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A Strategic, Intellectual, and Political Forum to Study and enhance Palestinian Social and Political Discourse and Action inside the Green Line

A Concept Paper

December 2024

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*“History has neither mirror
Nor an unveiled face.
It is a reality that is unreal
Or an imagination that is not imaginary,
So don’t write it. Don’t write is as poetry.”*

Mahmoud Darwish

1) Introduction

However varied and far-reaching analyses of the current political moment may be—with the differing perspectives, objectives and concerns, between those who see it as a historical turning and those who disagree, and despite their vastly different conclusions—there remains a truth that unites all perspectives: we are living through a pivotal moment, one after which nothing—including ourselves—will be as it was before.

The current political moment—defined by the genocide underway in Gaza—has forced Palestinians, Arabs and the world at large to confront profound questions. For Palestinians living inside the Green Line, these questions have taken on a distinct form, re-opening the issue of Palestinian political agency, particularly given the state of submission and socio-political regression that resulted in a lack of meaningful political action during the early months of the bloody assault on Gaza. If, as Darwish suggests, history “has no time to reflect”, then how can those who live through each moment find time to reflect—at the very least—on what preceded this moment? What did we sow in order to reap this political regression? Is resignation a natural response to the present moment, or have we reached a threshold in the trajectory our political, social and economic reality as Palestinians inside the Green Line over the past two decades?

Even as we face the relentless unfolding of events, unable to comprehend their shape and form, or to where they will lead, questions arise that demand deep contemplation from academic, social and political figures. We must ask ourselves: What do political agency and collective action mean now, during these events and in their aftermath? How did we get here? What are our reflections and reactions to the emptiness of citizenship inside the Green Line that has now been exposed? What does it mean that political action has been confined within the limits defined by this citizenship, the hollowness of which has been so clearly laid bare? What are the



implications of this realization for the national political program, discourse and vision, under such circumstances? And how might these changes shape the dialectics of homeland and citizenship for Palestinians inside the Green Line?¹

These are just some of the many pressing questions that weigh on both academics and political actors, reflected in daily concerns and preoccupations about the future. The social sciences remind us that events, however great their impact, can only be partially and superficially understood unless we trace the historical processes that gave rise to them. We must therefore examine the current moment through the lens of recent history, to understand the deep layers of social, political and economic stratification it has created.

From this understanding, Mada al-Carmel has sought, over the past two years, to study and conceptualize the socio-political transformations that Palestinians living the Green Line have undergone, and to examine the dialectic between homeland and citizenship—even before the start of the genocidal war on Gaza. This process has become even more crucial given the escalation of Israel's genocidal assault, and the need for collective reflection all the more urgent. While such reflection may not itself be enough to address the current moment in all its fullness, it may at least help untangle the socio-political processes that led to it. In doing so, we may arrive at a deeper comprehension of the last two decades and how we reached the current impasse. Taken together, these readings and reflections offer the possibility of a more profound understanding of transformations within Palestinian politics and society inside the Green Line over the last 20 years. Such an understanding may shed greater light on issues of agency, political action, and the socio-economic structures that shape them. In this way, we hope to make a modest contribution to a renewed vision of what can be done to restore Palestinian agency, and to play a role in rethinking the future of the Palestinian national project.

¹ See more in Mada al-Carmel. (2024, February). Arab parties in Israel: Between the hammer of genocide and the anvil of the government. [Mada al-Carmel](#). [in Arabic]; Mada al-Carmel. (2023, December). Arab society and positions in the war on Gaza. [Mada al-Carmel](#). [in Arabic]; Mada al-Carmel. (2023, November). The war on Gaza: policies of silencing, intimidation and persecution for Palestinians inside Israel. [Mada al-Carmel](#). [in Arabic]; Odeh-Haj, Inas. (2023, October). Facing two violences: Palestinian society between war and silencing—a psychological study. [Mada al-Carmel](#). [in Arabic]; Mada al-Carmel. (2024, October). Anabtawi, Khaled. (2024). **Present on the threshold: the Hibat al-Karama movement and popular activism inside Israel, a sociological reading**. Haifa: Mada al-Carmel [in Arabic]; Mada al-Carmel. (2024, June). Fragile citizenship: racism and oppression against Arab citizens of Israel during the war on Gaza. [Mada al-Carmel](#).



