift towards what we defined as “indigenous minority nationalism”, accelerated by the second Intifada and the events of October 2000 and formalized by the Vision Documents, continues to define the dominant forms of Palestinian counter-hegemonic discourse in Israel today. Furthermore, it continues to serve as a lowest-common-denominator between ideological competitors within the Palestinian minority. However, political transformations in Israel generally – namely, the sustained intensification of ultra-nationalist, Neo-Zionist<sup>52</sup> and Religious-Zionist discourse – have rendered the available spaces for formal (parliamentary) counter-hegemonic contestation even smaller. The passing of Israel’s “Nation-

<sup>48</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 168.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>52</sup> Defined by Uri Ram as a “particularistic”, “exclusionary ethno-nationalist trend” within Zionism; Uri Ram, *Israeli Nationalism: Social Conflicts and the Politics of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2011): 4.

State Law”, which demoted the status of Arabic as an official language and denied the right to self-determination for any group other than the Jewish people, is a clear, recent example of this discourse of delegitimization<sup>53</sup>. Indeed, as we shall see, state persecution of Palestinian politicians and activists has greatly intensified in recent years, and the tolerance for counter-hegemonic political expressions has arguably been reduced to a historic nadir.

The Palestinian response to these trends has been twofold. On the one hand, CSOs continue to take center stage while parties have but few concrete achievements to show their constituents. Some argue this constitutes a complementary mechanism: CSOs employ a discourse not tolerated in the formal political sphere, operating outside the tight spaces available to politicians in the Knesset.<sup>54</sup> Others take this a step further, arguing that CSOs activity comes *at the expense* of formal political participation, further limiting the scope of formal-parliamentary activism<sup>55</sup>. And yet, on the other hand, Palestinian participation in the Knesset has undergone deep transformations in the last four years, most notably the establishment (and disbandment) of the Joint List. The JL’s establishment was a political maneuver; a response to the Israeli Right’s successful bid to raise the election threshold – a move which deliberately targeted Palestinian parties<sup>56</sup>. The formation of the JL was successful, insofar as preserving and even raising the number of seats earned by Palestinian and binational parties from a cumulative total of 11 in the 19th Knesset to 13 in the 20th Knesset (out of 120 seats in total). In stark contrast with the 2001 elections, the 2015 elections saw an extensive joint political campaign that successfully resonated with the Palestinian public, reaching a 63.7% voter turnout rate<sup>57</sup>. Indeed, one could argue that the Palestinian political leadership successfully identified an opportunity to increase their strength as a response to a perceived structural threat, re-orienting collective Palestinian efforts towards the formal political sphere.

The creation of the Joint List should not be understated. It was an extraordinary political achievement, bringing together political rivals and increasing the leverage of Palestinian representatives in the Knesset. But, as mentioned, although the literature recognizes the consensus that was reached within the Palestinian leadership in Israel – especially since writing the Vision Documents in 2006 – it also emphasizes ongoing organizational and ideological fragmentation. In “Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel”, Amal Jamal expends considerable effort exploring the tension between the emergent consensual counter-hegemonic discourse – the “indigenous minority nationalism” paradigm – and the deep divisions among the Palestinian civic and political leadership. Jamal argues that political fragmentation is not only the result of ideological rivalries among politically distinct constituencies, but mostly the result of personal differences within a “clientelistic” Palestinian political culture:

<sup>53</sup> Nadia Ben-Youssef and Sandra Samaan Tamari, "Enshrining Discrimination: Israel's Nation-State Law," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>54</sup> Rida Abu Rass, "Database of Interviews Conducted in the Summer of 2017," Google Drive, July 13, 2017, <https://goo.gl/g9sVaZ>, 2017-07-24 (Musawa).

<sup>55</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-08-06, 2017-08-02 (Histadrut); Yousef Jabareen, "הארגונים הלא ממשלתיים", כאלטרנטיבה פוליטית - מבט ביקורתי, in *The Arab Minority in Israel and the 17th Knesset Elections*, ed. Elie Rekhess (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University), accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.dayan.org/kap/images/stories/elections%202006%20knesset%2017.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Ruth Eglash, "Israel's Arab political parties have united for the first time," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 2015, accessed September 14, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/israels-sparring-arab-political-parties-have-united-for-the-first-time/2015/03/09/6f6c021a-c660-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israels-sparring-arab-political-parties-have-united-for-the-first-time/2015/03/09/6f6c021a-c660-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3_story.html).

