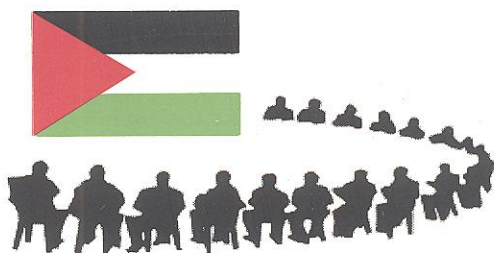


# DIALOGUE ON PALESTINIAN STATE-BUILDING AND IDENTITY

PASSIA

Meetings & Lectures

1995-1998



Edited by  
Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi

PASSIA  
Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

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Edited by  
Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi

PASSIA  
Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

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# FROM OCCUPATION TO THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY - A CHAPTER IN PALESTINIAN NATION-BUILDING <sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
Head of PASSIA, Jerusalem

The current stage in Palestinian politics and the development of Palestinian Society can be described as marking the transformation from an *Intifada*-based society, in which unwritten laws were acknowledged and arranged by a popular movement, to an embryonic civil society, with a leadership that is now a recognized partner in a political settlement. The Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation can be divided into five different periods: non-cooperation, steadfastness, isolation following the PLO's decamp to Tunis, *Intifada*, and negotiation.

There are various political trends in Palestinian society and their attitudes to the Declaration of Principles (DoP) differ. The mainstream see the agreements as the first step towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The political priorities of the Palestinian Authority (PA) were defined as follows: the release of political prisoners, the dismantling of Israeli settlements, the development of the economy, and the democratization of Palestinian society. Recently, the Fatah movement has begun a process of institutionalization in preparation for the Palestinian council elections. The problems facing the mainstream are the continued presence of Israeli settlers in the Palestinian Territories, the absence of a linkage between the transitional phase and the final status negotiations, the unclear division of labor and responsibilities within the PA, leading to internal power struggles, the deterioration of the relationship with Jordan, and the plethora of economic agreements with Israel, Jordan and the donor countries.

The Palestinian opposition, in both its secular and religious guises, sees the Declaration of Palestine (DoP) as being unable to lead to a Palestinian state, this goal clearly being off the international agenda. Many activists

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a lecture event organized by the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern & African Studies, Tel Aviv University, on 2 January 1995.

stress that armed operations of the Islamic opposition took place only in reaction to actions by Israelis, such as the Hebron massacre. However, both the secular and the Islamic opposition have failed to formulate a coherent alternative to the strategy pursued by the mainstream.

A third stream that can be identified is that of the grassroots organizations, business people, intellectuals and the 'silent majority', who believe that the current process will lead to more than autonomy, but less than a state, and hope that the Palestinians will take the opportunity to constructively develop their society and economy during the transitional phase.

As for the major external parties in the process, Jordan is no longer interested in competing with the PLO for Palestinian loyalties. Israel clearly still intends to do the following:

- cut Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank;
- defer serious consideration of the issue of settlers;
- encourage assimilation rather than return as a solution for the Palestinian refugees;
- maintain Israeli military superiority and a regional police role;
- normalize relations with the Arab World;
- strictly implement the Israeli interpretation of the DoP through the control of budgets and projects in the Palestinian Territories.

The donor countries themselves are concerned with accountability and transparency within the PA, and advocate that funds be channeled through a centralized body. In general, they do not approve of the political conditions demanded by Tel Aviv and Washington.

Of the issues facing the PA, the following should be emphasized: the Question of Jerusalem, early empowerment and funding in sectors such as education, tourism and health, the observance of human rights; freedom of the press, free enterprise and investment, and continuing negotiations with Israel. Internally, the necessary pre-condition for facing these challenges in a proper way is the establishment of democratic structures.

Conclusively, the following possible scenarios for the future of the region could be outlined: an acceptance of Israel as a Middle Eastern state, this being dependent on Israel dealing with the Palestinians and Jordan as equals; a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation on the basis of equality; a Syrian-Lebanese confederation; or finally, the failure of the DoP, leading to a rise in extremism and violence in both the Israeli and Palestinian camps.

# THE OPPOSITION AND ITS ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Riad Malki

*Director, PANORAMA, Jerusalem/Ramallah*

To summarize the topic of 'the opposition and its role in the peace process' in one sentence, I would say: there is no role for the opposition. In the following, I will try to look retrospectively at the traditional role of the Palestinian opposition and how this role - including their participation in the current peace process - has developed to date.

## 1. The Concept of Opposition in the Palestinian Political Context

To begin, I can say a classic Palestinian opposition has never existed. One reason for this is the fact that we have never had elections, and thus no government-opposition situation. What we call 'opposition' is still under the umbrella of the PLO, which nowadays represents the peace process. That is one reason why it is difficult to define 'opposition' in a Palestinian context. Although there is a Palestinian authority (PA) in the making and some sort of opposition, their respective roles are mixed and there is no clear division between the two sides.

Secondly, if an opposition does exist, then it usually does so in relation to specific issues, for example the peace process; there is no general opposition. Some PLO factions define themselves as opponents of the peace process, but in relation to other matters the picture changes and they no longer constitute an opposition. Take for example the issue of Jerusalem; those who oppose the peace process are not an opposition, but sit with the PA and work as one team! The position of the various factions always changes according to the topic that is under consideration. Other issues, such as refugees, can immediately turn a faction from an opposition into an ally.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a workshop held at PASSIA on 24 November 1995. The event was part of a PASSIA project – jointly undertaken with the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv, and the Center for Strategic Studies, Amman - entitled "Palestine, Jordan, Israel – Building a Base for Common Scholarship and Understanding in the New Era of the Middle East."



Therefore, opposition in Palestine is limited to specific issues.

Thirdly, the Palestinian opposition lacks experience; it does not know how to behave as an opposition, or how to play the role properly. This lack of experience leads to the confusion that is reflected in the opposition's statements.

The outside was always presented as *the* leadership while there was much less trust in the inside. Moreover, the inside was always loyal to the outside, while the opposite was not the case. A good example concerns the leaflets that were distributed at the beginning of the *Intifada*, calling for a boycott of Israel. The Gaza leadership passed a clear message, saying a boycott would cost a certain amount of money; only if this was provided by the outside, would they make sure that no one would leave Gaza to work in Israel.

## 2. The Concept of Opposition in Palestinian Public Opinion

The Palestinian people did not develop nor materialize in any form any special feeling for the 'opposition'. As mentioned above, separation between factions occurs only in relation to certain issues but disputes always end with a reconciliation. The occupation has played a very important role here and has created an excellent atmosphere for this situation: differences between the factions faded in the struggle against the common enemy. For example, the Islamic movement, on the whole, never presented a threat to the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It emerged relatively late, in the 1980s, while other factions have much longer histories.

Furthermore, the concept of opposition found no space within the PLO system, which is based on, and functions by consensus. Hence, even during the last 18 months, perhaps with one exception (the November 1994 clashes), the public never witnessed a serious confrontation between the PA and the opposition. Relations were characterized by the seeking and developing of a dialogue between the two camps. Thus, with few exceptions, the public never felt that the PA-opposition relationship posed a real threat. The public's view of the opposition is determined by two main issues:

- (1) The theme of the opposition is becoming more complicated. The newly emerged and widely debated idea of 'civil war' - which is instantly related to the opposition - is a totally new phenomenon. Without a strong opposition, however, civil war should not be a major concern of the public.
- (2) The emergence of a reconciliation process after every disagreement over the last two decades makes people feel that whenever a crisis occurs, it will only be a matter of time before it is settled by the conflicting parties. Since solutions are always found, people do not know whether to regard the opposition as initiators of crises, which will be solved anyway, or as the potential perpetrators of civil war.

As a result of these circumstances there are two options for the opposition in the future; they could find an entirely new role or alternatively, continue their traditional role with some possible extensions. In the event that they choose the first option, the threat of a civil war might become more likely, whereas in the second scenario, the cycle of crisis and solution will continue.

