

The Parliamentary Elections and Political Behavior

BETWEEN MILITARY AND ELECTORAL BATTLES

Israel was not concerned about the difficulties of the Arabs who remained in Israel and did nothing to enable their return to their lands within its borders. There were exceptions to this rule, such as with those whose return served Israel's interests, or those who had cooperated with the state, even if for a short time. Israel had consented both to the return of communists and to that of their rivals. MK Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi wrote in his memoirs that at the beginning of his political career he took advantage of the return of a number of leaders of the Liberation League from Lebanon (including Emile Tuma) to demand the return of members of his own family and close friends.¹ In Israel, communists were considered allies because of the support of the Soviet Union for the establishment of a Jewish state, and due to their position against the intervention of Arab armies in the 1948 war. However, many Zionist leaders in power viewed most Arabs who remained in Israel, including some who had cooperated with the Jews in the past, as a demographic problem and a security threat. The Arabs in Haifa and the Galilee in particular were seen as an obstacle to Israel's control of the largest possible amount of Palestinian land.

The Israeli government, under the leadership of the ruling Mapai party, continued its confused and stumbling approach to the inclusion of the Arabs in the first elections, even after the election date was announced. Aside from the communists, no one among the remaining Arabs would have objected to being excluded from the Knesset elections. To facilitate a decision, the prime minister convened a meeting in mid-December 1948 to hear the opinions of party experts on this issue.² The majority of participants in the meeting did not support including Arabs in the elections, with some opposing the idea vehemently. But Ben-Gurion's opinion was decisive in swaying the outcome of the discussion in favor of including Arabs. His opinion was based on Israel's interests and domestic as well as international

considerations. After taking that definitive decision, Mapai and other Zionist parties began to prepare for capturing a large share of the Arab vote, in part because they did not want to leave the field uncontested to the communists and Mapam activists, who enthusiastically supported including the Arabs in the elections.³

Mapai activists set up two Arab lists to compete for Arab votes. Mapai leaders chose suitable candidates for the two lists, to have a large measure of control over them. By controlling their representatives, and with the policy of collective social and political isolation of Arab citizens, the leaders of the ruling party voided the meaning of free elections. The lists associated with Mapai were not genuine parties, only organizational arrangements setup on the eve of the elections. These lists were headed by known collaborators with Zionist institutions prior to and during the Nakba. Their job was to compete with the Maki party in the electoral battle, molding Arab policy in Israel in the last weeks of the war: Maki against the Mapai lists. By not allowing Arabs to organize in independent Arab parties, the right to vote granted to Arab citizens had no meaning.

The enthusiastic participation of Arab communists in the January 1949 elections has been largely ignored by researchers. Most studies deal with the activities of the Arabs who remained after the mid-1950s, giving little significance to the Arab participation in Israeli elections during the war. The Israeli leadership that chose to organize those elections during the final days of fighting was comfortable with the merger of the Liberation League with Maki, and its participation in political life. At the international level, that participation had a favorable effect on consolidating the close relationship with the Soviet Union, which provided important political and military support for Israel. Furthermore, the existence of an Israeli Communist Party including Arabs and Jews served the aims of Israeli propaganda and the image of Israel as a democratic state when it was trying to be accepted as a member of the United Nations. Even at the level of local and regional politics, the communist positions of opposition to the intervention of Arab armies and to the nationalist movement headed by Amin al-Husayni made them a useful ally in that critical stage of the struggle.

This chapter will attempt to complete what was begun in chapter 3 and to verify the assertion that the leaders of Maki remained, for the most part, comfortable partners to Israel and its policies until at least 1955. The communists contributed to obscuring the Palestinian identity of the remaining Arabs and promoted in its place the government's line about "the Arab minority," "the Arabs in Israel," or even "the Israeli Arabs." As a consequence, they monopolized the political representation of the rights of the Palestinians who stayed, and confined their activities to civil struggles against discrimination among citizens. Consequently, the nationalist aspect of the struggle and resistance to Zionism, which was the official ideology of the state and its policies, was absent. This was comfortable and useful to Israel. The leaders of Maki did not resist either the Law of Return, or the

settlement of Zionists on the lands of destroyed and depopulated Arab villages, or the flag, or the national anthem, or other symbols of the Jewish nature of the state. In this respect, the communists accepted the Zionist version of the Palestine partition resolution of 1947. Other remaining Arabs who dared to express nationalist positions contrary to the positions of Maki were severely attacked and accused of being nationalism-mongers.

The communists and the government collaborators who assumed the leadership of political action among the remaining Arabs in Haifa and the Galilee were only a small minority in early 1949. Studies which highlight the rivalry between these two trends fail to capture the full picture of the political behavior of Arab citizens after the Nakba. Support by Arab citizens for either of these two trends was due to the fight to stay and should not be read as a manifestation of either conviction or assimilation. After the tragedies of the Nakba, preservation of the family and the ability to stay in the homeland topped the list of priorities of the remaining Arabs, followed by holding onto their homes and lands. In order to secure these goals, people were prepared to temporarily sacrifice their dignity and human rights and the rights of citizenship. The expectations of the Palestinians who stayed in the Jewish state were not high; they believed that their situation was temporary and would end soon through liberation from the outside, despite everything that had happened to them in the year of the Nakba. Consequently, all they had to do was endure and remain in their homes until the “coming of the saviors.”

The men of the ruling party who understood Arab society were optimistic that they would capture most of the minority’s votes. Eliyahu Sasson estimated that 80 percent of the Arabs would vote for Mapai and its affiliated list, headed by Minister Bechor Shitrit. He also predicted that only 20 percent would vote for the Zionist leftist Mapam party and the non-Zionist Maki party.⁴ Not all observers agreed with Sasson’s estimate, but they were convinced that the ruling party would win the majority of Arab votes. When the election date drew near in January 1949, friction increased between party activists and the military government. Even Mapai activists in the north of the country (like Abba Hoshi) complained at the time about the conduct of the army in the areas under military rule. Ben-Gurion intervened and promised party members that he would issue the appropriate orders to the army.⁵

THE FIRST ISRAELI ELECTIONS AND THEIR RESULTS

Israel’s census of November 1948 determined that there were 782,000 people living in the country, of which 713,000 were Jews and only 69,000 were Arabs (or non-Jewish minorities). We mentioned earlier that these figures on the Arab population did not reflect the true demographic facts concerning those who remained under Israeli rule. Many Arabs in northern Galilee were not included in the first census despite the fact that Israel had occupied this area in Operation Hiram; also

the Arabs of the Naqab were not registered in the census for several reasons.⁶ What is more important is that the borders of the state had not been clearly and officially defined. The census included the residents of Nazareth and the villages in its district, but ignored the fact that thousands of others were located in several other regions. The final result of this partial census of the Arab population was to undercut the number of remaining Arabs with voting rights.⁷

Those eighteen years of age and older were given the right to vote. Photo identity cards with details of family status and the names of children under the age of eighteen were distributed to those with the right to vote—personally handed out in exchange for a registration receipt.⁸ Those who did not bring along pictures of themselves at the requisite time did not receive an ID card and lost the right to vote. For this procedural reason, in addition to many other reasons, the number of those with voting rights shrank a great deal from those listed in the population register. The total number of those with voting rights for the first election was 507,000, while the number of Arabs with voting rights was only about 30,000.⁹ Some officials feared that many would not exercise their right to vote. Those fears dissipated when it became clear that about 25,000 Arabs, or more than 83 percent of registered Arabs, exercised their right to vote, not much lower than the percentage of Jews who did so.¹⁰

Most Arab voters in Israel's first elections in 1949 were residents of Nazareth and villages in its district, as well as Arabs who remained in Shafa 'Amr, 'Akka, Haifa, and villages in western Galilee. The areas of Nazareth and western Galilee had been allocated to the Arab state under the 1947 partition resolution. Ben-Gurion understood the importance of the participation of the residents of these Arab territories, named "administered territories" in the elections, as a step towards consolidating Israeli control and rule over them. What is interesting but less clear is how the Arab activists in Maki explained their participation in lending legitimacy to that step, which amounted to the annexation of regions of the Galilee to Israel, before the conclusion of armistice agreements with Arab countries. Communist sources do not raise this issue as being a matter that worried party leaders. In this respect, Maki's conduct was not different from that of Zionist leaders who accepted the partition resolution in principle and yet accepted the enlargement of the territory of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians.

Twenty-one lists competed in the election, of which twelve surpassed the required minimum threshold for inclusion in the 120-member Knesset. After the results were announced, parliamentary seats were distributed among the lists as follows: Mapai, under the leadership of Ben-Gurion, the largest number (forty-six), which established its position as the ruling party; Mapam in second place with only nineteen seats, although it gained a seat in August 1949 after one communist MK joined its ranks;¹¹ the bloc of Jewish religious parties (sixteen); the right-wing Herut party (fourteen); General Zionists (seven); Progressives (five); Maki (four); and the Nazareth Democratic list, headed by Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi

(two). Among these, the Arabs were represented by a total of three seats in the first Knesset: Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi and Amin Jarjura from the Nazareth Democratic list, and Tawfiq Tubi from Maki. Three seats out of 120 was a weak and inadequate representation of the Arabs who had been counted in the census and granted the right to vote. What was the reason for this weak representation of the Arab population in the first Knesset?

The Arabs faced several difficulties along the path to the elections which led to this small number of representatives. As previously mentioned, not all Arabs living under Israeli rule were registered. Among the 69,000 who were, not all gained the right to vote. Arab voters were about 5.5 percent of the total. These elections were a new and strange experience for Arab voters under the prevailing circumstances at the end of the war. Concerns were raised about how many of the remaining Arabs would be able to get to the ballot boxes in view of the blatant discrimination, as efforts to uproot them continued, alongside attempts also to assimilate them. When Arab voters arrived to vote, they were not faced with many real worthwhile choices. Going to the polls, like obtaining identity cards before that, was a means to an end and a talisman to protect them against being uprooted and expelled.

The ruling Mapai party created two Arab lists, only one of which passed the threshold for inclusion in the Knesset; consequently thousands of votes were wasted. Even in Maki, Arabs were under-represented in the names at the top of the Communist Party list: among the top five only one Arab name was present, that of Tawfiq Tubi. The Liberation League had joined Maki at the end of 1948 from a clear position of weakness. Shmuel Mikunis and his Jewish comrades in the leadership of the party were more experienced and had better ties to the Soviet Union as well as to Israeli leaders. Also, the number of veterans, tried-and-tested members of the Liberation League who remained in Israel or who returned to it after the Nakba was quite small, no more than a few dozen. Consequently, naming one of them to be among the top five names on the list did not elicit objections from the Arab comrades at the time. However, this imbalance of forces inside the leadership of Maki began to give rise to tensions and conflicts in a later phase of the party's history.