<sup>57</sup> Bishara, *Reflections on October 2000*, 66; Jack Khoury, "לקראת סגירת הקלפיות, במפלגות הערביות מדווחים כי שיעור ההצבעה מתקרב ל-50%", *Haaretz*, April 09, 2019, accessed April 09, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/elections/1.7106752>.

*Among the salient features of [the Palestinian leadership in Israel] is an intense personal competition that results in fragmentation and disunity, seriously undermining its effectiveness. The competition between political parties is usually focused on the differences between politicians. Even competition between politicians within the same political party is very personal. Rivalries take on personal dimensions that block co-operation and co-ordination on common interests between parties and within them. ... The fierce competition between parties and leaders in a clientelistic political culture prevents much of the possible co-operation and co-ordination necessary to deal with the challenges that the Arab community faces vis-a-vis the policies of exclusion and control of the state.*<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, stating his case through the lens of political opportunity theory, Jamal argues that this clientelist traditional structure is largely the result of intense competition between Palestinian political leaders, in turn the result of scarcely available political and material opportunities<sup>59</sup>. Jamal points to the patriarchal and “familiarcratic” roots of these rivalries, noting that though the Palestinian minority in Israel is undergoing major social changes, it maintains elements of an extended-family-centric political tradition whereby political campaigns are as much about family- and local-identity politics as they are about national issues, especially in municipal elections<sup>60</sup>. Importantly, the permanence of these traditional, patriarchal, clientelistic political traditions, as Jamal argues, is partly due to Israel’s policy of cooptation and its recruitment of local powerful figures as “insiders”<sup>61</sup>.

As a result of this clientelistic and “familiarcratic” political structure, Jamal argues, competing leaders would “rarely share political campaigns even when such co-operation is necessary”, would “not even appear on the same panels in public”, and though they may march together in demonstrations, they would “rarely talk to each other”<sup>62</sup>. And so, despite the discursive and strategic achievements of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Palestinian potential for mass, multi-partisan, collective mobilization was largely hindered by these internal frictions within and between the civic and political spheres. This serves to put in perspective the establishment of the JL, not only electorally and tactically, but also in interpersonal and organizational terms: indeed, there were structural incentives to run for elections under one unified party list (raising the electoral threshold), but the interpersonal barriers that had to be overcome were no minor matter. The creation of the JL raised hopes among the Palestinian constituency that longstanding interpersonal rivalries could be overcome – or at least ignored – for the sake of working mutually towards shared political goals, especially as the threats and restrictions faced by the community grew.

One could have expected the Palestinian leadership to show greater coordination as a result of the JL’s establishment, both between the civic and political spheres as well as within each sphere. And while umbrella organizations continue play a coordinative role (most notably, the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel), the formal political union of Palestinian leaders in the form of the JL could have rendered common political directives clearer, especially as Israeli repression grew, and the rhetoric of exclusion intensified. But the exact opposite was observed: although the JL embodied a common discourse of resistance, and though it brought former rivals under the same political-organizational umbrella, it ultimately failed to mend the

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<sup>58</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 133.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-154.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

interpersonal and ideological rift between the different parties and personalities within. The creation of the Joint List did not bring together disparate leaders from different communities representing different constituencies – it brought together well-acquainted leaders of similar ages who studied in the same handful of Israeli universities, representing the same constituency. Still, they could not work together despite incentives to the contrary, and the JL formally disbanded leading up to the 2019 elections. Why?