The opposition at the moment, as I see it, has opted for the its old role with certain extensions. The opposition's behavior in the last months *vis-à-vis* the PA has shown very clearly that they will not try to destroy what the PA tries to build. Rather, they 'swallow' policies and decisions rather than openly oppose the PA. This gives the public the impression that neither side is taking the other seriously, and thus, is doing nothing significant in order to harm or challenge the other; were the two sides to take each other seriously, the opposition would become stronger. Now it is a loyal opposition at best. The PA, of course, is interested in maintaining the opposition's traditional role since this allows for a degree of co-option. Accordingly the PA has no interest in a new definition of the relationship with the opposition.

If the current situation does not change, reconciliation between the PA and the opposition will continue and become stronger. If, on the other hand, relations become more hostile, the use of arms - which are available everywhere - could lead to chaos and insecurity. One can say, therefore, that neither side is interested in the deterioration of the relationship.

### **3. The Historic Position of the Palestinian Opposition Towards the Concept of Peace**

There are three main events in Palestinian history that have highlighted the opposition's attitude towards peace: the Geneva Conference of 1974, the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Amman Agreement of the mid-1980s.

The relevant question here is whether the historical position of the opposition was always positive/supportive or negative/preventive with regard to peaceful solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In other words, did the opposition work towards or against peace?

The three events mentioned above have shown that the opposition had a substantial influence in preventing any peace initiative that they regarded as failing to achieve justice and the recognition of Palestinian rights.

In order to evaluate the opposition's stand, their behavior in the current peace process must be examined. Does their attitude nowadays differ from before, for example towards Camp David?

I believe that after the Gulf War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, new realities have emerged, making it impossible to talk about a 'just' and 'peaceful' solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now, the opposition is forced to find new expressions; 'just' for example, can no longer mean historical Palestine. This altered situation made the opposition look at Madrid in a different, new way. Their new view could be described as the 'concept of phases'. This became a Palestinian concept in general and one of the opposition's in particular: the distinction was made between an immediate Palestinian state and different *mahalia* (phases) towards this goal. The opposition's way of thinking became more pragmatic and more receptive to the idea of having various stages that will eventually lead to a Palestinian state. During the *Intifada* leaflets were distributed (in particular leaflet 26) that mentioned the necessity of a staged process, leading to Palestinian independence. Today, the opposition sees two stages in the existing peace process:

- the Jerusalem-Madrid-Washington stage; and
- the Oslo/post-Oslo stage.

In this context, the first stage is considered the 'premature stage' since Israel and Palestine were always dependent on the interference of a third side, the US. Consequently, the Oslo-stage is seen as the 'mature stage': both sides decided to get rid of the third party, perceiving themselves as 'mature' enough to go ahead alone.

During the Jerusalem-Madrid-Washington stage, the opposition was still in the making, that is, the concept of opposition towards the peace process did not materialize in terms of actions and/or statements.

The leaders of opposing factions attended PLO meetings in spite of the Madrid talks. We also used to attend briefings with the negotiating teams. I believe that the opposition always looked at this stage as another Geneva, convinced it would also fail. Therefore, they didn't attempt to mobilize support for their stand, which was totally against the talks. I remember George Habash saying at a PNC meeting that Arafat will never cross a certain line. In short, it was not felt that there was a need to develop a real opposition.

Then the Oslo Agreement came and created the real rupture! Following Oslo, the opposition boycotted the PLO Executive Committee meeting. Some people - including myself - even boycotted Orient House. With the shock of Oslo, the opposition felt for the first time that they had to respond and to articulate their opposition. Tension accumulated and led to disintegration, which was reflected in the leaflets distributed at that time: it was a period of mutual animosity and blame. Oslo was the turning point at which the opposition began to take action.

The measurement of opposition activity can be seen in two dimensions:

- political versus military actions;
- the progression from the Jerusalem-Madrid-Washington stage to the Oslo stage (time factor).

Following Oslo, both mainstream and opposition political activity increased considerably: meetings, discussions and lobbying took place everywhere in order to create public opinion that was either for, or against, the agreement. The focus of both camps was on mobilizing people. With Oslo, military actions were also launched, initially on the part of the Islamic opposition rather than the PFLP or DFLP. Oslo can be seen as the climax in terms of decisive action, mutual accusations and lobbying. At this stage, the position of the opposition could be best described as 'rejectionism'. As things developed and the PA established its offices and departments, however, opposition activity declined.

A major role in this context was played by the PA, which adopted a policy of detaining members of the opposition groups, marking the beginning of the opposition's surrender. Apart from occasional demonstrations and statements, no other action was taken, or expected to be taken, by the opposition.

The DFLP and PFLP were always attached to the PLO system and expressions, and they are still opting for the old quota system. I believe that this is one of the reasons why they have opted for 'contained confrontation', that is confrontation, but with clearly defined limits. Further evidence of their rather hesitant position is that the leadership of the PFLP and DFLP were very reluctant to increase their military activities. They did not want their relation with the PA to reach a point of no return. In contrast, Hamas and Islamic Jihad were not used to the existing style and codes of the PLO and its leadership (Arafat) nor bound by traditional ties, and thus went beyond certain limits, launching numerous military attacks on Israeli targets.

#### **4. The Opposition's Relationship to the PA and the Effects of the Opposition on the Peace Process**

The secular opposition have no clear program, and they do not appear to have formulated a clear stand on certain issues pertaining to the peace process. They have been unable to choose which way to go at this juncture. On the other hand, they acknowledge that the situation is not to their advantage and that they are unable to present an alternative agenda. Instead, they have stuck to their traditional programs. We are witnessing a very deep organizational crisis within these factions as far as their ways of functioning, decision-making and implementation are concerned. Hegemony

remains and prevails. No 'Perestroika' has taken place. Inside, the issue of self-criticism has reached the factions, but those on the outside want to preserve the centralization of power in their hands. The dilemma is that at the same time they want to show some sort of democratic commitment in order to satisfy their members. But when the DFLP and PFLP decided to transfer the decision-making process to inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the leadership of both the inside and the outside were reluctant, fearing a loss in power and prestige.

Following the Israeli-PLO Agreements, people from outside could return to the inside and a new opportunity arose to balance the inside and the outside. Since, however, the power remained in the outside's hands, a serious crisis developed within the factions. The leaders - even inside - love their positions but the members began to demand changes and a new phenomenon within the DFLP and PFLP emerged: *mustanqif* (freezing of leadership and membership activities) as a new form of protest. Today, 90 percent of PFLP members and supporters are *mustanqif*, while only the remaining ten percent are still active. Thus, the majority have a problem with their leadership and its policies, but this does not mean that they have shifted to Fatah or any other faction. I believe that if the leadership were to change, most of the 90 percent could be re-activated/mobilized. The clear distinction between leadership and members, whereby the latter are currently totally paralyzed, is the main cause of the present crisis. The people as well as the factions themselves know that they are still there but only on the basis of their past fame. The old leaders could re-emerge, but only if they first realize that they have to adjust to the new circumstances. It would appear at the moment, however, that they are refusing to accept this fact.

Immediately after Oslo, the opposition began to discuss among themselves and with the PA the new relationship between the two sides. Initially, the opposition decided not to deal with the PA at all, but when pressure started mounting the leadership outside was forced to revise its position. The new directive was that some sort of contact with the PA was allowed if it promised to be of advantage for practical reasons. With the pressure still mounting, the order was changed once again, allowing for meetings with any PA member except Arafat. The next change came when it was decided that if any problem could not be solved without the involvement of Arafat, it was permitted to contact even Arafat himself.