2) Principles and Key References

The Palestinian cause and Palestinian society have undergone major political shifts, particularly over the last two decades. Moreover, there is a growing consensus in academic and political circles that Palestinians inside the Green Line have entered a new chapter in three key areas: their relationship with the state, their internal socio-economic dynamics, and their connection to the broader Palestinian cause. Palestinian society currently stands at the crossroads of several processes of transformation that have unfolded over the past two decades in relation to these three factors, which have shaped the formation of the political community inside the Green Line. Beyond the internal dynamics at each of these levels, the three factors also intersect, affect, and are affected by, one another.

A. The first shift on the Israeli front has been the evolution of the extreme nationalist right into Israel's dominant political force,² the implementation of its political agenda, and the consolidation of Israel's definition as a Jewish state. Instrumental to this dynamic has been the acceleration of the settler-colonial project on both sides of the Green Line.

This, in turn, has contributed to shifts in the pattern of colonial control over Palestinians inside the Green Line, in the form of amplified efforts to suppress their political activity, undermine their collective national organization, and increase their economic marginalization. These policies came both in response to the uprisings of October 2000—an example of Palestinian political agency—and as a result of internal transformations within Israel's society and political system, which saw a rise in support for religious-colonialist Zionism, alongside the increasing pursuit of neoliberal economic policies.

B. At the Palestinian, regional and international levels: regional developments that followed the temporary victory of the counter-revolutions, on the one hand, and shifts in U.S. strategy in the Middle East, on the other, have redrawn the map of alliances and alignments in the region. This culminated in the normalization of relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords, signed by Israel and some Arab regimes. These developments—along with certain



² See: Abu Irsheid, Suleiman. (2019, January 12). Dr. Mohannad Mustafa: Likud has become a ruling party leading a dominant right-wing bloc. [Arab48](#). [in Arabic]

objective internal factors, such as Palestinian political division—have contributed to a decline in Palestinian national institutions and political leadership. These shifts within Palestinian societies have further undermined national institutions.

- C. Third, at the internal societal level, Palestinian society inside Israel has experienced, and continues to experience, various social, political and economic transformations, driven both by internal factors and the shifts outlined above, and the impact of new Israeli policies. In recent years, these changes have weakened and eroded the Palestinian political center, as evident in the fact that parliamentary politics dominate over most party-political activities, and in the rise of the discourse of “influence and achievement”, which prioritizes practical needs over national demands, and sidelines the Palestinian national question in formal political practice. Amid these developments, a political movement has emerged within the community that advocates for full integration into the Israeli political system, recognition and surrender to the existing external reality, and acceptance of the Jewish state. This movement treats Palestinian citizens as a discrete cultural minority group within Israel, disconnected from the broader Palestinian context. Its most far-reaching demands are for increased budget allocations, improved daily living standards, and action to tackle crime within Arab society. The recent political stagnation and regression have led to a reconfiguration of the political elite inside the Green Line, to a marked rise in political populism, and an attempt to shift the center of political gravity towards local government and mayors. Mayoral positions are no longer exclusively tied to traditional social structures, whether family-based or sectarian, as they were before. Instead, they are now more organically linked to Israel’s economic plans and networks of clientelist, clan-based or sectarian relations.

In our view, it is impossible to understand these political transformations and the ongoing retreat of Palestinian politics without first comprehending the underlying socio-economic infrastructure. This is evident in vast economic shifts, including an overall rise in income and living standards, diversified patterns of consumption, and the emergence of new economic classes and elites within the Palestinian community inside the Green Line. These new groups see the benefit of investing in the margins of citizenship and economic integration—however partial and minor—by politicizing it and transforming it into a form



of integration into the margins of political life. This has posed, and continues to pose, a serious challenge to the national political cause inside the Green Line. While ever-present racism and the inherent fragility of their Israeli citizenship as Palestinians mean that political questions are ever more relevant to these groups, their growing integration into new markets and increasing economic dependency present a challenge to Palestinian political agency, especially as in the midst of rampant persecution and censorship.³ We have seen how these economic factors have begun to produce new elites who glorify utilitarian discourse and the rhetoric of individual salvation and incremental integration, as well as political disengagement. These elites promote the idea of consuming the crumbs offered by the Israeli establishment, adopting a dominant narrative of exchange—trading the national cause for the civic concerns of daily life.