### c. Connective tissues, fragmentation and maneuverability

As noted by several authors – most notably Oded Haklai, Amal Jamal, Ian Lustick<sup>63</sup>, and Ilan Pappé – Israel has continuously employed a multi-layered mechanism of coercion and social control vis-à-vis the Palestinian minority. Indeed, this should not be understated: despite significant socio-economic improvements, the community continues to face threats associated with contentious collective political action, and it arguably faces unprecedented levels of both cultural and institutional exclusion. As Jamal argues, the Arab leadership is, to this day, not only persecuted by the state and deliberately excluded from formal political life, but also delegitimized by hegemonic journalists, academics, and cultural figures<sup>64</sup>. The pepper-spray attack on the head of the JL, Ayman Odeh, during a peaceful demonstration against house demolitions in the Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran on 18 January 2017 serves as a very recent example of the state's escalating policy of exclusion and delegitimization of Palestinian political figures<sup>65</sup>; a state increasingly willing to undermine legal protections to exclude counter-hegemonic, non-Zionist challengers. Furthermore, there is wide acceptance among the Jewish-Israeli public – save for a small minority in the post- and non-Zionist Left – of this discourse of delegitimization, which accuses Palestinian politicians of constituting a “fifth column”. As Jamal argues:

*In the last few years almost all the Arab members of the Knesset were legally indicted, for either visiting an Arab state considered to be an enemy state according to Israel or for participating in a public protest against discriminatory policies, such as the Arab house demolition or land confiscation. In most cases, these legal procedures can last for years, keeping Arab political leaders constantly under threat of harassment or arrest, effectively limiting their space of behavior. Such a process is widely propagated by the Israeli media, thereby criminalizing Arab leaders and representatives”<sup>66</sup>.*

In addition to these external pressures, the political and civic leadership experience endogenous tensions, as previously discussed. All interviewed MKs maintained a position of internal cooperation within the JL, not mentioning any friction within the party. However, recent developments – namely, the “rotation crisis” and the subsequent splitting of the JL into two separate parties – clearly indicate an inability to cooperate within this short-lived political framework<sup>67</sup>. Indeed, the split is a clear manifestation of the fragmentary pressures that existed

<sup>63</sup> Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1980).

<sup>64</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 135, 162.

<sup>65</sup> TOI staff, "New Umm al-Hiran video shows police pepper-spraying Arab MK," *The Times of Israel*, November 22, 2017, accessed November 25, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-umm-al-hiran-video-shows-police-pepper-spraying-arab-mk/>.

<sup>66</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 135.

<sup>67</sup> Makbula Nassar, "שיחה מקומית", *משבר הרוטציה חושף את היסוד הרופף של הרשימה המשותפת*, August 01, 2017, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://mekomit.co.il/משבר-הרוטציה-חושף-את-כשלי-המשותפת/>; Jack Khoury, "Israel's Only Arab

within the JL and the Palestinian political leadership generally, especially as it pertains to the “personification” of Palestinian politics, to use Jamal’s terminology. Based on news reports and informal, off-the-record discussions with interviewees and other DFPE members, personal rivalries within the list intensified during the “rotation crisis”, wherein the separate parties that comprise the JL competed to have their own candidates promoted to fill a vacancy.

These internal frictions are not exclusive to the political sphere. To the contrary: Jamal argues that this phenomenon is rather pervasive, affecting the Palestinian civic and political leadership generally. Interestingly, some interviewees pointed to fragmentation in the civic sphere as the more pressing issue, especially after the establishment of the JL. In an interview conducted on 7 August 2017, an MK made the case that instead of transcending interpersonal and ideological divisions within the community, prominent Palestinian CSOs in Israel replicate and reinforce them<sup>68</sup>. He argued that CSOs end up reproducing political fragmentation in the civic sphere, since the most visible Palestinian CSOs were established by political leaders seeking to create a network of CSOs around them to increase their political influence in the community<sup>69</sup>. This view is reinforced by Jamal, who argues that the political affiliation of civil society organizations is detrimental to their mission statements and their ability to cooperate with a variety of political actors: “Many of the prominent Arab NGOs”, Jamal argues, “are affiliated with political parties and this pattern of relationship leads to much tension between them, thereby harming their ability to mobilize commonly to achieve the rights of their constituency”<sup>70</sup>. The MK confirms this observation, but goes one step further: after the creation of the JL, he argues, the political leadership unified but the CSOs associated with them ‘lagged behind’, so to speak, maintaining their former alliances contrary to politicians’ expectations:

*When we started having several parties, and fights and competitions broke out, this affected civil society. There is a certain way of thinking, where they say: “let’s strengthen our party through CSOs”. So they say: “this would be a research center, and it will be politically independent, but the people who work there - and the general ideology - will be close to us”. This created a tension within civil society. Now, the Joint List ameliorated this, to an extent. ... In fact, the JL is in a position to lead a paradigm shift for civil society. But it ought to have happened the other way around: for the civil sphere to have been united, persuading political parties to follow suit.<sup>71</sup>*

Regardless of tensions internal to each sphere, interviewees all seem to confirm that strong connective tissues exist *between* the civic and political spheres. And while most interviewees stated that the quality of cooperation between the civic and political spheres could be improved, all reported having strong, consistent working relationships with representatives of the opposite sphere. The MKs stressed the importance of CSOs to their work, noting the valuable services they provide, from drafting position papers to initiating ad-hoc parliamentary committees (one of which was attended as part of the research conducted for this paper). For example, the same MK made the following remarks:

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Majority Party in Danger of Collapse After Lawmaker Convicted," Haaretz, July 31, 2017, , accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.804303>.

<sup>68</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-08-07.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Jamal, *The counter-hegemonic role of civil society*, 298.

<sup>71</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-08-07.

*There is a need for cooperation, because civil society produces important material for politicians. So for me, today, after two and a half years in politics, I can tell you that the politician does not have time to conduct a study, gather statistics, etc. He knows the general arguments, but not necessarily the details. ... So the Arab Center for Alternative Planning might help with everything that relates to the Kaminitz Law, for example; Adalah with the "Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People" law ["חוק הלאום"]; Mossawa with the budget... So for me, with the Kaminitz Law, maybe if I sit down for two or three days I can make an excellent summary, because this is in my field. But I do not have the time. And there are other MKs that do not have the tools to prepare a summary. So for us, this is a very important kind of support that we get from civil society.<sup>72</sup>*

In these remarks, the MK provides a clear illustration of the interdependence of the civic and political spheres within the Palestinian minority in Israel. Throughout the interview, the MK asserts that parliamentarians in Israel today (both Jewish and Palestinian) require external assistance that was not necessary for previous generations of politicians, resulting in strong working relationships – at times, dependencies – on the services provided by CSOs. A practitioner from the Arab Center for Alternative Planning agreed with this analysis, arguing that “not just Arab parliamentary work – but parliamentary work in general – [depends on the assistance provided by external civic associations]”<sup>73</sup>. Another practitioner from the Abraham Fund – a Jewish-Palestinian CSO that works towards “full and equal citizenship”<sup>74</sup> for Israelis and Palestinians – similarly argued that “civil society complements the work of political parties. CSOs are no alternative for political parties... political parties and the MKs are at the front. But we are also pushing, encouraging, and providing materials and information”<sup>75</sup>.

A recent, revealing example of coordination between Palestinian CSOs and the JL, that also illustrates the structural limitations of Palestinian political mobilization in Israel generally, is the “Economic Development Plan for the Arab Sector” often referred to as “Resolution No. 922” or “Decision 922”. This bill aims to close the economic-developmental gap between Palestinians and Jews in Israel, allocating an estimated 10-15 billion New Israeli Shekels over five years towards developing Palestinian local councils, public transportation, educational infrastructure, and other social goods and public services<sup>76</sup>. Virtually all interviewees from both the civic and political spheres mentioned Decision 922 as a major political achievement, and as an example of the symbiotic relationship between the JL and Palestinian CSOs. In an interview with two practitioners from “Sikkuy” – a joint, Jewish-Palestinian CSO promoting “full equality in all fields and on all levels between the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel and the Jewish citizens”<sup>77</sup> – one interviewee noted:

*Sikkuy had a very central role, both in the professional sense, in terms of the content of this draft - we worked directly with budgetary section of the Ministry of Finance on which of Sikkuy's policy recommendations to include, as well as advising and changing certain wordings in the first drafts - and also in the process of mediating between the leadership*

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-07-13 (Arab Center for Alternative Planning).