After the official election results were released, Maki leaders had hopes that Ben-Gurion would include the party in the governing coalition and they let this be clearly known in *al-Ittihad*.¹² However the leader of the ruling party never considered including the non-Zionist Maki party in running the affairs of the state. He went further by coining his famous phrase, "neither Maki nor Herut," thereby delegitimizing the two parties on the far left and the far right. By doing this, Ben-Gurion laid the cornerstone for rendering Arab citizens' right to vote to be an inconsequential act in Israeli politics, while still lending the process a democratic hue. Arabs, and their representatives in the Knesset, were excluded from any real influence in Israeli politics from 1949 onwards; they had the right to vote but no influence on decision-making or implementation.

The situation of the two Knesset members from the Nazareth list associated with Mapai was no different, despite their connection to the ruling party. Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi (b. 1913) entertained no ambitions beyond leadership at the local level of Nazareth and its region. He was chosen to be at the head of the list because of his long cooperation with Zionist institutions, which he served without reservation.¹³ Al-Zu'bi was content with his status as a faithful follower, and his demands on the ruling party were limited to mediation for some of his close friends and relatives in return for serving the policy of the state. Sayf al-Din was an example of "the good Arab" whom the authorities helped in the service of their own interests and in an attempt to domesticate the Palestinians who remained under the control of the military government. The majority of Arab voters in that period only saw the elections as a means to consolidating their ability to stay. Therefore, many saw no problem with voting on election day for Sayf al-Din and his sort.

The three Arab members of the first Israeli Knesset were urbanites from the north of the country, which reflected the demographic and social center of gravity. At that time, the remaining Arabs in Haifa and the Galilee were the vast majority of voters, so it was therefore natural that their representatives in the Knesset should be from Haifa and Nazareth. Those two cities continued to represent the center of gravity for the remaining Arabs even after the addition of the Triangle to Israel and the participation of its inhabitants in elections after 1951. Two of the three Arab members of the Knesset were Christians, which reflected the consolidation of the political status of members of that community in Israel after the Nakba and following the loss of the urban city and the Palestinian elite in 1948. The Arab activists in Maki were mostly Orthodox Christians, which also reflected the cultural and historical relationship between that sect and Russia since the end of the Ottoman era. The inclusion of Muslims and some Druze in the Communist Party, particularly in its leadership, did not happen until the 1970s.¹⁴

The historical literature is full of inaccurate generalizations about the Arab Knesset members from lists associated with the Mapai party, describing them as agents of the governing authorities in Israel. This generalization is unjust to one of them and does not present an accurate picture of the positions and actions of this parliamentarian. The second on the Nazareth list, Amin Jarjura (1886–1975), proved more than once that he had independent positions and critical views which he expressed inside and outside the Knesset. In his first speech in February 1949, he chose to stress that the values of justice and equality should be the basis for government and for the state's treatment of Arab citizens.¹⁵ Amin Jarjura was a lawyer from a well-known Nazarene family whose autobiography does not match what we know about the other Knesset members from lists associated with the ruling party in the 1950s. Jarjura's audacity and his independent positions at times embarrassed the leadership of Mapai in the Knesset. In a debate in June 1949 about the problem of refugees and their right to return, this parliamentarian told the Knesset: "These are people who have been driven from their quarters and their lands

and their homeland under conditions of fear and terrorism and the disproportionate use of direct and indirect violence. People's attachment to their homeland is well-known and clear and in no need of investigation and proof." Jarjura added: "If the Jewish people have retained their right in Palestine, including the right to live there, for two thousand years, why do the Arab refugees not have the right to return to their lands and cities and villages? They were forced to leave only a few months ago, under coercion as is well known."¹⁶

MK Jarjura was not satisfied with making those brave statements concerning the circumstances of the uprooting of Palestinians refugees from their homeland. He also debated the claim of foreign minister Moshe Sharett that their expulsion was the result of the attack by Arab armies, saying: "It is very well known that the expulsion of the Arabs from Haifa, Jaffa, Tiberias, 'Akka, Bisan, and other places took place prior to 15 May 1948 and the withdrawal of British mandatory forces, and before their own eyes." Jarjura concluded: "There is no relationship between the expulsion of the refugees and the entry of Arab armies in Palestine, so that has nothing to do with our subject."¹⁷ These frank words from the podium of the Knesset in response to the foreign minister who was one of the prominent leaders of the ruling Mapai party in June 1949 are nothing to make light of.

Let us look at another example of Jarjura's courageous statements. In a debate about a permit for the Galilee Bus Company to operate in Nazareth, he said: "The Galilee company in Nazareth is the only one that continued to operate after the Israeli occupation."¹⁸ The assertion, on the eve of the second parliamentary elections in June 1951, that Israel had "occupied" Nazareth was a bold and dissonant note amidst the dominant political discourse of that period. It should be pointed out that such statements were unheard of even from the leaders of Maki, be they Arabs or Jews. MK Jarjura, despite his election as no. 2 on the Nazareth slate alongside Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi, gave voice to quite distinct political positions. The lawyer/parliamentarian demonstrated a measure of self-confidence and independence that did not suit what the leaders of Mapai expected. Consequently, his days in the Knesset were numbered, and his name was not placed high on the slate which al-Zu'bi headed in 1951, ensuring his non-election.¹⁹

Jarjura was well educated by the standards of those days following the Nakba. He was replaced in his capacity as "representative of the Christians" in the second and third Knessets by Mas'ad Qassis from Mi'lya, who we will discuss later. Although Mapai chose for its associated lists people who would advance the government's policies and interests, some occasionally behaved in a manner that was not entirely consistent with the party's expectations. From this perspective, one can see the significant difference between the conduct of Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi and Jarjura, his partner on the Nazareth Democratic list. Amin Jarjura remained active in politics after 1951, and was elected mayor of Nazareth in 1954, remaining in that position until 1959. He set a noble example for the survivors, reminiscent of the

Palestinian elite that had existed before the Nakba. He was quite different from Sayf al-Din and his sort who willingly served the Israeli authorities.

Returning to the results of the elections and the distribution of Arab votes, we see that the choice available to Arab voters was between Mapai and its lists and the Communist Party. It is difficult to determine the distribution of Arab votes with sufficient accuracy because of the absence of information from ballot boxes in "mixed cities." Still, it is estimated that 10,600 Arab votes were given to the two lists associated with Mapai.²⁰ Maki received about 6,000 votes from Arabs, representing about one quarter of Arab voters in those elections. Other Zionist parties had also tried to attract Arab votes, such as Mapam and the General Zionists. Mapam created an Arab list named the Popular Arab Bloc, but it received a mere 2,812 votes, below the threshold for the Knesset. Thousands of Arab votes went to other Zionist parties which had no Arab representatives at all. Thus, the biggest winners from Arab participation in the 1949 elections were Maki on one side and the Nazareth list headed by Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi on the other.

At first glance these results look like what one would have expected, involving no surprises. However, a more in-depth analysis of the distribution of Arab votes would indicate some surprising victories for the Communist Party in Arab cities, where it received one quarter of the Arab vote, according to official data.²¹ Maki won a decisive victory in Nazareth, receiving over half of the votes of the only Arab city to escape destruction, which had great significance. The semi-official *al-Yawm* newspaper, which highlighted the large Arab turnout in the election, tried to belittle the significance of the victory of the Communist Party by attributing it to the importing of over 170 Arab laborers from Ramla to vote in Nazareth.²² However, the real reason behind the victory of Maki in the city of the Annunciation was that there had been ten months of persistent and organized work before the elections. The activists of the Liberation League in the city, under the leadership of Saliba Khamis, managed to attract a number of supporters beginning in summer of 1948. During those days, relations between activists of the League and Mapam's civilian and military activists were consolidated. Relations with governmental offices led by Mapam ministers contributed to the flow of workers to the ranks of the League.²³ Therefore, it came as no surprise at the time of the elections that the activists of Maki should have been better prepared than any other party to enter and win the contest, particularly in Nazareth.

The victory of the communists in Nazareth was their most prominent and important, but it was not an isolated triumph. According to official party data, Maki won about 52 percent of the Arab vote in Nazareth, almost 28 percent of the vote in 'Iblin and Kafr Yusif, and 25 percent in Shafa 'Amr and 'Akka. Overall, Maki won 28 percent of the votes of Arabs in Israel.²⁴ Despite the fact that some of these figures are a bit higher than the final official figures, there is no doubt that it was a big victory for the communists. Official results estimated that only 22 percent

of Arab votes went to the party, although it was admitted that Maki gained over half the votes in Nazareth. These results were an important victory in themselves, a success rate that the party was unable to duplicate in electoral battles over the next two decades.²⁵

The results were all the more significant since many Arab residents of the Galilee and other areas did not participate in the elections because they were not allowed to vote. Some Mapai leaders also objected to the remaining Arabs voting, and claimed that many Arab voters would refrain from doing so.²⁶ The Palestinians in Haifa and the Galilee were for the most part still traumatized by the consequences of the war. One may ask: how is this consistent with the strong showing for the opposition Communist Party in January 1949? This party was opposed to Zionism. It was the only party that opened its ranks to Arab citizens, and it also represented the interests of the minority people. For these reasons the authorities began to pursue communist activists and their supporters. So how do we explain the success of the Communists in their electoral battle and in overcoming the military government? Why did the authorities not succeed in terrorizing the Arab citizens against voting for Maki? And how do we explain the remarkable success of the Communists in Nazareth, where they obtained more than half of the vote?

In addition to the organizational abilities of the Liberation League and its political experience, particularly with workers, in contrast to its rivals among Arab slates, other factors existed which researchers into the history of the Communist Party have not mentioned. For instance, the Arab-Jewish partnership in Maki served to dispel some fears of retaliation by the authorities, as did the fact that the communists were close to activists in Mapam, the second biggest Zionist party. We saw earlier how civil servants in Israeli ministries belonging to Mapam supported the activities of the Liberation League before it merged with Maki. Also, the communists supported the partition resolution and the establishment of a Jewish state. These reasons—and the role of the Soviet Union—all contributed to the communists' ability to consolidate their position among the remaining Palestinians many months before the elections.