The economic aspect plays another important role: during the *Intifada*, there was always enough money, which is not the case now that the leadership have discovered that their investments are not paying off. In addition, Arafat has stopped allocating funds to the opposition, as did the Arab states. Now they have only donations and funds from individuals, which is nowhere near enough to run a fully structured organization. The financial crisis has forced

them to release hundreds of thousands of full-time employees and to close various organizations and kindergartens, etc. Naturally, this has contributed to the decline of local support. For the same reasons, there are also no funds available for election campaigns. With such a comprehensive crisis on all levels, it is unreasonable to expect the opposition to deliver effectively.

The only group that meets Arafat on an official level is Hamas; all others see him only as an unofficial member in meetings of a 'private' nature. The relation between the PA and the opposition is basically limited to the Islamic movements, although they have no traditional relation to Arafat.

The fact that the PA wanted to meet with Hamas, albeit due, in part, to pragmatism, was to a great extent due to its desire to put an end to the group's military actions, which were regarded as being counterproductive. Thus, the need for dialogue was mutual. Another reason was the Hamas initiative (of Musa Abu Marzouq, April 1994) offering a dialogue and mentioning the possibility of Hamas attacking Palestinian targets. All this put pressure on the PA to start a dialogue with Hamas while there was still no need to do so with the traditional opposition.

## 5. The Opposition and the Final Status Negotiations

Many people see that things are changing and that the Authority is being established, but they reject the idea *per se*. For them, the *barnamaj watani* is still meaningful and they hold on it, e.g., by behaving as in the past (such as being in the underground, implementing without thinking, leaving no room for democracy). According to their way of thinking, their refusal to change things now is excusable.

Anything that can be said on this topic now is prediction more than anything else. The opposition are still very busy and preoccupied with more pressing issues such as Oslo I and II and the coming elections, and they have not yet had time to discuss the permanent status negotiations and their respective role. Consequently, it can be assumed that the opposition's role will be very limited, even if they decide to be incorporated into the negotiation process. There are several reasons for this assumption:

- (1) The burden of the negotiations will be on the shoulders of the legislative and executive bodies.
- (2) Due to the existing sense of continuity, as far as the negotiators are concerned there is no place for the opposition.
- (3) Fatah wants to and will dominate the negotiations; the opposition therefore, will self-limit its role to different forms of protest.

- (4) Due to Israeli disapproval of any assigned role to the opposition, the latter's role is interpreted as slowing down, rather than speeding up, the negotiation process.

Should it transpire that the opposition will not be incorporated in this process, especially if they decide not to participate in the elections, their role will be even more marginal. The opposition themselves see their future role more in relation to representation in local councils (i.e., village or municipal councils). They believe that they will have a better opportunity to articulate on such a basis, from where they will be able to disrupt/slow down the negotiation process.

In this context, the options for the opposition can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The opposition will use its influence on the municipal and village level; if successful, this could enable them to create civil disobedience with regard to the negotiations.
- (2) If the opposition believe that the civil disobedience strategy will not work, a minority from within the opposition might opt for violence.
- (3) The majority of the opposition will try to focus on certain issues such as elections and push for referenda.

## **6. Conclusion**

Firstly, the opposition see peace as a risk, which they do not want to take. Moreover, they also see that there is a price for peace, which they are not ready to pay.

Secondly, despite the fact that the traditional opposition (DFLP, PFLP) tried to be among the leading parties within the PLO, they do not want to accept responsibility for making decisions: thus Fatah decides, takes the risk and pays the price while the opposition feel more comfortable with seeing what happens and then deciding if they agree with or oppose a decision.

Finally, regardless of whether or not the current peace process continues or even accelerates, the weight of the opposition will be minimal. In brief: the opposition will not play any role with regard to the outcome of future negotiations.

# ASSESSMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
*Head of PASSIA, Jerusalem*

The Palestinian elections ended the era of factions as characterized by the PFLP, the DFLP, Fatah, FIDA, the Communist Party, etc. New 'groupings' will emerge in the elected Council, with Hamas forming its own political party, the Islamic Salvation Party outside the Council.

One group in the Council will probably form around individuals such as Dr. Haidar Abdul Shafi, and Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, and will include figures such as Raweh Shawwa and Dr. Azmi Shu'aybi as well as academics such as Dr. Ziad Abu Amr. They can be defined as an 'intellectual progressive' group, with a self-image as democrats, but without a significant constituency. Their personal relationships, rather than any shared program or agreement on particular issues such as Jerusalem, will lead to their coalescence as a group. Dr. Haidar Abdul Shafi is likely to be the focus due to his age and standing. They may eventually form a Social Democratic Party.

A second group may consist of an alliance between the returning PLO old guard and younger Fatah activists. This is suggested, for example, by the results in Tulkarm, where Tayyeb Abd Ar-Rahman, considered very close to the Chairman, and Mufid Abed Rabbo, a local activist, won seats. It is possible that these two elements will form two wings of a future group. The two groups, over the 18 months since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), are not in competition but are cooperating. Other examples are the elected members Salah Ta'mari (Bethlehem) - representing the old guard - and Abdul Fatah Hamayel (Ramallah) - representing the *Intifada* leadership.

A third group may comprise of figures associated with the Chairman and could be described as 'the President's men'.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a briefing session held at PASSIA on 25 January 1996.



A fourth group could emerge from within the young generation, middle-class professionals, often with links to notable families, but deriving their political significance from their professional background. Examples are Maher Al-Masri and Ghassan Shaka'a, both from the Nablus constituency.

An analysis of the Fatah candidate selection procedure and of how the Central Committee had discussed the formation of lists, with representatives from the constituencies speaking and nominating candidates, shows some internal bargaining within Fatah for Arafat's blessing. Chairman Arafat personally received candidates wishing to stand prior to the formation of the lists, and was receptive to everyone who wanted to stand. An example was Ahmad Ghneim, an *Intifada* activist, who won in the Fatah primaries in Jerusalem but was persuaded not to stand: as compensation, he was appointed Director General in the Ministry of Local Government.

Most Fatah activists opposed the Central Committee's action in changing the lists after the primaries. Two schools of thought emerged: (1) Fatah is a movement not a party and everyone wishing to stand can do so; (2) Fatah cannot split or compete with itself if the movement is to retain its significance within society.

In Jerusalem, attempts to form a national coalition list consisting of all factions, including Hamas affiliates, led to delays in forming a Fatah list. Faisal Husseini resisted efforts to persuade him to head the list.

The role of the notable families in the elections was determined by the general decline of their influence in Palestinian politics, which can be traced to the dominance of the middle class in the PLO, whose leadership came from an entirely different social background, and whose constituency included the refugee camps. During the *Intifada*, individual members of notable families played roles, but as activists, not notables. This continued in the elections as candidates from notable families emphasized their professional or activist background.

As for the future of the secular opposition such as the PFLP and DFLP, it could be said that there is a certain consensus regarding their involvement in politics in the post-election context, although they are dying as political forums and the remaining activists may not feel comfortable with any of the above groupings. Within the secular opposition the existence of pragmatic elements that want to become involved in the self-rule experiment are indisputable. They neither exaggerate the gains of the current process, nor underestimate what Palestinians can achieve under the present circumstances.

There are several possible future scenarios at this stage. The worst case scenario would be the continuation of the negotiations without results, a lack of private investment, and public disappointment in the context of heightened expectations, which would lead to an extra-parliamentary opposition, potentially willing and able to use violence against the Palestinian Authority. This could include the assassination of political leaders and the emergence of a civil war-like situation, especially with regard to a possible power struggle between the various security and military apparatuses.