All this coincides with widening domestic economic gaps and rising poverty rates that have affected certain social groups and geographical areas over the past two decades, lending these dynamics particular salience. Add to all this a deepening social crisis, which is manifested as social fragmentation, particularly in the absence of modern structures of social solidarity, the unprecedented proliferation of crime and violence, and the erosion of social cohesion and collective resilience. There has also been a resurgence of divisive factional, clan-based and sectarian discourse, which has been politicized within local clientelist relationships in the context of local governance.

These three simultaneous transformations in Palestinian society—political, social and economic—are in a constant state of interaction and mutual reinforcement. They have no doubt contributed to the decline in the once mature political discourse, as reflected in visionary documents and other national accomplishments. At the same time, they have paved the way for new initiatives, led by Israeli civil society, that seek to entrench economic dependency on the Israeli body politic and draw Arab human resources into its orbit, especially amid the decline of Palestinian civil society and its inability to build genuine social frameworks that are capable of resisting these changes. However, these changes have concurrently given rise to some new



³ See: Mada al-Carmel. (2024, October). In reference No. 1.

and alternative forms of political action. They have led, dialectically, to the emergence of new political spaces and initiatives that offer novel ways of thinking about political action and how to adapt to current approaches to recent developments. Among them are academic and political initiatives such as the One State Campaign, and social initiatives like the youth movement that led *Habbat al-Karama* (the Dignity Uprising) in 2021, the youth movement against crime, the Tal’at feminist movement and other grassroots initiatives. All these movements have raised questions about the possibilities for Palestinian action and agency inside the Green Line, in the face of pervasive racism.

With the outbreak of the genocidal war on Gaza, which has continued for more than a year and a half, this situation has grown yet more harsh and complex, as Israel appears to be implementing a decisive plan for ending the conflict, one that will not only be limited to Palestinians in Gaza or residents of the West Bank and Jerusalem, but will encompass all Palestinians, including those inside the Green Line. There can be no doubt that such a decisive course will impact whatever marginal room for maneuver remains for Palestinians inside the Green Line, which previously allowed them a degree of political agency.

Therefore, the need is today more urgent than ever for collective reflection, studying, investigation, analysis and conceptualization of the present moment and the transformation of Palestinian society—even though the project’s basic premise is not explicitly grounded in the present moment. Since the publication of the “Future Vision Documents” in 2008—most notably “The Haifa Declaration”—which articulated a contemporary and future political and intellectual vision for Palestinians in Israel, no new conceptual framework has been put forward for collective thinking about the various social and political changes that have taken place, or their future implications for Palestinians in Israel. The decline in collective action and political discourse has further limited the possibilities of bringing together a group to collectively reflect on and brainstorm ways to navigate our complex reality.

3) General Goals

The proposed project aims to provide a platform and space for thinking about the current social and political moment inside the Green Line. While it may originate from the perspective and positionality of the “1948 Palestinians,” it is an inclusive initiative that seeks to engage in discussions with Palestinians everywhere. It takes this approach because the whole of historical



Palestine is governed by what is a single political regime—an apartheid regime—even though it imposes different systems of governance and legal statuses on different Palestinian communities.

Although there have been many initiatives in recent years to establish groups for “strategic thinking”, our aim is not to reproduce these experiences, important though they are. Nor do we seek to set forth a representative visionary process or build a new collective vision of that kind. Rather, the intention is to establish a conceptual and political foundation for the present Palestinian moment, or for the new chapter for Palestinians inside the Green Line. It is an academic intervention that aspires to make a political and social impact. Accordingly, the project entails the establishment of a working group to study, research and reflect strategically on these questions and concerns.