Even after the Liberation League decided to merge with Maki, the Zionist left under the leadership of Mapam saw the Arab communists as an important ally.²⁷ The first Knesset elections took place then at a time when the communists were not considered a bitter enemy of Zionism, as happened later in the 1950s. If we add to all this the fact that the viable alternatives before Arab voters were not attractive, we can understand why the success of Maki exceeded the expectations of the advisors of the ruling Mapai party regarding Arab society. Perhaps the hesitancy of Mapam to create an Arab list played a role in the success of the communists as well. The failure of the Mapam-associated list to exceed the minimum threshold for representation in the Knesset led to recriminations against Ben-Gurion's policies and self-criticism on the part of activists in the Marxist-Zionist Hashomer Hatzair.²⁸

The activists in the Arab department in Mapam found reasons to justify their lack of success in attracting Arab voters to their list, but they later admitted their failure and frankly accepted responsibility for it. Aharon Cohen, for example, was outspoken in a letter he sent to the political committee on 15 May 1949. In the course of his self-criticism of the party, he said: "We cannot do what Mapai does and copy its methods. The Arabs who chose to go with us will leave us and go to Maki if we do not accept them as equals. Therefore, it is up to Mapam to decide if it wants to remain a Jewish party and leave the Arabs of Israel to the others, or if it wants to be the party of all workers in Israel."²⁹ Rustum Bastuni made similarly bold statements at the 14 June 1949 meeting of the party secretariat in which he attacked the establishment of an Arab list. He added: "We are convinced that this method of setting up a separate slate for the Arabs was not democratic, and that it did not aspire to full equality free of discrimination." He warned that if Mapam did not open its doors to the Arabs "then that would mean the party was treating us like the British treat the people of the African continent."³⁰

Indeed, the exclusion of Arabs from membership in all Zionist parties, including Mapam, was a factor in making the slates associated with them unattractive, which in turn strengthened the position of Maki. If we add that Israel did not permit the establishment of independent Arab parties throughout the period of military rule, it is not hard to see what was distinctive about the Communist Party and why it succeeded. Maki spoke frankly and unequivocally about discrimination against Arab citizens and demanded full equality for them. In those early days after the Nakba, when the wounds were still open, those who remained in Haifa and the Galilee were looking for a savior from expulsion and a life of exile, and Maki was a lifeboat for them. For those with political awareness, the party, with its Jewish/Arab leadership and its anti-Zionist positions, was the most attractive among the alternatives.

On the other hand, Maki never changed its position on leftist Zionism under the leadership of Mapam, and continued to seek cooperation with it. On many occasions these two parties voted together against the government of Ben-Gurion. For example, both parties voted against the armistice agreement between Israel and Jordan on 3 April 1949. Maki also stuck by its position of supporting unrestricted Jewish immigration to the country, and used the Zionist term *aliyah* (ascent) for it.³¹ When rivals of the communists questioned this position, party leaders responded sharply. MK Meir Vilner, for example, conveyed Maki's clear position to members of the Knesset in a special session, stating: "We see aliya as a vital need for the state of Israel." He reminded them that "during the difficult days of the war, Mikunis organized a collective fighting aliya. At the time, the leadership of Maki not only supported aliya, it also supported settlement."³² Indeed, Maki did not object even to leftist Zionist settlement and the establishment of kibbutzim on the ruins of Arab villages such as Kufr Bir'im, Sa'sa', and others.

THE RETURN AND POLITICS: THE RETURN
OF TWO RIVALS AND ENEMIES OF COMMUNISM

MK Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi wrote in his memoirs that after the return of Emile Tuma from Lebanon in the spring of 1949, he went to the authorities and asked that his brother-in-law (Ahmad Tawfiq al-Fahum) be allowed to return.³³ Tuma was one of the last of the communists whose return to Haifa by way of Nazareth had been approved by Israel. Before him, a large number of activists in the League and their families had returned from Lebanon and other countries. After the elections, the authorities agreed to most of al-Zu'bi's demands for the return of his relatives and close friends, including Hanna Abu 'Asal, the father of the Anglican priest (later bishop) Riyah from Nazareth, a number of fishermen from 'Akka, and Hanna Daklush from Haifa, among others.³⁴ Thus, the mechanism of family reunification was exploited for political reasons in the service of Mapai and its collaborators in the Arab slates.

Mapai activists and consultants on Arab affairs exploited all means available to them after the first elections to weaken the communists. One avenue was to bring back leading figures who were anticommunist, or at least rivals to the communists. While Israel needed the support of communists and the Soviet Union during the 1948 war, and rewarded local communists for that, Mapai leaders were surprised by the extent of Maki's success at the ballot box, and tried to reduce its influence on the Arabs. The ruling party was not looking for Arab partners, but for collaborators with its policies. As for Maki's Arab leaders (with Tawfiq Tubi at their head), they created illusions of Arab-Jewish fraternity, a partnership of worker's parties, and the establishment of a socialist regime allied with the Soviet Union. Maki's leaders became greatly disappointed with Ben-Gurion and his international policies, and with the governing coalition he put together, in which not even Mapam was included.

Ben-Gurion's advisors began work from spring of 1949 on limiting the influence of the communists on the Arabs. Bishop Hakim was the first to benefit from this policy. He had been the leader of the Melkite Catholic community and a well-connected figure with considerable influence, well-known for his hostility to communism. This is why he was selected on his return to the country to become, by dint of his personality and his office, a strong rival to the communists. In this way the return of Bishop Hakim contributed to weakening the influence of Maki, on the one hand, and to furthering the policy of divide and rule among Palestinian Christians, on the other, since most communist leaders came from the Orthodox sect. His return also served Israel's international interests due to his multifaceted relationship with the Vatican concerning Palestinian refugees, which helped the government fend off pressure for their return.

Bishop Hakim's return to the country on a permanent basis was preceded by a series of talks and dealings with the Israeli government. Hakim first returned to

Haifa after its fall as a visitor at the end of June 1948. During that visit he explored the possibility of the return of members of his Catholic sect. At that stage Israel did not agree to all of his demands, but it left the door open for further talks. Hakim left and began a tour of neighboring Arab countries.³⁵ In December 1948, Israel came under international pressure to accept the return of Palestinian refugees, particularly in light of the adoption of United Nations Resolution 194. At that stage, a number of those working in the Israeli foreign ministry assessed that the return of Bishop Hakim to Haifa would be useful for Israeli propaganda and foreign relations, and in fact his return was approved in early 1949 and implemented very soon thereafter.³⁶

Al-Yawm reported the return of Bishop Hakim to Haifa by plane on 18 February 1949.³⁷ In contrast to the paper welcoming his return in the name of the authorities, the communists directed strong criticism at this event, and accused him of serving the interests of the Mapai party. Maki activists rightly estimated that the return of the Bishop was part of government efforts to weaken their influence among the Arab population. Indeed, Hakim was openly prepared to offer his services in this regard. In his application for a license for his printing press, he wrote that he was seeking to “purify the air that was full of communist poison and to publish the truth and correct principles in Arab circles.”³⁸ In return, the authorities encouraged him “to establish a moderate Arab party” so as to distance a large section of his religious community from the influence of the communists.

Bishop Hakim obtained a permit to resume publishing *al-Rabita* magazine which had stopped in 1948; it quickly became a pulpit for attacks on the communists and their leadership. He also used his clerical authority to impose a ban by the church on communists and their supporters among members of his denomination.³⁹ The magazine, which spoke in the name of the church, published sharp rebuttals of the statements and propaganda by the communists. One article dealt with the issue of the persecution of Catholics in eastern Europe under communist regimes.⁴⁰ The magazine reported on the celebration of the return of dozens of children from Lebanon to Haifa on 13 October 1949. The bishop and his supporters went even further when they asked the Israeli authorities to close down *al-Ittihad* newspaper after its “vilification” of the bishop, who was the supreme local spiritual authority of the denomination.⁴¹

Maki leaders redoubled their accusations that Bishop Hakim was working with the Israeli authorities and serving their interests.⁴² MK Tubi commented on Israel’s granting him permission to return to Haifa “despite the fact that he had agitated against the UN partition resolution and had known connections to imperialism.”⁴³ The leaders of Maki and their allies in Mapam understood the clear motives of Mapai for allowing the bishop to return to the country. The statements of Tubi and other Maki leaders after the Nakba indicate that they considered the granting of permission to Palestinians to return to the country at that time to be a political reward for their positions on partition and the establishment of the Jewish state

rather than a basic right of the expellees. The written and verbal statements by Maki activists included criticisms of the government for allowing the opponents of partition, supporters of the mufti, and those who had cooperated with the Rescue Army to return to live in the country. The pages of *al-Ittihad* in 1949 were full of examples of these strange statements.

In the years following the return of Bishop Hakim and hundreds of members of his sect in 1949, he was helpful to dozens more people. Members of the Srouji family of Nazareth who had been studying in Beirut and were stranded there after the Nakba were able to return to their city in 1951 thanks to the help of the bishop. For example, Dr. 'Aziz Srouji had graduated with a degree in medicine from the American University of Beirut in 1947 and arrived to visit his family. He returned to Lebanon to work in the university hospital and then worked for two years (1949–50) with the Red Cross in Palestinian refugee camps. On 1 January 1951, he learned that the health of his father, who was suffering from cancer, had deteriorated, so he decided to return to the country with the help of smugglers.⁴⁴ He was arrested near Fassuta and detained in 'Akka for two days before his brother, Dr. Elias Srouji, managed to arrange his release with the help of Hakim and the Nazareth police chief Wanderman. Initially he obtained a residence permit in Nazareth for a month, which was renewed several times. In the end, he acquired an identity card and citizenship, and remained in Nazareth where he worked as a doctor.

'Anis Srouji (b. 1928) went to Beirut in 1945 to study engineering and completed his studies in June 1950. He found work in Tartus, Syria, and resided there for ten months.⁴⁵ From Tartus he went to Aleppo to work with an infrastructure company run by a Palestinian, Sa'id Saffuri, from Kafr Kana, on Aleppo's water system. In the summer of 1951, he found his name on a list of those approved for family reunification. He arrived at the border with his brother 'Afif, crossed to the Israeli side through Ra's al-Naqura, and returned to Nazareth. Several months later he opened a civil engineering office and over the years became a well-known architect in Nazareth. Bishop Hakim contributed to the success of 'Anis Srouji's office as he chose him to manage all of his building projects inside and outside the city. Thus, the Srouji brothers succeeded in returning to their homes and became an important part of the social and political elite of Nazareth.⁴⁶

Bishop Hakim's assistance to the Srouji family and others in his denomination yielded political benefits, too. In 1954, in the first elections for the Nazareth municipal council held since the Nakba, 'Anis Srouji became one of the pillars of the "Home Bloc" (al-Kutla al-Ahliya), which was close to the bishop, and he remained active in municipal affairs for twenty-six years. During my interview with him, 'Anis expressed pride in the role that MK Mas'ad Qassis (who was also close to the bishop) was playing. Thus, the government's plan to promote rivals to the Communist Party, preeminently the bishop, had succeeded. The return of a number of academics of the Catholic faith (such as the Srouji family) played an important role in that success.