Participation in the elections in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem differed from one area to another:

- (1) In Gaza people exercised their right to vote in an atmosphere of euphoria, a result of the passage of two years since the end of the occupation and the establishment of the PNA. Some results were surprising.
- (2) In the West Bank, the atmosphere was more subdued, due to the fresh memories of the occupation. Differences in voting behavior between towns and villages emerged, the latter giving greater support to the old guard of the PLO, with cities giving more support to local Intifada activists, for example Abdul Fatah Hamayel (Ramallah). In Ramallah, the fact that there was only one Christian seat meant that people had to carefully consider which Christian candidate to vote for. In the event, it was won by Ghazi Hanania. In the north of the West Bank, candidates from notable families ran together, such as Ghassan Shaka'a and Maher Al-Masri in Nablus.
- (3) In Jerusalem, it was discouraging to see the manner in which the elections were conducted, with the city 'reoccupied' with a massive Israeli military presence, violating the arrangements made in the Oslo II Agreement. Former US President Jimmy Carter pointed to the level of Israeli intimidation of Palestinians, including the filming of voters. Prior to the elections, rumors were spread, reinforced by threatening posters, that Palestinians participating in the elections would lose their residency rights in the city or national insurance and medical benefits to which they had contributed. Queries concerning the fairness of the elections in Jerusalem were raised as early returns showed that three female candidates were likely to be elected, while in the event, only one, Hanan Ashrawi, was successful.

# WOMEN'S ROLE AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS <sup>1</sup>

Roundtable Discussion

*with activists from the Jerusalem Center For Women*

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi:* Welcome to PASSIA and today's roundtable. I believe a look at the elections from the point of view of women is necessary and important if we are to assess, for example, how some women activists in the Old City of Jerusalem succeeded in mobilizing female voters and thereby improved female participation. An assessment and comparison of the various campaigns by female candidates is also worthwhile. Some female candidates ran very professional campaigns, but were not elected due to the electoral system.

*Ghada Zughaiar:* As current director of the Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW) I would like to begin with a brief description of the JCW's project to document the 1996 Palestinian elections in terms of women, so as to attempt to advance the position of women in future elections. The project began in December 1995 and entails the study of three elections: the presidential, the legislative and the upcoming municipal elections. Two opinion polls were conducted before and after the presidential/legislative election, and more are being planned for the municipal elections. This is the first time that polls have included questions on specifically 'female' issues. The polls have been conducted as part of the JMCC's monthly polls, with four questions per poll being directly related to women's issues, for example the question of a quota system to encourage the election of women to the PLC.

Regarding other activities, the JCW held pre-election workshops and model elections, and also conducted questionnaires, the findings of which will be published in April, with a comprehensive report on the elections from the perspective of women's issues being due by the end of the year.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting held at PASSIA on 16 March 1996.

- strategies adopted by women candidates during the election campaign;
- difficulties faced by women in participating in the elections
- the implications of the electoral system for women;
- the implications of the registration system for women;
- behavior of women voters.

During the elections the possibility of a quota system for women was raised but there is no consensus among female politicians as to the desirability of such a quota. What was perceived as rather negative was the fact that there was no female representation on the Central Elections Commission (CEC). It is to be hoped that a momentum from the elections will lead to continued debate in Palestinian society and the meetings of the PLC, for example, in regard to personal status laws. An encouraging sign was that some male candidates raised women's issues during their campaigns.

*Abdul Rahman Abu Arafah:* I would like to comment on the debate concerning the issue of a women's quota prior to the election, and the differing interpretations of the election results in terms of the number of women elected. The five female members represent approximately five percent of the Legislative Council, which is comparable with the situation in Israel, Jordan, the US and some European countries. Would a quota system therefore still be valid?

*Ghada Zughaiar:* There are two assessments of the results:

1. Some women feel that the result was good considering there was no quota.
2. Some feel that the result was poor, and that women are entitled to a more representative representation than a quota or an alternative electoral system would provide.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* What about the appointment of women as deputy ministers and other leading positions in the bureaucracy.

*Ghada Zughaiar:* We believe that here, also, a quota system would be appropriate, but the problem right now is that women lack the mechanisms for appropriate lobbying.

*Rana Nashashibi:* When discussing issues such as quotas or lobbying, it is necessary to bear in mind the local system. A choice needs to be made whether to lobby within the system, i.e., through Chairman Arafat, or to work from below in order to change the system. The former course would be a

not solely women's concerns. Society as a whole is affected by such patriarchal mechanisms.

*Maral Kaprielian:* I have a problem with the Palestinian 'women's movement' in general. To me, the impression prevails that there are rather small groups of women working in different sections of society.

*Ghada Zughaiar:* The women's movement suffers from the absence of a strategy, insufficient networking, and political factionalism, mirroring that of wider Palestinian society. Fatah has historically been the largest faction and is now viewed as the 'government party'. The perception is that Fatah is patronizing to women. It is necessary for the women's movement to make a rapid assessment of the post-elections situation and to rebuild itself from the grassroots level in order to counteract its isolation.

*Rana Nashashibi:* On the question of whether the Palestinian women's movement could be described as feminist, I think this is possible on the political level, in terms of women's participation in the national movement, but not, for example, in terms of women's sexual freedom.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* The position of women in Palestinian society needs to be put in its regional, that is Arab, context. The women's movement can be an agent for change in Arab society, but it needs to operate in conjunction with other forces. One problem is that there is no media coverage of women's issues, and this is one factor to be addressed.

*Rana Nashashibi:* Why did Hanan Ashrawi's election campaign and victory transcend gender? Was the reason for this media coverage, reputation, successful fundraising, or a combination of all three? We should bear in mind, however, that Dr. Ashrawi is not a good example when it comes to generalizing about the position of women in Palestinian society.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* Why did the female candidates in Jerusalem not run on a joint list?

*Ghada Zughaiar:* The open list system diverted women's votes; look at the example of a Fatah leader standing in Ramallah, who had not been elected because she was a woman.

*Abdul Rahman Abu Arafah:* The quota system, whether on religious or gender lines, contributes to the fragmentation of Palestinian society. \*

remedied by a quota system.

*Ghada Zughaiar:* Instant equality is not possible. Look at the CEC, which did not spend much of its budget on the education of women voters.

*Rana Nashashibi:* It was not simply a failure to educate women: the CEC often sent male-only teams to register voters, knowing that in the absence of male relatives many women could not receive them in order to register. Thus, many women were not registered in the first place, which can be seen as an institutional attempt to reduce the proportion of women who could vote. Returning to the Arab context, the question is whether there will be an attempt to change matters from above, as in Tunisia under Bourguiba, or whether grassroots action is the answer. Voter behavior demonstrated a tendency to vote for those already in power or holding positions of influence, which does not argue well for reform from above.

# IDENTITY, PLURALISM AND THE PALESTINIAN EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
*Head of PASSIA, Jerusalem*

The historical, geographical and demographic entity called Palestine is an integral part of the Arab homeland. It was governed for over four centuries by the Ottomans. As early as 1904, the Palestinians joined the other Arab peoples in sharing a heightened consciousness with regard to their various interrelated identities - i.e., religious, cultural, national, political and regional - and thus became a part of what is commonly referred to as the 'Arab awakening'. The 'awakening' resulted in the struggle against Ottoman-Turkish rule in order to achieve a recognized Arab entity on Arab soil and widespread cultural freedom.

National movements in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and other parts of the Arab World succeeded in achieving self-determination, and consequently established a recognized state. For Palestine, it would have been only a matter of time, were it not for the fact that the Palestinians were confronted with the interests and resulting policies of the Western allies, most of which reflected their strong support of the Jewish question, embodied in the Zionist movement.

The British occupation and the subsequent mandate over Palestine (1917 to 1947) were favorable to the establishment of a Jewish entity in Palestine as opposed to the interests and wellbeing of the Palestinian people. During those years, the Palestinian national consciousness, especially with regard to a shared identity, was reflected in three dimensions:

- a sense of belonging to the Palestinian territory and sharing the Palestinian aspirations regarding statehood;
- the Arab heritage of the people, rooted in the Islamic culture; and
- widespread rejection of and resistance against the policies of the British Mandate and Zionist immigration to Palestine.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a workshop held at PASSIA on 1 July 1996. The event was part of a PASSIA project – jointly undertaken with the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv, and the Center for Strategic Studies, Amman - entitled "Palestine, Jordan, Israel – Building a Base for Common Scholarship and Understanding in the New Era of the Middle East."

convening of national conferences, and the legitimization of a political leadership comprising the intellectual elite and religious notables.