<sup>74</sup> "Mission Statement," The Abraham Fund, accessed July 26, 2017, [https://www.abrahamfund.org/mission\\_statement](https://www.abrahamfund.org/mission_statement).

<sup>75</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-07-30 (Abraham Fund).

<sup>76</sup> "החלטת ממשלה 922 - מענקי פיתוח לרשויות הערביות" Israeli Ministry of the Interior, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://www.moin.gov.il/Pages/922.aspx>.

<sup>77</sup> "About Sikkuy," Sikkuy | סיכוי, accessed July 22, 2017, <http://www.sikkuy.org.il/about/?lang=en>.

*of the Arab community, including the heads of local councils and MKs, and the government, and helping the leadership of the Arab community in the negotiating process with government offices during the drafting process.*<sup>78</sup>

Additionally, the second interviewee noted:

*...even 922, which is a step in the right direction, is not ideal for us. The discrimination against the Arab community has existed for many years, and it is deep, and many such steps are required to close the gap. Now, I personally think - and we also think, at Sikkuy - that things are not either-or. ... In policy, it is important to take advantage of opportunities, and this is the situation, for example, with 922. ... We are part of coalitions ... for example, on the matter of the Kaminitz Law, we were part of a wide coalition of organizations working on this issue. On 922, for example, we worked closely with the National Committee of the Heads of Arab Localities [NCALC], working together intensively, as well as with other organizations. Decision 922 is a very large bill, and in order to make sure it is implemented and in order for organizations to be able to help the NCALC and the Arab leadership generally, in following this decision and its implementation, it is necessary to work together. But the NCALC also divided the various issues within 922 among the various [civil society] organizations.*<sup>79</sup>

As we can see, the relationship between the various Palestinian CSOs and the political leadership – especially on policy issues that could benefit from the professional services provided by CSOs – is reciprocal and symbiotic. It is interesting to note the role of the NCALC and other umbrella organizations: the interviews show that cooperation between the civic and political spheres can occur spontaneously at times, without organizational assistance, but they also show that when a clear political opportunity arises, umbrella organizations such as the NCALC and the HFUCAI can play an active role in coordinating and allocating certain tasks to appropriate actors. So, even though the Palestinian civic and political leaderships are fragmented along ideological lines, and although interpersonal rivalries persist, there also exists a wider common directive – a “general will” – that forms the basis of ad-hoc coordination, facilitated by extra-parliamentary umbrella organizations. The tensions that exist in day-to-day political organization, the interviewees report, were largely interpersonal rather than strictly ideological, confirming Jamal’s argument: “I think a big part of this tension between different organizations is personal”, argued one of the interviewees from Sikkuy, “partly as a result of competition for funding, *although today, the foundations [donors] push us more and more towards collaborations between organizations*” [emphasis added]<sup>80</sup>. The existence of these strictly interpersonal tensions in spite of material, ideological and structural incentives toward greater unity, was confirmed by three other interviewees from civil society organizations, and notably, very few MKs, who were possibly more careful to maintain the party’s position of mutual respect rather than delve into interpersonal grievances. And yet, the JL’s breakup, triggered by political opportunism on the part of Ahmad Tibi of Ta’al, one of the JL’s former constituent parties, confirms the significance of interpersonal rivalries in the political sphere, despite the general will towards coordinated political action<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-07-27 (Sikkuy).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> "Arab MK Tibi Breaks Away from the Joint List," The Jerusalem Post, January 08, 2019, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/MK-Tibi-removes-his-party-Taal-from-the-Joint-List-576721>.

On the other hand, some also commented on the fragility of ad-hoc partnerships between Palestinian civil and political society in Israel, expressing desires for a permanent, unifying, national framework to provide common political directives. Another MK argued that although joint efforts are common, there remains much room for improving the political-civic partnership by creating a “coordinative framework”:

*I think that there is a need for further development of this cooperation; to reach a more organized situation. ... Sure, there are personal relationships, there are acquaintances, there are initiatives on part of NGOs, and you find that MKs are responsive. But there ought to be a coordinative framework. ... We benefit greatly from the position papers submitted by NGOs before any discussion [in the Knesset] - I am one of the people that greatly benefits from them. I read them and I follow them. I also involve legal NGOs in my work, taking consultation from them. They even represent me on some issues. I think that there is cooperation, but that there is a need for improvement.<sup>82</sup>*