Following the initial successes of Bishop Hakim, he established a scout movement to compete with the Maki youth. The bishop's scouts spearheaded the rivalry with the Communist Party in Arab cities and villages, and sometimes initiated violent confrontations with the Communist Party activists. The competition between the two sides intensified and worsened at times into bloody clashes, especially with marches organized by the church scout movement during holidays and other occasions, leading to tragic events in 'Iblin and 'Ilabun.⁴⁷ Towns and cities inhabited by Orthodox and Catholics became arenas for the struggle between the two sides. The government had helped consolidate the bishop's position and his role by restoring church property which had been appropriated and paying compensation for property not returned. In this way the strong economic base of the bishop and his supporters grew, which contributed to the expansion of their political activities and the capture of new supporters, and drove others away from Maki.⁴⁸

On 14 April 1952 (Easter), the bishop's scouts from Haifa, Shafa 'Amr, and a few other Galilee villages came to Nazareth to demonstrate a clear show of force.⁴⁹ Hundreds of young scouts gathered and then marched in the streets of the city, which fed rising tensions and exploded in a clash in the eastern quarter with young men on both sides injured. Ni'mat al-Qasim was seriously wounded and died two days later, which provoked fevered emotions in the city, and threatened a wider explosion between Muslims and Catholics. At this point, the military government declared a curfew in Nazareth for a month, and a residents' committee worked quickly to calm things and arrange a truce between the two sides.⁵⁰

Despite the predicament that the death of al-Qasim caused the camp of the bishop and his scouts, it did not stop their attempts to challenge the activities of the communists in the Galilee. Another tragic event occurred between the two camps in October 1952 in 'Ilabun. The 'Ilabun villagers were still suffering from the events of the Nakba at the end of 1948 when they were surprised by a fire which broke out in the Communist Party club, which claimed the life of young Suhayl Zurayq. Hillel Cohen reported on the events in 'Ilabun, giving the view of the arsonist, who frankly declared his blind hatred of communists.⁵¹ The events in 'Ilabun led to counter-intuitive results: they consolidated the position of the party in the village, and added to the condemnation of the activities of the bishop's scouts and his supporters. The killing of Suhayl Zurayq became a symbol of the bloody actions of the authorities, in an oft-repeated slogan, "those who worked with them worked against those fighting for the rights of the Arabs in Israel." Hanna Abu Hanna, the young poet in charge of the communist youth at the time, composed a poem dedicated to "the soul of the martyr Suhayl Zurayq" titled "Smoke in 'Ilabun."⁵²

Aside from Bishop Hakim, the Israeli government permitted the return of another leader who was a communist rival, the attorney Muhammad Nimr al-Hawwari, in December 1949. Al-Hawwari's return was part of the government's policy to encourage rivals of Maki among the Arabs who remained in the Galilee.⁵³ Al-Hawwari was born in Nazareth in 1908 and grew up there. After completing his studies in Nazareth, he worked as a teacher for ten years in Jerusalem, then

studied law and became a trial lawyer. In 1945 he took over leadership of the youth organization al-Najjada in Jaffa. Initially, he was close to the mufti, who became the leader of the Palestinian nationalist movement. But the internal divisions and the rivalry for jobs made him drift away from Hajj Amin and his supporters. In 1947 he established relations with the Haganah in Tel Aviv. His opponents said that he was one of the first to run away from Jaffa when military skirmishes began following the partition resolution.⁵⁴

The man who took the initiative in bringing al-Hawwari back to the country was the prime minister's advisor on Arab affairs, Yehushua Palmon. When he was criticized for this undertaking, he hastened to announce that Hawwari "has worked with us since 1945." Palmon, who represented and implemented the policies of the authorities towards the Arabs who remained, maintained personal relations with al-Hawwari for years after al-Hawwari quit politics and went back to working as a lawyer, then a judge.⁵⁵ After al-Hawwari returned to the country, he set up residence in Haifa, where he found a number of supporters, but also much enmity. This was instigated by the communists who were concerned about the role that this able lawyer might play, given that the authorities had allowed his return as part of their divide and rule policy. The activists of Maki and the party's press launched strongly worded attacks on al-Hawwari and accused him of "serving Israel and its policies."⁵⁶ The communist press also referred to his old ties to the mufti and his role in organizing al-Najjada, and raised questions about his role as a representative of the refugees at the Rhodes talks with Israeli representatives and his subsequent surprising arrival in the country with his family only.

The communists had heard reports of al-Hawwari's possible return to the country a month before it happened. *Al-Ittihad* reported in November 1949 about a rumor circulating that al-Hawwari might be brought back to Nazareth, the purpose being to create an Arab party sympathetic to the Mapai party and Ben-Gurion's policies.⁵⁷ Contrary to Bishop Hakim, however, al-Hawwari did not have strong reliable backing and became an easy target for communist arrows. The communists feared an alliance of al-Hawwari, Hakim, and others who were opposed to Maki and supported by the government and its institutions. Indeed, the hostile reception that the communists organized for al-Hawwari's return was a clear statement of those fears that followed their successes in the Knesset elections that same year. Compared to the leaders of Arab slates connected to the ruling party, Bishop Hakim and al-Hawwari were considered heavyweight, experienced leaders.

After al-Hawwari settled in 'Akka, the communists organized demonstrations and verbal attacks against him which at times extended to the rest of his family. In one demonstration, the participants screamed, "Al-Hawwari to the gallows." The party organ which reported this news added that the authorities "are bringing back al-Hawwari while they hunt down infiltrators in Haifa" and imposed curfews and arrested people in Wadi al-Nisnas.⁵⁸ But this communist harassment did not deter

al-Hawwari from continuing his hostile political activities against them, at least for a while. Al-Hawwari moved from 'Akka to Nazareth, where he consulted with several known figures about establishing an anticommunist Arab party. After he published his memoirs and political opinions in *al-Yawm*, the communists intensified their attacks on him and his activities.⁵⁹ Compared to 'Akka, al-Hawwari found greater support in Nazareth from his extended family and other rivals of the communists who were pleased that he joined their camp.

Al-Hawwari's return took more than two years, during which time he and his family moved from one country to another. He was considered a leader of the Palestinian national movement, yet we do not find in his memoir *The Secret of al-Nakba* any self-criticism or deep analysis of the causes of the tragedy. Instead, in his preface to the book he directed his barbs at the communists who had accused him of being an agent and traitor, even a war criminal.⁶⁰ The party activists accused al-Hawwari of being one of the mufti's men who contributed to igniting the war between Arabs and Jews. He, on the other hand, claimed that in December 1947 he had done all he could to preserve peace and tranquility between the Arab inhabitants of Jaffa and their neighbors in Tel Aviv. He added that his activism for the sake of peace between neighbors was what forced him to leave at the end of that month.⁶¹ Al-Hawwari went beyond defending himself against the communists' accusations; he turned those accusations on their head, claiming that it was the communists who were responsible for the actions in question.

Al-Hawwari's return did indeed seem unusual against the backdrop of his activities and the role he played in Jaffa before 1948, followed by his defense of the Palestinian cause and right of return. The communists speculated, correctly, that his return with the authorities' blessings was part of a divide and rule policy, so they never let up in their attacks. When he cooperated with Bishop Hakim to establish an Arab party before the 1951 elections, their attacks resumed in force. However, in contrast to the enmity between the bishop and the communists which continued throughout the 1950s, al-Hawwari chose to renounce politics fairly quickly. As of 1950, he left the political arena and—belonging to no church or party or large family which could protect and support him—devoted most of his time to the judicial system, working as a lawyer and later a judge, providing support for his extended family.⁶²

THE SECOND KNESSET ELECTIONS OF 1951 AND THEIR OUTCOME

The second parliamentary elections in Israel took place under relatively comfortable circumstances for the Arabs remaining in the Galilee and other areas. The shock which had unsettled the Arabs who had escaped the uprooting and expulsion measures metamorphosed into gradual acclimatization to the new political reality. The number of Arabs with voting rights doubled,⁶³ and when election day

came, a greater number exercised the right to vote; the rate of voters reached 86 percent of those eligible, higher than the general average.⁶⁴ As a result, the number of Arabs elected to the Knesset in 1951 increased from three to eight. Tawfiq Tubi and Emile Habibi from Maki were elected, and five others were elected from Arab slates associated with the ruling party; Rustum Bastuni from Mapam was also elected. While the ratio of Arab members of the Knesset was smaller than their demographic ratio to the general population, it was nonetheless a significant jump which represented a measure of stability.

The number of Arabs with voting rights increased to about 70,000 in 1951, but still constituted only 40 percent of the Arab population, which totaled 160,000 at the end of 1949. One obvious reason for this low rate was the large average size of Arab families, such that many were below voting age. Another reason was the continuing practice of denying Israeli citizenship to many of the Arabs who remained, who only had temporary registration cards and red identity cards. The available information on this category of the population in 1951 is scant. Even the official numbers which have been adopted by some researchers about those elections and the Arabs who participated in them is not very clear.⁶⁵ The election results indicate that the number of actual Arab voters that year was less than 60,000.

The relatively large number of Arabs who had the right to vote did attract the attention of parties that competed for their votes. The elections also gave the remaining Arabs an opportunity to exploit their right to vote in the service of personal, familial, or sectarian interests. Some had learned from the first elections the value of votes as an in-demand commodity that could be profitable. Some took to bargaining with the votes of their families or their clans to secure personal or group demands from the government. The competition by Zionist parties for Arab votes played a role in relaxing the iron grip of the military government and securing promises from the government to improve their living conditions. Thus, the Arabs who remained had acquired something they could trade, particularly considering that they did not consider the elections game as anything serious.

The 1951 elections reflected the increase in the importance of the votes of the remaining Arabs, demonstrated by eight Arab Knesset members being elected. Mapai was the biggest winner of Arab representation in the Knesset, with five seats for slates associated with the party.⁶⁶ Two of Maki's five seats went to Arab candidates. Mapam did not form a separate Arab slate this time, but included a number of Arabs in the list of its own candidates, which was how Rustum Bastuni was elected to the Knesset. If we focus on the sectarian breakdown of the Arabs elected in 1951, we find it quite different from the previous elections. Two members of the Druze sect, Salih Khunayfis from Shafa 'Amr and Jabr Ma'di from Yarka, were elected. Residents of the Triangle, who took part in the elections for the first time, succeeded in electing a member of the Knesset to represent them from Baqa al-Gharbiyya.⁶⁷

The composition of the eight Arab candidates elected to the Knesset in 1951 shows that the ruling Mapai party succeeded in pushing through and consolidating

its policies in this electoral battle. Mapai was careful to choose people to head their Arab slates who had proven their loyalty to Israel and the Zionist movement, and people who represented group, sectarian, and tribal interests which were compatible with the policy of divide and rule. Most of those nominated to their slates and elected perceived this to be a reward from the regime for services rendered, so they did not try to express individual political positions. Most of the parliamentarians on those slates were, for the most part, lacking the educational and cultural background which would have enabled them to play a free and independent political role. Their knowledge of Hebrew was minimal or nonexistent, which made it easy for the representatives of the ruling party to gain control over them. The representatives of leftist parties, on the other hand—Rustum Bastuni, Tawfiq Tubi, and Emile Habibi—were educated young men and holders of clear political positions. The clear difference between members of Mapai-affiliated slates and leftist opposition parties remained unchanged during the years of military rule, with some exceptions which will be discussed later.