The second dimension was expressed in an advanced Palestinian media, and was discussed in conferences and cultural institutions that called for Arab support of the Palestinian cause, whilst warning that if Palestine were to fall in the hands of the Zionist movement, the rest of the Arab countries would be at stake. Another aspect of this dimension involved an atmosphere of reciprocity, according to which Palestinians took part in the defense of other Arab countries whilst continuing their state-building processes. They participated, for example, in the Syrian struggle against the French Mandate, in particular in the 1925 revolt. They were also involved in the building of the political, social and cultural system of Jordan in the early days of 1921.

The third dimension was manifested in the various Palestinian revolts and uprisings against both British and Zionist police, namely in 1921, 1933, 1936, and 1939.

All three components mentioned above played a vital role in shaping the Palestinian identity.

By November 1947, the partition solution was advocated and imposed on Palestine against the will of its people. Palestine was to be divided into two states - one Jewish, one Arab - while the heart of the country, Jerusalem, was to be internationalized. The first Arab-Israeli war of 1947/48 ended not with the establishment of a Palestinian state, but with the defeat of the Arab armies and the uprooting, expulsion and dispersal of the Palestinian people. Having thus become stateless and homeless, the Palestinians found themselves either governed by the Arab armies on the West Bank or the Egyptian forces in Gaza, or refugees in neighboring Arab host countries.

During the years 1948-67, the international community addressed the Palestine cause as a refugee question. Meanwhile, the Palestinians in Gaza formed the All-Palestine Government, while those on the West Bank accepted Jordanian citizenship, due to their belief in the power of the Arab identity to protect them, pending the realization of Palestinian self-determination and the liberation of Palestine.

In the Arab countries, we witnessed the Iraqi Government establishing a Palestine army, the Egyptians supporting the *fedayeen* in Gaza, and the Jordanians replacing the Palestinian Salvation Army with a national guard, to be deployed along the borders of the new Israeli state. All these efforts, however, failed to meet the Palestinians' aspirations. All Palestinian thinking was preoccupied with the hope of return, in spite of the fact



late phase. At that time, the Palestinians did not call for an entity, nor for an independent or bi-national or democratic-secular state; they merely wanted to return to their homeland and rest their cause in the hands of the Arab states. From the outset, they were treated as refugees to be taken care of by the UNRWA and the governments of the host countries in which they lived under miserable conditions. For the refugees, even the mention of the word Palestine led to painfully nostalgic memories of a house, a garden, a mountain, or a seashore, and many clung on to both the keys to the homes from which they had been cast out and dreams of an imminent return. The phase of 'Arabizing' the Palestine cause and *de facto* inter-Arab differences was characterized by slogans relating to Arab unity and the impending liberation of Palestine.

In October 1956, when Israeli forces occupied the Gaza Strip, the direct confrontation between Palestinians and Israelis was re-launched after a decade-long war of words and rhetoric between the Arab states and Israel. During the resistance to the Israeli occupation of Gaza throughout 1956/57, a new Palestinian cadre was born, and it was determined to reshape and reorganize the Palestinian identity in the refugee camps and amongst Palestinian communities in the Diaspora. In 1957, ten years after the partition of Palestine, a new organization was established by the youth of the Palestinian *Naqba* (catastrophe): Fatah (*Harakat At-Tahrir Al-Filastiniyyeh*), the Palestinian Liberation Movement. Fatah called for the Palestinization of the struggle against the Jewish state, while the Palestinians on the West Bank remained active in Arab political parties, fully convinced that the Palestinian cause could only be strengthened through Arabization.

In the early 1960s, Palestinians spoke openly and with confidence about their legitimate right and need to establish a Palestinian entity. Their demands represented a revolutionary new way of thinking in the national movement to liberate the homeland. The early Palestinian organizations of the 1960s built their alliances with Cairo (Gamal Abdul Nasser), Baghdad (Abdul Karim Qassem), and Riyadh (King Saud) in an attempt to organize, mobilize and obtain financial support for the establishment of a Palestinian entity.

In March 1959, Egypt called on the Arab League to discuss ways and means to help reorganize and mobilize the Palestinian people as one nation, as opposed to refugees scattered in a number of foreign countries. The deliberations of the Arab leaders in the first Arab summit of January 1964 revealed major differences in the various Arab countries' positions and interests regarding the realization of an independent Palestine: Algeria (President Ben Bella) and Tunis (President Habib Bourqiba) called for the formation of a national liberation front; Saudi Arabia (King Saud) for the formation of a Palestinian government; and Syria (Amin Al-Hafez) for the

cepted, albeit reluctantly, the Egyptian call to delegate the Palestinian representative at the Arab League in Cairo, Ahmad Shuqeiri, to begin consultations with the Arab governments in order to establish a sound base on which to organize the Palestinian people and facilitate their role in the liberation of Palestine. The Arab League subsequently delegated Shuqeiri, who started his mission in February 1964. In his first address to the Palestinian people, Shuqeiri summarized the Palestinian situation by saying,

“We are a people without an entity, we are a national cause without leadership; therefore, we must take on our shoulders the responsibility for comprehensive reorganization and a total mobilization of our people.”<sup>2</sup>

Shuqeiri's words reflected the reality of the Palestinian people, the desire to put an end to their suffering and the hope to rebuild the Palestinian entity with Arab assistance. The question of armed struggle and the mobilization of the political elite, businessmen and economists was confronted with the policies and interests of the Arab host countries. When Shuqeiri toured the Arab countries to consult with Palestinian communities and personalities, his trip concluded in the convening of the first Palestinian national conference in Jerusalem on 14 May 1964, under the auspices of King Hussein. The conference endorsed a Palestinian charter, which established the PLO as an institutional entity with a flag (the Arab revolt flag of 1916), an oath, and a national anthem, in addition to the formation of military units known as the Palestinian Liberation Army. In order to calm the doubts of the Arab governments, Article 24 of the Palestinian National Charter stated that the PLO would not exercise any territorial sovereignty over the West Bank of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, nor over the Gaza Strip, which was under Egyptian rule, nor over the region of Al-Himma, then under Syrian rule.

One year after the formation of the PLO and its headquarters in Jerusalem, the PNC convened for the second time in Cairo. At this meeting, several Palestinian associations joined the PLO, i.e., The General Union of Palestinian Laborers, the General Union of Palestinian Women, the Writers' Union, and the General Union of Palestinian Students. At the same time, there were reservations and objections within the Palestinian communities that were based on a fear of relying on the Arab governments for the formation of the PLO, which reflects the pluralism within the Palestinian house. A group of Palestinian intellectuals objected to Shuqeiri's style and decisions, saying, “The people's cause should not be in one man's briefcase.”<sup>3</sup> In op-

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<sup>2</sup> Issa Ash-Shuaibi, *Palestinian Statism: Entity, Consciousness, and Institutional Development*. Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1979, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Mahdi Abdul Hadi, *The Palestine Question and Political Peaceful Solutions, 1934-1974*. Beirut, 1974.

Several Islamic groups as well as Fatah objected to the continuous Arabization of the Palestinian cause and demanded the Palestinization of the struggle. This position was reflected clearly in the following statement of Abu Jihad (Khalil Al-Wazir):

“The armed struggle is the way to rebuild our nation and to expose its national identity to achieve the objectives of return and the liberation of the land.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Palestinian pluralism was reflected by the following tracks:

- the Arabization of the cause, headed by Shuqairi;
- the democratization of the cause, advocated by intellectuals and professionals; and
- the Palestinization of the cause, demanded by Fatah and Islamic groups.