From this perspective, conceptualizing the profound transformations that have taken place within Palestinian society inside the Green Line, through a process of deep, intensive collective reflection, will result in the production of a reference guide to the transformations experienced by Palestinians inside the Green line over the two decades, from 2006 to 2026. To ensure that this collective reflection and the materials it generates do not remained confined to the pages of research texts accessible to a narrow academic elite, or limited to Palestinians inside the Green Line, the project will include an additional track following the research, learning and study phase. The project will then draft a charter or public appeal with broader political resonance, for use by politically and socially active persons. It will also include simulations of the current realities, and the material produced by the group will be shared with social organizations active both inside and outside the 1948 territories. Through this work, the process will acquire a practical, applied dimension, and executive summaries will be produced for relevant institutions and actors. There is clearly a need for a discussion group that is capable of enriching the debate and providing cogent analysis of the present moment, after deep reflection and analysis of the prevailing reality and deconstruction of the ineffectual prevailing mainstream political discourse, which is clearly powerless to contend with evolving realities in all the areas mentioned above.

We see the strategic and political working group project as a contribution to a broader initiative of collective, strategic reflection that our collective institutions must develop in order to rebuild the social-political contract for Palestinians living inside the Green Line. It is especially urgent since these bodies face major questions as they stand at the threshold of a new phase, such as:



What are the contents and limits of that contract, and how can we build a consensus around it? What will be the form and role of Palestinian political action inside the Green Line in the coming years, and what are its principles? What will the new generation of Palestinian socio, political, economic and cultural elites look like? What will their reference points and values be? Our civil and political institutions must grapple with these and other questions within a process of collective reflection. We do not claim that we at Mada al-Carmel can address all of these questions, as this would be beyond our organizational mandate, and because these questions must be addressed through broader collective political frameworks. However, we hope that this new initiative, with its planned outcomes and applications, will encourage and inspire the start of a broader collective process.

Target Group

A group of 30-35 academics, students, activists and actors involved in political and public affairs, in accordance with the framework outlined above.

4) Key Project Stages, Timeline, and Proposed Mechanisms

A. Stage One : Preparation (December 2024 – January 2025)

This stage covered developing the project concept, conducting a preliminary survey and research into earlier vision projects, writing the concept paper for the project and the forum, and beginning to recruit and set up the working group.

B. Stage Two: Consolidating the Forum and Engaging it in Research and Collective Reflection (December 2024 – June 2025)

The forum will then embark in a process of collective reflection, discussion and research on five key themes (outlined below), over the course of six intensive overnight sessions (one weekend per month). Each session will be dedicated to discussing of one of the themes. One or more researchers (members of the working group or others) will be invited to present and write a paper related to the theme. The group will then discuss it over the intensive two-day session, following which an executive summary will be produced.

Suggested topics for discussion within the group include collective reflection, exploration and research into transformations within the following five main themes:



1. **The political sphere:** Discourse, practice and the political elite, including decentralized activity by political parties and emerging movements.
2. **The socio-economic sphere:** Recent economic transformations, the new economic elite, and social structures, including issues such as crime, patterns of religiosity, social identities, etc.
3. **The relationship with the Israeli state and regime:** Recent trends and developments.
4. **Palestinian civil society and local governance:** Including civil society organizations, media outlets, the cultural and academic elites, and other actors.
5. **Palestinian, regional and global transformations:** The relationship of Palestinian inside the Green Line to the broader Palestinian national project, as well as to changes within the Arab world.

C. Stage Three: Discussion, Revision, and Publication (August 2025 – January 2026)

After the completion of the second stage—consolidating the group, concluding the internal discussions, recruiting researchers, and drafting papers on the themes—the group will organize workshops, study days and seminars to discuss the findings from Stage Two with the wider community. It will seek to broaden participation in the discussion on these findings to include academic and political organizations from throughout Palestine.

D. Stage Four: Editing and Publication of the Guide and Charter (January 2006 – August 2026)

After all the above has been accomplished, the final stage will entail a process of compiling all contributions, both from the internal discussions and the external public dialogue. Work will then begin on editing a *Guide to the 1948 Palestinians*, covering two decades of change. In addition, a “call” or a brief “charter” will be drafted as a summary or intervention made in the name of the group, addressing the current phase in Palestine. At a later stage, following its internal discussion, presentation and distribution, we will organize a Palestinian conference outside Palestine, the first of its kind to examine the shifting realities inside the Green Line—the 1948 territories—as one of the Palestinian geographies whose perspective springs from its position within the Palestinian national project.