The increase in number of Arab parliamentarians to eight resulted in better representation for the Palestinians who remained, reflecting their different inclinations and social and sectarian affiliations. As we mentioned above, two members of the Druze sect were elected in 1951, which came at the expense of the Muslims, who also had two representatives (Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi, the head of the list, and Faris Hamdan) out of five Knesset members from the Mapai slates. Catholic supporters of Bishop Hakim were represented by Mas'ad Qassis from Mi'lya, who succeeded 'Amin Jarjura in that capacity. The two Arab parliamentarians from the Maki list were also Christians from Haifa, and Maki's Arab representatives were consistently urban Christians for a long period, a fact which their rivals used against them.⁶⁸ But Maki did not change its leaders, and did not try to include Muslims in the party leadership until the 1970s.

Of the two men allowed to return with the authorities' blessings to challenge the communists, one (al-Hawwari) abandoned politics, but Bishop Hakim continued to fight them, and succeeded in bringing Mas'ad Qassis back from Lebanon to make him a member of the Knesset in 1951.⁶⁹ Although the election results showed that the strength of the communists shrank that year, Maki remained one of the important winners, receiving 31,000 votes, of which 10,000 were from Arabs, constituting 16.3 percent of the total number of Arab votes. Communist propaganda emphasized that this was in spite of "terrorism, pressures, and deceptions."⁷⁰ Indeed, the government and its institutions had mobilized in 1951 to weaken the influence of the communists among the remaining Arabs, and used the politics of the "carrot" to that end. It was widely believed in Arab villages that the authorities allowed a number of "infiltrators" to remain in order to ensure their families would vote for the Arab lists affiliated with Mapai; the rumored price of an identity card for an infiltrator was 200 votes.⁷¹

The authorities did all they could to obstruct the communists and their supporters, and included some leaders of Maki. A file found among the papers

of lawyer Hanna Naqqara included a court appeal by Emile Habibi in June 1951 against a decision eliminating his name among eligible voters in Haifa. This appeal was discussed in central court before Judge Ya'ir Azulai. The ministry of the interior claimed that Habibi had entered the country illegally, which while technically accurate, was a case of the government "playing dumb," because Habibi, like his "Pessoptimist" character, had returned with the blessings and full knowledge of the authorities in the autumn of 1948. Habibi and his lawyer Naqqara challenged this claim, and showed their papers to the court, including an identity card (no. 46386) which the plaintiff had obtained on the eve of the first elections on 16 January 1949.⁷² The court of appeals accepted this, and Emile Habibi became a member of the Knesset in 1951.

Activist supporters of Maki were the main target of repression and legal prosecutions by the authorities on the eve of the elections. However, Arab citizens who supported Mapam were also targeted by this repressive policy, including some party activists who complained of legal prosecutions by the military government. Mapam received only 3,300, or about 5.6 percent, of total Arab votes.⁷³ However, some activists in Mapam were convinced that their limited success was the result of other factors besides the authorities' pressure and techniques of deception. For instance, Eliezer Be'eri (Bauer) argued that rather than pressure from Mapai being responsible for the relative failure of the party to win Arab votes, even greater pressures from the authorities were brought against Maki, but the party had nevertheless been successful in winning 10,000 Arab votes. Of his several other reasons for the failure of Mapam, he placed pressure from Mapai and its propaganda as third on the list.⁷⁴

A close look at the 1951 election results shows some relative success by the communists; the party received about 4 percent of the total number of votes cast, compared to 3.5 percent in 1949, but this slight increase came primarily from Jewish voters. At the beginning of the 1950s a large number of communists from Eastern Europe and Iraq had immigrated to Israel, which strengthened Maki's support, but at the same time support for the party in Arab cities and villages had shrunk. The most prominent decrease was in Nazareth, where only 3,146 votes were cast for Maki in 1951, less than half the votes the party received in 1949.⁷⁵ Despite that, the fact that it received about 10,000 votes from Arab citizens overall was considered a success, although those votes constituted only 16.3 percent of Arab votes, compared to the 22.2 percent it received in 1949.

How does one explain this communist retreat in the second elections? Was the result due to the pressures applied by the authorities and their legal prosecutions?

Let us first focus on the changes which affected the social and cultural backgrounds of the Arab voters in the Naqab, despite inadequate information on the Bedouin Arabs in the Naqab who were counted in the census and voted in the second elections. What is known is that this segment of the Arabs who remained lived in greater fear than the northern Arabs. The Bedouins were under constant

threat of expulsion until the end of the 1950s. Considering the known custom of this group of following the lead of the shaykh of the tribe and voting in a bloc, the chances that Maki would attract the votes of the Naqab Arabs were meager indeed, particularly since the communists did not make a real effort to reach those voters during the entire period of military rule. Even the Arab slates affiliated with the ruling party did not put much effort into this, and did not place the names of Bedouin residents on the early lists of candidates during that period.⁷⁶

The other large group that voted for the first time in 1951 was the population of the Triangle, who lived in more than twenty villages, big and small, similar to most residents of the Galilee. But they differed in that these villagers were all Muslim, among whom it was rare to find a Marxist. The Communist Party and its Arab leaders did not have much influence in this conservative society. For these reasons, it came as no surprise that the success of Maki in the Triangle was modest.⁷⁷ The nomination of Faris Hamdan from the Triangle village of Baqa al-Gharbiyya for one of the Mapai-affiliated lists attracted many voters in the region away from the communists.

The third large group of Arabs who voted for the first time in 1951 were the inhabitants of upper Galilee. Many were mountain Druze who were socially conservative, and close to the leaders of the sect who had tied their destiny to the state. Furthermore, the listing of Druze candidates Salih Khunayfis from Shafa 'Amr on the Progress and Work slate, and Jabr Ma'di from Yarka on Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi's slate, significantly reduced the likelihood of the communists attracting any Druze votes. The Ma'di clan in general, and Jabr Ma'di in particular, were quite instrumental in attracting Arab votes from the villages of al-Shaghur and other places to this slate, because of the help Jabr had given to the inhabitants to stay in their villages in 1948. Consequently, Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi's list won three seats, which consolidated its position and influence in that period.⁷⁸

These factors, which emerge from breaking down the majority of the new Arab voters in 1951 into categories, constitute "objective" causes for the decline in Maki's strength. With the old voters from Haifa and the Galilee, the communists were largely able to hang on to their influence and margin of success. This was complemented by inhabitants in some Galilee villages who voted for the first time in the second elections and contributed in no small measure to the relative success of Maki.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the headlines in the communist press which indicated an increase in the strength and influence of the party were not accurate. Support for Maki shrank in Nazareth, Shafa 'Amr, Kufr Yasif, and other villages. Alongside this decline, the slates affiliated with the regime scored significant success, and three of them were able to cross the entry threshold into the Knesset, capturing 32,288 votes, about 55 percent of total Arab votes.⁸⁰

Pressure from the military government and other government agencies partly explain the results of the 1951 elections. So why did these factors not deter the Arabs who remained in 1949?

Let us look at the Israeli political map leading up to each of the elections. After the first elections, the ministry of minorities under the leadership of Bechor Shitrit, which employed a number of Mapam activists, was abolished⁸¹ after members of the ruling party complained of the support the communists were receiving from Mapam and its activists. But the government did not seek at the time to end support for the communists in Haifa, Nazareth, and other cities for reasons related to Israel's foreign and domestic policies. However, after the results of the first elections became known, government agencies did what they could to promote the influence of communist rivals. Also, Mapai, under the leadership of Ben-Gurion (who was also the minister of defense) fired the military governors who were members of Mapam and replaced them with members of the ruling party. Thus, government agencies acted in many ways to sap the influence of the communists and to win votes for the ruling party and electoral slates affiliated with it.⁸²

For all of these reasons, the ruling party managed to win the majority of Arab votes in 1951. Most of the Arabs who remained were still engaged with the struggle to survive, and needed all means they could muster to protect themselves from repression and expulsion. Some of those who voted for the communists in 1949 thought at the time that Maki was close to the government and in its good graces. This impression was plainly challenged in the summer of that year, when the authorities began firing dozens of teachers and aggressively following a number of Arab Maki activists while supporting their rivals.⁸³ This domestic policy reflected the change in Israel's foreign policy; the government had distanced itself from the USSR and the eastern bloc and drawn closer to the West. These new rules for Israel's foreign and domestic policies changed the situation and continued to influence political strategies and Arab voters' conduct under military government.

The authorities' use of the carrot and stick policy was successful in the early 1950s, demonstrated by the increase in the number of Arab voters and the consolidation of Mapai's influence and that of its affiliated slates. In spite of that, Maki managed to situate itself and its leadership as the true representative of the interests of the Arab public. The communists continued to oppose the government's policy of discrimination and repression, and especially the system of military government. The Arab Knesset members affiliated with the ruling party, on the other hand, did not dare criticize those policies, nor did they have any influence over them. Normally, they were able to go only as far as to offer their good offices to people who were close to them to help secure permits from the government and to solve some individual problems at government offices. Governmental representatives sometimes displayed a measure of magnanimity on the eve of the electoral battle by visiting Arab villages and promising to carry out development projects in the areas of water distribution, building roads, improving the electric network, and other services. As a result, electoral seasons came to be known in Arab folklore as "the year of *marhaba* (greetings!)." ⁸⁴

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: THE
INDEPENDENTS AMONG THE REMAINING ARABS

At the beginning of 1951, *Haaretz* published a report by Amos Elon on the passage of thirty months since the imposition of Israeli rule over Nazareth.⁸⁵ The gist of the report was that the Arabs were disappointed with promises of equality and the possibility of achieving a form of Israeli citizenship that would unite Jews and Arabs in the state. Months later, Elon went back to the Galilee and then published a new article on his impressions of the general climate of opinion among eligible voters. Elon quoted one of the teachers he met, who said: "I shall not vote, just as prisoners do not vote. Israel has pushed us all into a giant prison."⁸⁶ Elon commented that the Arabs could elect ten or eleven members of the Knesset "if they were to establish an independent national Arab organization," but not a single independent Arab representative would be elected. He continued: "We know that there is not a single independent Arab slate among the 20 slates of candidates." Still, he expected that Arab citizens would vote, and that most of their votes would go to Mapai and Maki. Those who were afraid, or who believed the promises of the regime, would vote for Mapai and its Arab slates; those who were not afraid would vote for the communists. At any rate, the Arabs would not vote for independent candidates because there was no such slate.