The manner in which the PLO was established reflected the Arab weakness and incompetence in confronting Israel, which often resulted from widespread disunity and a conflict of interests. At the same time, the PLO was caught between the positions of Riyadh, Cairo and Amman. The latter was very clear in its reservations, objections and worries about the future development of the PLO and its possible impact on Jordan's independence and the Arab state's role on the West Bank. Shuqairi's favorite slogans (e.g., “We are one people, not two people,” and “We are one country, not two countries”) were one of many reasons why Amman was reluctant in its support of the PLO. The War of June 1967 and the three years that followed gave Fatah and other *fedayeen* organizations the credibility, the legitimacy and the responsibility to lead the Palestinian resistance movement within the various Palestinian communities.

Many university students, professionals and refugees joined the resistance movement in contrast to the experience of 1947/48. Palestinian academic Hisham Sharabi criticized the attitude of his generation during the War of 1947/48 as follows:

“I ask myself now, after many years have passed, how we could have left our homeland during the war, while the Jews were prepared to take it over. It never occurred to us in our thinking to postpone our studies and to stay at home to fight. There were others to fight instead of us, those

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in *Palestine Affairs*, Issue 152/153 (November 1985), p. 14.

place is here, on the land. But us, the intellectuals, our place is somewhere else. We struggle on the intellectual front.”<sup>5</sup>

Within three years, the resistance movement took over the PLO, and Fatah, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, gained full control over the PLO’s infrastructure. This marked not only the total Palestinization of the cause but also the beginning of the development of two Palestinian realities, identities and agendas, i.e., the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

The ‘inside’ was unable to compete with the ‘outside’s’ military resistance, and chose, for the time being, a strategy of *sumud* (steadfastness) and non-cooperation with the occupying power. On the leadership level, however, its members were very clear in demanding a role. Qadri Touqan, a leading Palestinian politician from Nablus, expressed this demand as follows:

“If the PLO leaders come to us through liberation, we will go to Jericho and meet them with flowers and carry them on our shoulders, as they would indeed be our leaders. But if they come through political negotiation, then we are the ones who have the right to lead and govern, for we are the ones who know more, if not better, than they.”<sup>6</sup>

During the first decade of Israeli occupation, the Palestinian ‘outside’ was identified with the PLO and its infrastructure in the wider Diaspora, all supporting armed struggle as the only means to achieve the liberation of Palestine. At the same time, there was a struggle for power within the Arab host countries, mainly in Jordan. This confrontation reached its peak with the 1970 civil war between the PLO and Jordan’s army, and ended with the departure of the PLO to Lebanon, where it established its mini-state.

In 1974, ten years after the establishment of the PLO and various Palestinian organizations, the mobilization of numerous Palestinian communities, and the daily confrontation with Israeli policies and practices, there was a major change in the way of thinking concerning the balance of power, and in the awareness of the overall living conditions of the Palestinian people. This was reflected in the PNC’s call for the establishment of a “Palestinian state in any part of the occupied areas, once they are evacuated by Israel.” This was followed by the Ten-Point Program of the PLO announced on 12 June 1974, which outlined the goals of the struggle for self-determination in an independent Palestinian state whilst dropping the call for a democratic,

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<sup>5</sup> *Memoirs of Arab Intellectuals*. Beirut: Ibn Rushd Publications, Arabic Edition, 1970, pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Mahdi Abdul Hadi, *The Palestine Question and Political Peaceful Solutions, 1934-1974*. Beirut, 1974.

Palestinian people; thus, international and Arab official recognition of the PLO marked the legitimization of attempts by the Palestinians to resist the occupation and their right to self-determination. The Arab Summit in Rabat added to this recognition the affirmation of the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent national authority in any Palestinian territory to be liberated. Eight years later, in September 1982, the Arab League Summit resulted in the Fez Declaration, which affirmed the right of all states to exist within recognized borders and called for a peaceful settlement, in order to allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

With the outbreak of the *Intifada* in December 1987, another major development in the political thinking of the Palestinians was reflected by the call for a two-state solution. This *Intifada* thesis was endorsed by the PNA during the 1988 meeting in Algiers, and was regarded as the minimum demand capable of guaranteeing the re-establishment of an entity and the maintaining of the national identity.

Four years into the *Intifada*, Palestinian-Israeli negotiations began on an official level, based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the 'land-for-peace' formula. The negotiation process exposed a leadership crisis that evolved as a result of growing disagreement over who should be represented by whom, and who exactly should eventually go to the negotiation table. It was the 'inside' who convinced the 'outside' to go ahead and overcome the humiliating conditions that the Israeli Government had imposed on the Palestinian people by going to the Madrid Peace Conference. The 'inside' was active and productive in two different respects, namely, in confronting the occupiers on the ground and in drafting scenarios and proposals for an interim period. The 'outside', meanwhile, became worried about the future role of the 'inside' and opened secret channels with the Israelis, one of which led to the Oslo Accords. As we all know, Oslo did not bring a final solution, but it did lead to a major breakthrough inasmuch as mutual official recognition was finally achieved.

The whole world is well aware of the fact that 'autonomy' throughout a transitional phase will not satisfy the Palestinian yearning for an independent state. The Palestinians are still facing historical challenges with regard to their institution-building processes and statehood, namely to develop and unite their ranks under one national identity on the soil of Palestine - the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem, the capital - in order to build a democratic system, i.e., elected representatives, an elected president, and an executive authority to govern society.

# THE PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Ziad Abu Amr

*PLC Member (Gaza Constituency), and  
Professor of Political Science, Birzeit University*

I would like to contextualize the PLC in the hope of arriving at a better understanding of its workings. Understanding the background and circumstances within which the PLC evolved and now operates is essential in evaluating its successes and failures as well as possible future pitfalls and opportunities for improvements.

Initially both the PNA and the Israelis had serious doubts about allowing elections for the PLC to even occur. This raises the question of why these two parties did not stop them from taking place. It seems the answer lies in the fact that they both saw the elections as being a way of supporting their aspirations in the peace process. However, this is not how the situation has turned out, and Arafat and the Israelis have thus begun to try to restrict the PLC's activities. Indeed, Israeli behavior towards the body has shown that Israel is not interested in a democratic Palestinian political entity - as it had often claimed to be in the past - now that it realizes that such a government may not follow the dictates of the Israeli Government.

The January 1996 elections were a remarkable event. For some time before the elections, there had been social malaise among Palestinians as they became increasingly disenchanted with the PLO-Israeli agreements, the conditions of their daily lives, and the prospects for progress towards an equitable future peace. The elections were seen as a way out of the stagnant political situation and a move towards national independence. Additionally, the historic importance and novelty of the first-ever Palestinian elections aroused a great deal of popular enthusiasm. Palestinian society was mobilized more than at any time since the enthusiastic days of the *Intifada*. Unfortunately, with the novelty gone, and with the dashing of many people's hopes of the PLC rapidly solving problems in Palestinian society, the next elections may not inspire the same enthusiasm. It seems that the

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a roundtable meeting held at PASSIA on 25 July 1996.

This is the backdrop against which the PLC arose. Let us look at some of the PLC's activities to see what lessons can be learned.

On the positive side, there were some encouraging signs during the first several months of the PLC's activities. The members have shown exceptional commitment and dedication to their task and have been working hard to create the foundations of a legislative body independent of Arafat. In other words, there is a realization among many members that there is a need to institutionalize the PLC so that it becomes a stable structure that will serve the interests of Palestinians in the long run. Besides the commitment of the members and their efforts towards the long-term success of the PLC, the other encouraging element has been the freedom and frankness of discussion that has occurred in our meetings. I have been pleasantly surprised that no subject has been taboo and there has been earnest and often heated debate about even the most politically sensitive topics. This spirit of feeling free to express what one really feels is unmatched in the Arab World.