A director of a leading Palestinian CSO similarly commented on the need for greater common directive:

*Today there is no grand vision of how we can complement each other. Look at al-Aqsa [referring to the mass demonstrations that broke out in the summer of 2017], how the Palestinians organized suddenly, but again - as a response, not as an initiative. A people that wants to liberate itself needs to have a liberation strategy.<sup>83</sup>*

Furthermore, another MK remarked:

*[After the establishment of the JL], it became easier for civil society to invite MKs from several different parties. So what we are saying is that, before the JL, civil society was a reflection of existing political divisions, and today, after we united, it became easier for civil society to work with everyone. But unfortunately, on the other hand, it is not empowered to set the tone. You do not have a united framework. So, to this day, Palestinian CSOs do not have a common unifying framework.<sup>84</sup>*

Evidently, activists from both spheres share the conviction that there ought to exist a unifying mechanism to coordinate disparate actors in civil society, just as the JL created a coordinated framework for the political sphere. These comments are rather odd, for such a unifying mechanism supposedly already exists: namely, the aforementioned umbrella organizations, most notably the HFUCAI and the NCALC. The minimal role played by those organizations in the interviews, despite the need interviewees expressed for greater coordination between various actors in each sphere, indicates a lack of faith in their activities and organizational structure. This stands in agreement with some of the recent literature on the HFUCAI, which highlights its inability to reach sweeping consensual decisions due to internal disorganization, lack of accountability and transparency<sup>85</sup>. Indeed, based on the limited number of interviews conducted for this paper in the summer of 2017, Palestinian civil society remains uncoordinated despite the material and structural incentives towards greater unity exerted upon it by donors and the JL. With the breakup of the JL, we can expect structural incentives toward greater unity to diminish, rendering the possibility of creating a permanent framework for civil society coordination unlikely.

<sup>82</sup> Abu Rass, *Database of Interviews*, 2017-07-23.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 2017-07-24 (Musawa).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 2017-08-07.

<sup>85</sup> Nadim N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, eds., *The Palestinians in Israel: Readings in History, Politics and Society* (Haifa: Mada al-Carmel, 2011), 94.

The interviews confirm Jamal's observations. Interpersonal and ideological differences continue to divide the Palestinian leadership – between, and within the civic and political spheres. At the same time – somewhat paradoxically – there exist a “general will”, as well as structural and material incentives, towards greater coordination. These pressures often lead to productive ad-hoc relationships between Palestinian actors in both the civic and political spheres, and yet none are satisfied with the strength and durability of the connective tissues between and within each sphere. Creating such permanent connective structures, all agree, is essential to sustaining counter-hegemonic, contentious political action in the face of ever-increasing state pressure. In their remarks, all actors – from both political and civil society – highlight the sense of crisis caused by the intensification of right-wing Zionist discourse, and the increased sense of exclusion, delegitimization and persecution. This is, by far, the most important theme that emerges from the interviews and the literature: that the various Palestinian actors in Israel are facing increasing institutional intolerance, as well as ever-shrinking spaces for contentious political action in their war of maneuver. Despite recent examples of greater political cooperation between distinct political actors – as in the cases of “Decision 922”, the “Kaminitz Law” and the “Praver Plan” – interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the state of connective tissues between distinct actors. In this sense, it would appear that the JL did not bring about the organizational revolution many hoped for in creating a unified front of Palestinian political and civic actors, nor in creating a united Palestinian social movement in Israel as per Tarrow's definition. Nevertheless, as noted by several interviewees – especially from Palestinian CSOs – there are signs of reconciliation among former rivals and greater effective cooperation among them. The question, now, is whether the trend of greater coordination can be maintained and, importantly, accelerated, and whether the dominant, hegemonic state ideology will continue to drift rightwards, further delegitimizing and further suppressing the counter-hegemonic activity of Israel's Palestinian minority.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In “Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel”, Amal Jamal argues that:

*The Arab leadership in Israel ... is not part of the governing elite. It is the leadership of a dominated minority that seeks to overcome the structural barriers set by the hegemonic Jewish majority. ... Israel has deployed a range of tactics to weaken and undermine an Arab leadership increasingly concerned with national issues and collective rights, and increasingly willing to challenge the state's Jewish identity and the exclusive hegemony of the Jewish majority over state institutions.*<sup>86</sup>

The challenges faced by the Palestinian minority are as large as they had ever been. The lack of political opportunities and limited maneuverability, brought about by the increasing exclusion of the Palestinian leadership from state institutions and Israeli society more broadly, converted the Palestinian struggle in Israel from an opportunistic campaign for equal distribution of resources to a face-forward confrontation with the state over its future *definition*: a state for all citizens, or an ethnocratic, Jewish state. Clearly, the cards are heavily stacked against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, including their political and civic leadership. Under increasingly restrictive conditions, it is no surprise that the Palestinian leadership *sought* to put aside – but importantly, had not yet been able to completely resolve – its internal tensions, uniting on the formal political front. Although there are some indications of greater coordination between discrete political actors from both

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<sup>86</sup> Jamal, *Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel*, 135.

spheres today (indications that will have to be corroborated as part of a larger, future study), the structural limitations placed on this community will likely require even greater coordination to surmount. Furthermore, as the October 2000 events and the 2015 elections indicate, inter-sectional, tightly-coordinated political action is one of the few mechanisms by which “the street” has been brought into the sphere of contention, a necessary component for transforming disparate acts of contention into a true social movement.

Indeed, “the street” is largely absent from this analysis, as well as contemporary literature on Palestinian mobilization more generally. Naturally, few authors can claim to know the collective inner workings of any national group, socially or politically. The committees that Bishara envisioned – ones operating “at the grass-roots level in Arab neighborhoods, towns, and villages that would be linked hierarchically to a countrywide leadership”<sup>87</sup> – have not yet materialized. Other than sporadic confrontations, like the recent, 2017 demonstrations at the al-Aqsa mosque, the Palestinian citizens of Israel did not take to the streets as they did during the October 2000 demonstrations. Why is this the case? Internally, the ideological divisions between different Palestinian groups might prove greater than the common Palestinian directive embodied in the “indigenous minority nationalism” paradigm; that is to say, political differences might prove stronger than the “general will” – to use Jamal’s terminology – expressed in the Vision Documents. Some commentators – including the individuals interviewed for this paper – express their disappointment in this lack of mass popular mobilization, in some cases lamenting a reality in which the masses take to the streets only in defense of religious symbols. Indeed, the role of the Islamic movement and Islamic organizations is glaringly absent from the existing literature as well as this study and should be explored as part of a future study.

The repertoire of Palestinian contention developed considerably throughout the state’s existence. Recently, the focal points for Palestinian contention proliferated, especially within Palestinian civil society in Israel. These new actors greatly contributed to the development of new forms of political contention in Israel, reframing the counter-hegemonic discourse employed by the Palestinian leadership in its war of position, in addition to providing essential services to the political leadership. And yet, while constituting a collective, common directive for discrete Palestinian political actors in Israel – representing a “general will” that aspires for greater “homogeneity”, as articulated by Amal Jamal – the “indigenous minority nationalism” paradigm embodied in the Vision Documents does not seem to have driven the community towards the formation a true *social movement*. The “effective connective structures” that Tarrow described and Bishara envisioned have yet to form, their development hindered – despite both popular will and structural-material incentives – by internal (interpersonal) and external (structural-institutional) fragmentary pressures. Internally, as shown by Jamal and as confirmed in the interviews, the personification of Palestinian politics, as well as the persistence of patriarchal and “familiaristic” social structures, seem to hinder the creation of such “effective connective structures” required for a true social movement to emerge. Externally, the lack of available spaces for formal political contestation continues to drive the fragmentation within the Palestinian civic and political spheres, despite strong material incentives toward greater coordination. Whether effective connective tissues materialize, whether discrete Palestinian actors unite to form a true social movement in Israel, and whether the Palestinian “street” emerges in a *sustained* political interaction with the state, remains to be seen.

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<sup>87</sup> Bishara, *Reflections on October 2000*, 64.

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