Elon's article included frank criticism of the ruling party, and the order of fear which it imposed on the Arab population. Preventing the creation of an independent party or even an electoral slate served the policy of monitoring and control, leaving only two options open to Arab voters: either Maki or the Arab lists associated with Mapai. The option of not voting was considered the most dangerous, and was not viable since it was interpreted as non-recognition of the state and disloyalty to its legitimate institutions. Although what Elon said was true in general, it did not give a complete picture of political reality at the time. Not all of those voting for the slates associated with the government were doing so solely out of fear, while the prospects of success for an independent Arab slate, even if one had been established at the beginning of the 1950s, were dim, falling between a rock and a hard place. The remaining Arabs were a vulnerable group that had lost its urban elite, and it was difficult for them to establish an independent national organization that could achieve a brilliant victory in the elections so soon after the shock of the Nakba.

There were a few attempts to establish an independent Arab party in the 1950s. One study of the political behavior of the Arabs remaining in Israel claimed that the first to think of establishing an independent Arab political party was the wealthy leader, Hajj Ahmad Abu-Laban, of Jaffa.⁸⁷ It described Abu-Laban's efforts to defend the survivors among the Jaffa population, his subsequent jailing, and his appeal to the Supreme Court, but it is doubtful that he would have tried at that time to establish an independent Arab party in Israel. Nevertheless, the story of

Abu-Laban and his difficulties with the Israeli authorities is an example of what any Arab would encounter who tried to preserve his dignity and his rights. The attorney Elias Kusa encountered similar problems in Haifa.

On the eve of elections in the summer of 1951, propaganda from the Mapai party tried to highlight the progress made by Arab society in education, health, and agriculture. Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett took part in this effort in a speech broadcast in Arabic on 28 July 1951. The attorney Elias Kusa responded to this speech, saying: "It contains nothing new; it merely repeats the usual propaganda of government representatives."⁸⁸ He added that Israel's Declaration of Independence had included promises of equal civil rights for all without discrimination on the basis of gender or religion, rights that were not limited to voting or to running in elections, but involved "full equality in civil rights." Kusa reminded his readers of the existing areas of discrimination against Arabs in Israel, stressing in particular the right of Arabs to their confiscated lands, freedom of movement and work, which were "much more important than the right to elect members of the Knesset. . . . It is true that Arabs have the right to vote, but it is doubtful that the Arabs, who are under military rule, will be allowed to use this right freely."⁸⁹ As for Sharett's statement that Arabs had the right to establish political parties, Kusa pointed out that this had not been applied in actuality. He referred to the experience of a group of Arabs who wanted to establish an Arab slate but could not get a license to do so, just as they were about to meet with their likely voters. As for the three slates affiliated with Mapai, he said: "Mr. Sharett knows very well the circumstances under which those lists are created . . . and that their candidates were not elected by Arabs or any Arab party."⁹⁰ Kusa concluded his reply by saying that he agreed with Minister Sharett on one point only, that "there is no discrimination in Israeli courts on the basis of gender or religion," which might be why those courts enjoyed the confidence of the Arabs. But he made a point to add: "The judges are bound at times by the laws that the Knesset passes which restrict their role."⁹¹

The number of university-educated activist Arab intellectuals, such as the attorney Kusa, was very small in Haifa and the Galilee after the Nakba. Apart from a few dozen university graduates in Haifa, Jaffa, and Nazareth, few were left from the ranks of the Palestinian elite who had vanished along with those urban centers. The attorney Wadi' al-Bustani, who had also stayed in Haifa, was famous for his activities in the Palestinian national movement during the days of the British Mandate, like Kusa. Kusa and al-Bustani differed from the activists of the Liberation League who merged with Maki due both to their long experience and their advanced age. Both had immigrated to Palestine from Lebanon and made Haifa their home. While many like them left Haifa and other coastal cities after the Nakba, Kusa and al-Bustani chose to remain in the city.

Wadi' al-Bustani (1888–1954) was a well-known figure in the Arab world by 1948. He graduated from the American University of Beirut and became a famous

author, poet, and translator, fluent in English and French as well as Arabic. He arrived in Haifa in 1917, where he soon became a member of the prominent political and cultural elite in the city. His nationalistic activities led him to the study of law at a late age and, after receiving his license in 1930, he defended many farmers whose lands were threatened with appropriation or sale.⁹² al-Bustani became disillusioned with the British policy of supporting Zionism and its project to establish a Jewish state in Palestine without regard for the native population.

Although he remained in Haifa after the Nakba, al-Bustani experienced great difficulty adapting to the new reality under Israeli rule where the Arabs were treated as an undesirable minority.⁹³ He found it unbearable to be cut off from the Arab world in general, but especially from his family and friends in Lebanon. He tried to continue his literary and juridical activities but the many difficulties prompted him to leave Haifa in 1953 to return to his village of Dibya in Lebanon, where he died the following year.⁹⁴ The only way for the remaining Palestinians to visit the Arab world was to renounce Israeli citizenship, as Elias Kusa wrote. In fact, dozens of members of the educated elite of Jaffa, Haifa, Nazareth, and other cities and villages made that choice—renouncing their citizenship and moving to other Arab countries in the early 1950s.

In addition to Elias Kusa, there remained some individuals in Haifa and Nazareth, and other cities and villages in the Galilee, who had adopted independent positions and saw *al-Rabita* magazine as a pulpit for these independent ideas and positions. This group included: Jabbur Jabbur, the mayor of Shafa 'Amr; Mas'ad Qassis from Mi'lya; Shaykh Tahir al-Tabari, the shari'a judge of Nazareth; and others. This group, which tried to organize politically on an independent basis, was later joined by Tahir al-Fahum, Shukri al-Khazin, Hanna Shumar, and others. This coalition of individuals, some with close ties to members of the regime, tried more than once (in 1953 and then 1955) to establish an independent political organization. In the spring of 1955, it appeared that this group might succeed in entering the electoral fray, under the name of the Arab-Israeli Bloc, and the attorney Kusa obtained a letter of approval for registration of the bloc from a Haifa district official, Jacob Bergman.⁹⁵

The communists, who had a monopoly on the representation of the interests of Arab citizens, were not pleased with the close relations between this group and Bishop Hakim. Kusa and his friends were attacked in *al-Ittihad* newspaper, by innuendo at times and openly at other times. In 1953, when the talk of starting a new Arab party to include independents with well-known names became serious, the communists intensified their attacks on the initiative, just as every other attempt to establish an independent Arab organization had met with intense opposition from both the authorities and the communists. *Al-Ittihad* published a strongly worded attack on "Hakim, al-Hawwari, Kusa, and others" who were trying to set up "the Deportation Party."⁹⁶ The paper tied the names of the three to the American and British consuls "who were behind this initiative."

In contrast to the image that the communists were trying to build for themselves as the heroes of the struggle for the rights of the remaining Arabs, Kusa had an altogether different understanding of the situation. A joint letter⁹⁷ to Arab citizens by Kusa and Tahir al-Fahum in November 1954 contained blistering criticism of the work of the Arab parliamentarians. After reviewing the situation of Arabs in Israel, the two spoke of the need for an independent Arab political organization. The letter said that the eight Knesset members had failed in their mission to relieve the existing oppression and persecution and to improve the situation. Special criticism was levelled at the communists, “who claim to be the spokesmen for the Arab public and the real fighters for its interests.” The two concluded their letter by saying that an independent and democratic organization is the way to work seriously and honestly to relieve oppression and stop the confiscation of land, to return the refugees to their villages, and to ensure equality in rights and responsibilities for all citizens.

Elias Kusa wrote a lengthy reply in *al-Rabita* to the attack on the Arab bloc initiative, speaking of his astonishment at the “lies and slanders” of *al-Ittihad*. He pointed out, “I recited the objectives of the Arab bloc for the correspondent of *al-Ittihad* and Mr. Hanna Naqqara to hear.” Kusa explained that those objectives included defending the rights of the Arabs, and then shared his own experience in cooperating with Maki: “In the past a committee was established for the defense of the rights of Arabs which included members of the Communist Party, but they exploited the situation to advance the interests of their party. That is why I left the committee and placed a condition for my return, that the committee not be exploited for narrow party objectives.”⁹⁸

Kusa then went on to attack the Communist Party: “*Al-Ittihad* claims that the Communist Party serves the interests of the Arab minority, but it has not provided one bit of evidence that the party has done anything tangible.” He resumed in a sharp satirical tone: “All of the beating of drums and the sounding of horns and holding general meetings and raucous demonstrations and failed conferences organized by the communists achieved nothing except to repel Jewish public opinion and hurt the interests of the Arabs.” In Kusa’s opinion, the speeches by communist members of the Knesset achieved nothing except to convince non-communist members that what the communist MKs said was recommended by Russian colonial sources.⁹⁹ Kusa concluded his criticism by writing: “I challenge the MKs belonging to the Communist Party, both Arabs and Jews, to mention one single Arab problem which they managed to solve in the interests of the Arabs, whether inside the Knesset or outside it.”