However, many factors have caused us to become extremely frustrated. The most serious of these is the relationship between the PLC and the executive branch of the PNA. In our first few months, the PLC has passed over 60 resolutions, which have all sat idly waiting to be signed by Chairman Arafat. We are told that it is normal to have competition between the legislative and executive branches in a democracy, but it seems that the balance of power in our case leans much too heavily in the favor of Arafat and his executive committee. Indeed, the PLC has no real leverage, and any time it threatens the executive's way of thinking, the result is simply that PLC activities are suspended. Examples abound of issues that we want to address but cannot. For instance, there are many prisoners sitting in PNA jails who have not yet been formally accused. The PLC staunchly opposes this practice but is utterly unable to do anything about it. Another important example is the Council's request to bring a draft of the Basic Law for discussion. Again, Arafat has used his power to prevent this from happening in order to concentrate control over this important issue in his executive branch. Suspending the PLC's ability to function is Arafat's standard way of frustrating its efforts to challenge his power.

Foremost among the problems between the branches is Arafat himself. First, it is hard for him to move from his *modus operandi* of the days of the revolutionary struggle - when he concentrated all power in himself - to a style in which he delegates more responsibility - as one would hope for in a democratic political system: it is difficult for him to get used to the idea of letting power emanate from sources other than himself. Thus, when we try to criticize, hold accountable, or question one of his ministers, he interprets

and popular legitimacy give him a great deal of power and often enable him to intimidate PLC members into acceding to his wishes. Thirdly, the ambiguousness of the Palestinian political entity gives Arafat power. Because he is the head of the PLO, the PNC and the PNA, each of which has a different mandate, he can often refer to the most convenient one to justify whatever action he feels is appropriate. Finally, there are many members of the Cabinet and throughout the PNA who are beholden to Arafat for their positions. They fear that if the PLC gains power it will threaten their own political power. They are thus a force that supports Arafat's efforts to stymie the PLC's goal of independent action.

The stranglehold of Arafat's executive branch over the legislative has, in turn, led to problems between the PLC and its constituency: because the legislative branch is largely impotent, members cannot respond to the demands of citizens, who then lose faith in the ability of their elected council and in the whole political system in general. Overall, member-constituency communication has been frequent and productive. The problem is that there are almost never new developments, rather continuations of established frustrations.

Another cause for frustration has been the lack of press coverage. Thus, while the PLC discusses important topics in a spirit of the frank exchange of ideas, the public is largely unaware that this is taking place. What is the practical benefit if more issues are discussed than in the Jordanian parliament if no one hears about it? The members of the press have all been co-opted by PNA money or cowed by its threats into refraining from printing material that challenges the official line.

## DISCUSSION

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi:* Are there any blocs or groupings forming in the PLC?

*Dr. Abu Amr:* Voting occurs almost exclusively according to members' positions on issues rather than to by groups with which members are affiliated. This is a positive point in that it eliminates the possibility of the dominance of a certain political majority over the voice of the opposition. The only possible grouping is that of several independent Islamists who walked out of a session as a group to protest Arafat's stalling on the issue of the Basic Law. This is a healthy development in that it showed the Council is starting to learn and implement parliamentary procedure.



racies.

*Dr. Abu Amr:* That is true in countries such as Australia but the specifics in the case of Palestine mean that party voting would probably just mean the tyranny of a majority directed by one individual.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* What is the PLC's policy towards Jerusalem?

*Dr. Abu Amr:* Jerusalem has only been discussed in reference to specific incidents, such as the effort of some Jews to pray in Al-Aqsa Mosque. An overall policy has not been developed. This reality stems from the fact that Jerusalem is a complicated issue: while most members agree in theory on a policy towards Jerusalem, the PLC does not want to put itself in the position of adopting a law that commits it to a policy that is impractical in the current political situation.

Furthermore, Jerusalem and other 'final status' issues are very important for Palestinians and this has caused a problem between the PLC and the people: namely, because the PLC is the only truly representative body for Palestinians, people have invested almost all their hopes and expectations in the Council. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the PLC is not very powerful and cannot fulfill people's aspirations.

Some of us tried to lower people's expectations during the election campaign because of Israel's and Arafat's power over the PLC, but citizens still look to the Council and are inevitably disappointed. Thus, the PLC has issued statements, but the press blackout and political restrictions hamper its effectiveness.

*Anita Vitello:* Now that we have heard about the limitations on the PLC, it would be helpful to hear what can be done.

*Dr. Abu Amr:* There is in fact very little that can be done. The PLC has passed supposedly binding resolutions and frequently issues statements, yet because of the press blackout these are usually heard by no one. Meanwhile, they basically never have any effect on those who should implement them because these people are controlled by Arafat. The PLC must make more strenuous efforts to wrest control from Arafat by using parliamentary procedure and other means to protest his heavy-handedness.

*Dr. Abu Amr:* I agree that this would be a good idea and is a possibility that the PLC must explore and develop. However, radio and television are the only really influential media because printed material is not that widely read. Even newspapers are considered more important for their social announcements than their use as a way of spreading information about political developments.

As for the PLC's relations with the Knesset and other official institutions of the Israeli government, I think it is important to establish such relations, but there needs to be a coordinated PLC policy on this. Without this policy, each member may meet with Israelis according to the circumstances. This can then send mixed messages about what kinds of meetings and arrangements for interaction the Palestinians consider legitimate. The Political Committee has been designated to draft a policy on this matter.

*Kai Boeckmann:* What would the role of the Council be in the negotiations?

*Dr. Abu Amr:* Technically there is no role since the agreements are between the PLO and the State of Israel. However, as the only official popularly elected Palestinian body, and as the representative of over two million Palestinians, the Council needs to lend its voice and assert itself to affect the negotiations on final status issues.

*Gines Oliver:* What would be the sources for drafting the Basic Law?

*Dr. Abu Amr:* Much of it will probably be based on Egyptian precedents due to the legal educational background of many of the Council members. There will also be a great deal of influence from Jordan because of the close ties in all areas between the two societies. Finally, there will be material taken from the West. It should be pointed out that all these main sources are from outside while the only internal source so far has been a draft supplied by Birzeit University. This draft was very encouraging and useful.

# GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN PALESTINE<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Salim Tamari

*Director, Institute of Jerusalem Studies, Jerusalem*

This intervention will address the manner in which the issue of identity among the Palestinians in the post-Oslo period has been transformed, not only by the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), but also by the developments in civil society that have redefined the relationship between the Palestinians who remained in their homeland and the Diaspora community.

At the risk of oversimplification we can see that prior to Oslo, the images of Palestinian dismemberment and the paradigms of exile dominated the debate over Palestinian identity. After Oslo we notice that juridical aspects of identity (citizenship, the Jordanian dimension, etc.) and the related issues of residency and access to citizenship under a regime of qualified sovereignty began to dominate this debate.

This dichotomy between the politics of exile and the politics of statehood camouflage a more profound - and more interesting - aspect of Palestinian identity: the question of localized consciousness on the one hand, and the tension that arose due to the Oslo dimension versus the regional dimension in the new Palestinian social formation on the other.

## Localized Consciousness

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries the local community in greater Syria, whether based on the village, city or regional unit, played an overriding role in defining Palestinian - and other Arab - loyalties. These points of reference, together with kinship, took precedence over religious and national identities. Localism was reinforced by a decentralized system of administration and regional markets, and was expressed through distinct recogniz-

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a workshop held at PASSIA on 3 November 1996. The event was part of a PASSIA project – jointly undertaken with the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv, and the Center for Strategic Studies, Amman - entitled "Palestine, Jordan, Israel – Building a Base for Common Scholarship and Understanding in the New Era of the Middle East."

and village potentates.

Modernity, marked by the campaign of Ibrahim Pasha and the Tanzimat following the collapse of Egyptian occupation, British colonial rule, and Zionism all contributed to the weakening of Palestinian localism and its contestation by a countrywide national identity, which often transcended the boundaries of modern Palestine, constituting the core of modern Palestinian regional nationalism.