After levelling biting criticism at Arab parliamentarians, particularly the communists, Kusa referred to his own personal efforts in the service of Arab citizens, performed “without drumming or honking.” He listed the areas where he had put his efforts and the achievements he had scored, such as amending the Absentees Law, convincing the government to print bank and other official payment checks

or receipts in Arabic, and his lengthy memoranda to the Knesset concerning the Nationality Law, the Land Acquisition Law, and other subjects. He concluded this testimony about his activities (without modesty) by saying that he had done all of that quietly: "If an Arab can do these productive things on his own, without the support of a party . . . there can be no doubt that an organized Arab party which represents the Arabs and speaks in their name and gives expression to their hopes and sufferings can easily outdo these individual achievements in the service of its people."¹⁰⁰

Kusa and his colleagues who had organized and made the necessary measures to establish an independent Arab organization ended up withdrawing before the 1955 elections. The positions adopted by Kusa and some of his independent colleagues, which were published in "the bishop's magazine," had stirred up opposition on the part of "moderate Christians." One complained that *al-Rabita* had recently turned into a propaganda pulpit for the Arab bloc under the leadership of Tahir al-Fahum and Elias Kusa, in contrast to recent years. Kusa did not keep quiet in the face of the criticism directed at him, and replied in a strongly worded article in *al-Rabita* titled "Who Is the Deceiver?" He began by saying: "There are people who read and understand what they are reading and there are those who read but do not understand what they are reading. Then there are those who read and do not understand, but claim that they understand, and these people are like a curse on people." Kusa then clarified what he had written earlier, by saying: "There is no deception in saying that Israel has a democratic system, but it discriminates against and oppresses the Arab minority."¹⁰¹

THE THIRD ELECTIONS (1955) AND THEIR RESULTS

The third Knesset elections were the first to take place without Ben-Gurion in the role of prime minister or as the sole leader of the ruling Mapai party. But the Arabs did not feel much change in the government's policy toward them under Moshe Sharett. As we saw earlier, the short-lived Sharett government tried to conscript the Arabs into the Israeli army in 1954 and, in the same year, elections were held for Arab municipal councils, following Maki's repeated demands. In these local elections, first in Kufr Yasif and then in Nazareth, the authorities used all means to limit the influence of the communists; however, the party scored a victory that could not be easily dismissed, which embarrassed the government at the local level.

This study has not taken up the issue of local government so far, but the local elections that took place in 1954 attained a symbolic importance and had particular repercussions for the general parliamentary elections the following year. In January 1954, in the elections held in Kufr Yasif, Yani Yani was elected to head the council for a second term with the support of two communist members of the council. Military governor Ya'cov Muhriz and his men tried unsuccessfully to prevent the formation of this coalition with members of the Maki party.¹⁰²

This failure by the governmental authorities set off alarms in the ministry of the interior and the military government, and officials feared similar results in the Nazareth elections set for 12 April 1954. The emergence of non-submissive local authorities would present a dilemma for the imposition of governmental policies on Arab citizens.

When it came time for the elections in Nazareth, a clear confrontation arose between the slates with connections to the authorities and Maki's local slate. However, despite the pressure applied by the government and its agencies, many voters supported the communist slate. When it became obvious that those collaborating with the government were unable to form a coalition in the municipal council without Maki's six members, the authorities procrastinated and used threats, even physical violence from supporters of Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi. In the end, a former Knesset member, Amin Jarjura, was elected mayor in July 1954.¹⁰³ However, the Nazareth elections and the struggle over the formation of the coalition led to increased tensions in the city. Geremy Forman, who examined those elections in detail, nevertheless wrote that he saw no direct connection between what happened in the municipal elections and the government's decision to build a new Jewish city next to Nazareth by the name of Nazareth Elit (Upper Nazareth) that same year.¹⁰⁴

The third Knesset elections took place on 26 July 1955. Of the one million eligible voters, there were 86,723 Arabs, of whom 77,750 actually voted, a 90 percent participation rate.¹⁰⁵ Eight Arab Knesset members were elected this time too, and almost all were incumbents, except for Mapam's Arab representative, whom we will discuss later. The very high participation rate among Arabs who remained demonstrated the consolidation of voting patterns which had emerged in previous elections. The political competition for the Arab street was essentially between Mapai's agencies and its slates on one side and Maki and its supporters on the other. These two camps held on to their relative power share among Arab voters, and together they received the majority of votes.

In the 1955 Knesset elections, Mapai and its affiliated slates won over 62 percent of Arab votes. Although the Democratic slate headed by Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi took first place among the three, their 15,475 votes were sufficient to elect only two Knesset members, not three as in the past. Some votes had gone directly to the Mapai party, and others to the affiliated Progress and Work list, which won two seats. A problem arose in the Democratic list when Jabr Ma'di did not make it into the Knesset, and his relationship with Sayf al-Din al-Zu'bi deteriorated. Al-Zu'bi was pressured to give up his seat in favor of Jabr Ma'di in March 1956.¹⁰⁶ Mas'ad Qassis, who was supposed to be the third seat, refused to step down, and did not have to do so because of the support he had from Bishop Hakim. This problem within the slate and the way it was solved clearly showed that the influence of the bishop on the Democratic list was strong and enduring.

Maki increased its strength among Jewish voters in 1955, which allowed it to acquire six seats, but it did not have the same support with Arab voters.¹⁰⁷ In fact, the strength of the communists declined, and they received just over 15 percent

of Arab votes, one percent less than in the previous election. The party held on to its strength in large Arab cities and villages, but its efforts to expand its share of votes in small villages and among the Bedouins of the Naqab were not successful. These conservative segments of the population were ruled by shaykhs and notables, many of whom cooperated with the authorities either out of fear or due to narrow factional interests. Thus, the ruling party managed to consolidate the policy of monitoring and control on Arab population centers far away from the cities and large villages which were known for their support of the communists.

MK Rustum Bastuni (1923–1994), who had been elected to the second Knesset, lost his seat in the 1955 elections. Bastuni was born in Tirat Haifa, and had the distinction of being one of the first Arabs to study at the institute of engineering (the Technion) in 1947. This promising young man left his house and city in the spring of 1949, like tens of thousands of Arabs, and became a refugee in Lebanon and Syria. But his older brother Muhammad, who remained in Haifa, encouraged him to return to the city, and paved the way for his return through his Jewish acquaintances.¹⁰⁸ After his return to Haifa, Bastuni became one of the most prominent Arab activists of Mapam. Although he was elected to the second Knesset, the success of his party with Arab voters was weak, as we saw above. In September 1951 the party issued a magazine called *al-Mirsad* which criticized the Mapai and Maki parties. Most of those who wrote in this weekly were Jews, except for Bastuni and a few of his Arab comrades.

Mapam was a severe critic of the government's policy and was opposed to the military government, but it did not succeed in broadening its base among Arab citizens. The Zionist positions of the party, particularly regarding the confiscation of Arab land for Jewish settlement, were confounding for Arab citizens. Similarly, the party fought discrimination against Arab citizens on the one hand, but did not accept them as equal members in its Zionist agencies and institutions on the other. Mapam activists spoke a great deal about the need for economic equality, even while the party was establishing kibbutzim on the lands of depopulated Arab villages, including Kufr Bir'im, Sa'sa' and others, at the same time. Nevertheless, Bastuni managed, after his election to the Knesset and the publication of *al-Mirsad*, to attract Arab youth to the ranks of Mapam. The party proudly announced after the third election that it had received about 6,000 Arab votes, double the number it had received in the earlier elections.¹⁰⁹

But Bastuni was not renominated, and Yusif Khamis took his place on the slate. Bastuni had become involved in the whirlpool of contradictions which beset the socialist Zionist doctrine of Mapam—such as the calls for Jewish-Arab equality while supporting Jewish settlement on Arab lands—and he was openly critical of these contradictory positions towards Arab residents. This Knesset member from Haifa, an able orator with few equals among the remaining Palestinians in the 1950s, first criticized his party for not opening up membership to Arab citizens: "We cannot show the generations the equality of peoples unless we serve as examples of that."¹¹⁰ He also had great difficulty remaining quiet about self-deception.

Radical leftists in Mapam found it problematic to accept these critical positions, leading to Bastuni being replaced with Khamis.

In 1955 Mapam joined the governing coalition at a time when it was clear that Israel was headed toward war with Egypt.¹¹¹ During that war, Mapam and Maki, which had been on the same path since 1948, went their separate ways. Mapam had found itself a partner in a government which initiated the war on Egypt in a conspiracy with colonial France and Britain. The main objectives of France and Britain in this war were, respectively, to prevent Algeria from gaining its independence and to maintain control over the Suez Canal. Maki, like the Soviet Union, took the side of Egypt under Abdel Nasser, who had concluded an arms deal with Czechoslovakia. Mapam, on the other hand, adopted the policy of the Ben-Gurion government which was hostile to Egypt, and continued its fierce attacks on Abdel Nasser's regime. So Mapam and Maki separated into two different camps during the 1956 war and afterwards.

On the eve of the Sinai War outbreak, Maki made its second reversal in less than ten years in its political positions regarding the Jewish state.¹¹² Up to the Knesset elections in 1955 the activists in the party expressed moderate opposition to Israeli foreign policy toward Arab states. Nevertheless, Maki retained an Israeli nationalist position regarding the state's important interests. But as Israel continued to distance itself from the USSR, at the same time that Abdel Nasser was drawing closer to the socialist camp, Maki's positions changed swiftly. When Ben-Gurion spoke during the war about establishing a "third Israeli kingdom," Maki leaders launched a sharp attack on the policy of not withdrawing from Gaza and large sections of occupied Sinai. Contrary to the case in the 1948 war, the party found itself in 1956 standing (with the Soviet Union) on the side of Egypt, "which is defending itself against a colonialist-Israeli plot."

During the 1956 Sinai War Maki's Arab and Jewish activists found themselves leading the camp opposed to the aggression against Egypt and condemning the massacre perpetrated by Israeli security forces in the village of Kafr Qasim. At the beginning of the withdrawal of British and French forces from the cities on the Suez Canal, the party's press quoted Radio Moscow regarding "the need for immediate withdrawal" by the Israeli army as well.¹¹³ Three days later, that press published news of preparations for a day of mourning and a strike on 6 January 1957 in condemnation of the massacre in Kafr Qasim. Indeed, a general strike was held on the announced date, described by *al-Ittihad* in a published report as "the unity of the Arab masses in their struggle against national oppression."¹¹⁴ Thus, once again, Soviet foreign policy combined with local events to bring about a revolution in the position of the communists.

On the domestic political scene, Maki's leaders intensified their criticism of the government's decision to reserve for Jews—exclusively—the first neighborhood (*shikun*) of the new Upper Nazareth (Nazareth Elit), under construction

next door to Nazareth. The Judaization of the Galilee, or construction for Jews only on confiscated Arab lands, led many to compare Israel with South Africa. *Al-Ittihad* wrote: "Nazareth will not become South Africa."¹¹⁵ The significance of the start of construction on Upper Nazareth was not lost on the residents of the city, particularly not the communists among them. The Judaization of the Galilee began with an effort to stifle the development of the only Palestinian city that had escaped destruction in the year of the Nakba. This position completed the circle of the gradual reversal in the positions of the Communist Party towards Israel's foreign and domestic policies. Just as most members of the Liberation League followed the path outlined by the Soviet Union in 1948, the comrades in the political party found themselves supporting Egypt under Abdel Nasser during the Sinai War, along with the socialist camp.

Moving away from the general picture, we will now look more closely at the life story of a leader in the party, the author of *The Pessoptimist*, Emile Habibi, who returned from Lebanon to Haifa to become one of the most prominent leaders of Maki. He decided eventually to move his family from the mixed city of Haifa to Nazareth in 1956. His mother, who had also moved to Haifa in 1948, had nine sons and daughters, most of whom became refugees after the war; only two were left near her, Emile and his sister Nada. Emile noticed that his mother was yearning to see her children, particularly the youngest, Na'im. In 1954, his mother decided to leave Haifa to spend the rest of her life next to her refugee children, after despairing of the possibility of their return to live next to her. She surrendered her Israeli nationality, and left the country by way of the Mandelbaum gate to Jerusalem. Emile Habibi accompanied her and later wrote a short story titled "The Mandelbaum Gate."¹¹⁶ It was after the Kafr Qasim massacre that Habibi himself decided to move his residence from Haifa to Nazareth.¹¹⁷

Not long after Habibi's move to Nazareth, the Shabak (or Shin Bet, the Israeli Security Agency), accused him of calling for a rebellion against Israel, similar to the Algerian rebellion, during an evening gathering with his friends. The intelligence agency, which was monitoring the changes in the position of communist leaders after the Sinai War, was looking for ways to repress Arab communist leaders. The agents were particularly wary of cooperation and coordination between the communists and some activist nationalists and independents in that period, since such a rapprochement would undermine Israel's policy of divide and rule and could lead to political organization for the Arab minority in Israel. Indeed Maki's discourse in 1957 drew closer to nationalist thought, which was evident in the resolutions of the party's thirteenth congress.¹¹⁸ What had been said at the congress—that the Arabs in Israel were an inseparable part of the Palestinian people, and an affirmation of this people's "right to self-determination, even separation"—had crossed a red line in the view of Israeli intelligence, and represented a revolution in the positions the party had adopted since 1948.

TENTH ANNIVERSARY AND TURNING
THE TABLES (1948–58)

We saw that Maki retreated from its positions of support for Israel after the elections of the summer of 1955, and that by May 1957 the party's discourse at its thirteenth congress moved closer to Arab nationalist positions. One Israeli researching this rapprochement concluded that the years 1955–57 were the “golden age” of the party for the Arab in the street, with a perfect alignment in that period between Marxist theory and Nasserist Arab nationalism supported by the Soviet Union.¹¹⁹ Another Israeli researcher, however, criticized this hasty generalization, and showed in his study that the Maki leaders were never, at any point in their history, torn between their loyalty to communism and their solidarity with Nasserist Arab nationalism.¹²⁰ This is true since Maki did not embrace Zionism in 1948–49, nor did it adopt Arab nationalism earlier in the mid-1950s when it followed Moscow's line.

A more accurate reading of the reversal in Maki's Arab nationalist positions (1955–58) points to a temporary honeymoon linked to the position of the USSR on Abdel Nasser. Even during that period of rapprochement, differences in points of view did not disappear altogether, and were manifest after the coup in Iraq when the USSR took the side of Abd al-Karim Qasim against Abdel Nasser. The change in Moscow's and then in Maki's positions on Arab nationalism was a tactic connected to the superpower's policy during the Cold War. At the local level, the rapprochement between the positions of Maki and the Arab nationalists supporting Abdel Nasser and the alignment of their political discourses was indeed temporary, and was influenced by the Sinai War against Egypt and the shock created by the Kafr Qasim massacre. But before we elaborate on the reversal in the positions of the communists in 1957–58, let us return to the analysis of Maki's position in 1948–49.

In previous chapters we saw that the Communist Party stood by Israel without reservation in its war against the Palestinian people and neighboring Arab countries; it called for participation in the celebration of the anniversary of Israel's independence as of 1949. Its leaders, including Tawfiq Tubi, supported the conscription of Arab youth in the Israeli army to defend Israel's borders and its independence. *Al-Ittihad* newspaper was full of Israeli nationalist discourse, which the party's leaders used at every occasion since its reemergence in Haifa near the end of 1948. This continued into the 1950s, including the annual call to participate in the festivities of Independence Day.¹²¹ The paper's editorial board explained the reasons for their call by saying: “The establishment of Israel was the proclamation of an essential development in the struggle of the peoples of the Middle East.” Even more cunning was their statement that: “The rise of Israel marked the beginning of serious development in the struggles of the Middle East peoples. The creation of Israel laid down the foundations for a solution to the Palestine issue,” and for

“constructing the edifice of real fraternity between the masses of the Jewish and Arab peoples.”¹²²

Even after the Soviet Union became disillusioned by Israel’s foreign policy, the party’s position toward Israel did not change significantly. Maki, which Ben-Gurion had kept away from joining his government coalitions, continued its Israeli nationalist discourse for a while. This spilled over onto the pages of *al-Ittihad*, but was much more prominent in the party’s Hebrew-language press and publications. The proceedings and resolutions of the twelfth party congress, near the end of May 1952, contain clear expressions of these Israeli nationalist positions.¹²³ In the report of party secretary Mikunis to the congress, disappointment is expressed in Ben-Gurion’s policy in the Cold War, and in the government’s domestic policy. But there is no deviation of support for Zionist positions and the Zionist view of history, nor in slogans about defending Israel against the colonialist camp and aggressive Arab states.¹²⁴ There is no mention of Palestinians or of those who remained—that is, those classified as an Arab minority in Israel—at that congress or, as one might have expected, at least in the summary of conference proceedings and resolutions. This communist discourse to a large extent aligned with the Zionist discourse on events, and ignored the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights.

In the 1950s, Maki leaders continued their policies supportive of the establishment of a Jewish state, even after the death of Stalin. An enduring expression of that was each year’s invitation on the front page of *al-Ittihad* to participate in the celebration of Israel’s Independence Day, which they called the national day for all Israelis, both Arabs and Jews.¹²⁵ At the same time, the party’s position on Abdel Nasser, who along with his fellow officers had overthrown Egypt’s monarchy, remained negative and very critical, and accused Nasser of collaborating with Britain and colonialism.¹²⁶ Well worth remembering here are the activists of the Liberation League who distributed leaflets in the summer of 1948 to Egyptian army soldiers and officers fighting in southern Palestine, exhorting them to leave and return to Egypt to overthrow the reactionary monarchical regime there. The coups that took place in a number of Arab countries, including Egypt, did not alter the position of Maki on the regime of Abdel Nasser until the mid-1950s.

The Israeli Communist press’s attacks on Abdel Nasser ceased only after the Czech arms deal in late 1955. The conclusion of that deal, and the rapprochement between Abdel Nasser and the socialist camp under the leadership of the USSR, were clearly reflected in a change in the position of Maki and its press towards Abdel Nasser. Political developments in Egypt were felt throughout the Arab world and affected even the Arabs remaining in Israel. The anti-British atmosphere had an impact in Jordan, leading King Hussein to dismiss the British commander of the Jordanian army, John Bagot Glubb (known as Glubb Pasha). That bold step increased the popularity of the young king among the ranks of the opposition, who saw Glubb as responsible for carrying out plots against the Palestinians since 1948. Syria too was affected by the optimistic nationalist spirit which spread through the

people of the region. The Soviet Union calculated that the new atmosphere was full of opportunities to extend its influence in the Middle East. Emile Habibi gave expression to this revolutionary optimism in a speech he delivered in Kafr Kana, near Nazareth: "The dismissal of Glubb Pasha, then the nationalization of the Suez Canal, and then the settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, are links in the chain of getting rid of colonial domination."¹²⁷

Indeed, the period 1955–57 witnessed an important transformation in the position of Maki on the heels of the increase in rapprochement and cooperation between Abdel Nasser and the socialist camp. This change was apparent in the discourse of the party leaders and in its press, and reached its zenith at the thirteenth party congress at the end of May 1957, which bridged the gap between them and the nationalist activists.¹²⁸ In addition to the overwhelming support for Abdel Nasser, the points of view of the two sides also drew closer on domestic issues relating to Palestinian identity, the symbols of political struggle, and other issues.¹²⁹ All of these events paved the way to the events of 1 May 1958 in Nazareth. The attempt by the government to impose the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the creation of Israel created a tense atmosphere and a willingness for the first time since the Nakba for a confrontation. In the ensuing confrontation, the independent nationalist forces united with the leadership of the Communist Party in together reframing Israel's Independence Day as the Nakba Day for the Palestinian people.

Between the Sinai War in October 1956 and the end of 1959, there were several reversals in the positions of the communists which led to withdrawal of support for Abdel Nasser, then a clash with him against the background of support for the rival regime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim in Iraq. In July 1958, Qasim led a military coup against the pro-British monarchy, similar to what Abdel Nasser had done in Egypt. At the beginning, the two ambitious leaders found common ground permitting cooperation between the two revolutionary regimes, but they had disputes, and Qasim in Baghdad turned against the Arab nationalists with support from the Iraqi communists. Differences between Abdel Nasser and Qasim came to a head concerning the leadership of the Arab world. The Soviet Union stood with Qasim against Abdel Nasser, who had entered into a union with Syria in early 1958. The leaders of Maki and its press quickly joined Moscow's caravan, and attacked the Egyptian regime using various accusations. But the Palestinians in general, including those remaining in Israel, maintained their support for Abdel Nasser, which created a split with the communists. The rivals and enemies of Maki fully capitalized on this dispute and the open confrontation between the two camps in the elections of 1959.¹³⁰

The reversal in the position of Maki on Abdel Nasser, which ran against the general trend among Arab voters, resulted in voters punishing the party in 1959. Maki won only three seats, down from the six seats it had previously, receiving only 11 percent of the Arab vote, a major reversal from the outcomes of previous

elections.¹³¹ Mapam won a big share of the votes of those who distanced themselves from Maki, successfully capitalizing on the fluctuations in Maki's positions since 1948 and its clash with Abdel Nasser in its electoral propaganda against the communists. The most prominent of Mapam activists was the poet and journalist Rashid Husain, who wrote the now famous article "When History Grows Hungry."¹³² This anticommunist propaganda fell on receptive ears and Mapam jumped to second place after Mapai and its Arab slates, while Maki took third place for the first time since the elections of 1948.

In addition to the communists' clash with Abdel Nasser, some nationalist activists could not forget Maki's unconditional support for Israel in the war of 1948, nor did they accept the party's ideology and its propaganda over the previous decade that the struggle between Jews and Arabs was a class struggle, not a nationalist one. Maki was fated to flip its positions whenever the positions of the Soviet Union changed, which cost the party its credibility and the independence of its ideology during the Cold War. Moscow's international interests and its positions were the primary determinant of the positions of the other communist parties circulating in the USSR's orbit. Initially, this reversal enabled members of the Liberation League to merge with Maki and to play an important leadership role for the Arabs who remained in Haifa and the Galilee. But closeness to Moscow had a price, as was evident in 1959, when the party won less than half of the Arab votes it had won in the first election in 1949.