This regional identity was itself riddled with ambivalence. At the turn of the century this ambivalence resulted from the contestation of regional Palestinian identity by those who felt that their main allegiance was to greater Syria (Bilad Ash-Sham) and that Palestine was part of Southern Syria (Istiqlal Party), and partly by the Pan-Arab supporters of King Faisal and the Arab Revolt. Both of these currents were the precursors of the Nasserist, Ba'thist and Syrian Nationalist currents that dominated Palestinian political trends in the 1950s and 1960s, and though they were eclipsed by the rise of the PLO, they nevertheless continue to contribute to its wider frame of reference in the cultural domain today. (There is a lot of debate today, for example, about the need to infuse Palestinian culture with an Arab dimension in the cultural periodicals.)

## The Politics of Exile and Identity

The decisive marker of contemporary Palestinian identity, however, has been the politics of exile. This is rooted in a social feature of the Palestinian experience, namely, that the bulk of the Palestinian leadership, together with the intelligentsia and its professional base - that is all those who played a critical role in the formulation of Palestinian national consciousness - were either expelled or exiled, or (as in the case of Mahmoud Darwish) chose exile.

The politics and poetics of exile became so dominant in this formative period that the conditions, aspirations and outlook of those Palestinians who remained in Palestine (almost half the total number of Palestinians) were virtually forgotten. They were rendered into an abstract object of glorification and heroism. In practice they were marginalized, but not only as a component of Palestinian politics: they were also subsumed as a residue, a remnant of a people whose real place was in the Diaspora. Subliminally there was an element of betrayal, due to the fact that they too were not exiled, or chose not to live in exile. This was the height of schizophrenia in the Palestinian national identity.

ouins in the Negev) of their national identity, and the *Intifada* of 1987. The former case established the struggle for equality with Israel society as a legitimate and recognized current within Palestinian politics. It brought more than ever the perspective and aspirations of the Arabs that had remained in Israel to the national conscience of the Palestinians as a whole. The *Intifada*, on the other hand, redressed the imbalance in the hegemony of the PLO over the 'forces of the inside'.

## Inside / Outside

The *Intifada* itself was the culmination of a protracted process by which the PLO, acting as the torchbearer of Diaspora politics, realized, after years of Arab encirclement and Israeli military subjugation, that it had to re-anchor itself in the emergent political will of the Palestinian homeland. This shift has been recognized, in formal terms, as a shift away from a strategy of liberation, towards adopting a strategy of independence. Such a shift not only required the adoption of the new pragmatic politics of territorial compromise and dialogue with the enemy, but also constituted a radical rupture with the established ideological heritage.

This heritage revolved around the notion of 'redemption through return' as the underpinning of all Palestinian political strategies. Its vision was amplified by a reconstitution of an idealized Palestinian past, which the dismembered Palestinian nation sought to recapture. Its vehicle was a combination of mass mobilization, armed struggle, and the linking of the exiled communities through the leadership of the PLO. The social base of these politics was the refugee camps in the Arab host countries, in addition to the mercantile / professional sectors in the Gulf countries and Jordan.

By contrast, the shift in the 1980s towards a 'territorial' strategy was a move in the direction of grounding Palestinian politics into the relatively stable (and conservative) communities of the West Bank and Gaza. Although they contained a large refugee component, these communities, to a large extent, constituted a historical continuity with the peasantry of the Palestinian highlands and their regional elites.

These stable communities, however, did not constitute a 'national' community. They did exhibit a high degree of nationalist consciousness, and increasingly - starting in the 1970s - began to articulate their political aspirations within the confines of the PLO. But unlike the 'external forces' in exile their leadership remained in the hands of the local regional elites, who derived their power, wealth and prestige from an extended network of kinship and putative identities, rooted distinctively in Nablus, Hebron, Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

The assumption of power by the PNA after the Cairo Agreement (1994) was therefore not only the beginning of the process of state-formation, but also the incorporation of those regional social groupings and political elites within a reconstructed national formation. The PLO through its cadres and relocated Diaspora bureaucracy thus performed a crucial integrating role for the segmented communities in the West Bank and Gaza, which the nationalist movement during 29 years of Israeli rule was unable to do. Because this process is still in a state of flux we are sometimes unable to see the forest from the trees. In the current debate about the role of the returnees in the allocation of positions and clout, references are made about familial and regional forces being over - or under - represented. Certainly the PNA (and Arafat) had to take the weight of these forces into account when deciding who to appoint to certain positions. Increasingly, however, we see a new national polity asserting itself, which is gradually transcending its constituent parts. The main victim of this corporate body has not been the regional elites but the private business sector.

This trend became more distinct during and after the elections for the Legislative Assembly in April of 1996. The campaign itself seemed to signal a return to familism and localism, but eventually the dominant forms of mobilization during the campaign reflected a mix of national and local concerns. The result was clearly the triumph of nationalist politics over localized localities. This was reflected not only by the program adopted by a majority of candidates - which was mostly rhetorical in content - but also by the background of candidates favored by the electorate, which displayed a clear preference for people with a history of national political activism and former refugees or exiles with a weak or non-existent local social base.

## The New Divide

Despite the current hegemony in Palestinian politics - the politics of the 'returnees' - I would argue that the hitherto dominant divide in Palestinian politics between outside/inside forces has been transcended by the current consolidation of the PNA. To the extent that the former divide still persists, it reflects the contestation over clout and patronage by a minority whose politics, social background and ideological predisposition is essentially the same as the 'native' community. One only detects a difference in matters of cultural socialization, with the returnees displaying a background (rooted in their exile experience) that is more urbane, secular, and alienated. The transplanted community is still in search of its hinges.

Palestinian pluralism, as a political form, is highly overrated, but it is nevertheless real; or at least it has a real kernel. It is rooted in the multiplicity of

mate in the ideological struggle between nationalist and leftist (or what was leftist) currents. Inside Palestine - and also within the Arab community in Israel - it is based on the voluntary coexistence between Islamist and nationalist political tendencies. An important contributor to this persistence of pluralism is a style of leadership that so far has preferred the politics of co-optation and patronage over the politics of confrontation and one-party control. Today we witness a significant deviation from this tradition, according to which the institutions of civil society and the variety of communal groupings that emerged during decades of occupation are engaged in a new battle for democratic space against an emergent state power.

## **Conclusion: Civil Society and the End of 'Embryonism'**

During the 1980s the strategy that prevailed within Palestinian mass organizations was one of 'embryonism'. This is the term that refers to the belief of a variety of resistance groups that since Israeli occupation is likely to prevail for an extended period, the task of Palestinian resistance inside the West Bank and Gaza was to establish alternative organs of power, both at the institutional level (municipalities, universities, schools, etc.), and in the provision of public services in the arenas of health, credit, day-care, and so on. Politically these institutions and services will ultimately converge in establishing an alternative organ of power to the colonial state apparatus. When the historical moment comes, these 'embryonic' institutions will act as the nascent alternative state in the making. Any future Palestinian state will have to establish its power base on foundations of these nascent organs.

As it happened this strategy proved to be completely mistaken in anticipating the nature of the power arrangement that actually emerged with the establishment of the PNA. At one level the nature of these institutions of civil society were much more attuned to organizing resistance than to establishing sustainable institutions of governance. But basically their 'failure' was due to a willful choice by the PLO to establish its power base on a combination of alliances with local social elites and the returning cadres of the PLO. The emergent state institutions in Palestine have much more in common with neighboring Arab regimes than with institutions of civil society established during years of resistance. Whatever future exists for the residual mass organizations that are still active today would seem to be the search to build an oppositional force that would focus on democracy, civic rights, and political pluralism. The natural arena for this battle includes the legislative assembly, the municipal council, and extra-parliamentary bodies like the media.

# POLITICAL TRENDS AND THE NEW ELITES IN PALESTINE<sup>1</sup>

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The choice of the title 'Political Trends and the New Elites' belies a certain preference for elite theory, which sees a pivotal role for elites in contrast to social movements, political parties and a more open class society. My observation is by no means meant as an attack on the conference organizers and on their political background or disposition; it is simply a thought. The title, however, may actually point to factual developments whereby Palestinian society is witnessing the circulation of elites or the creation of new ones as a means of distributing power, rather than other social manifestations.

Before proceeding further, a definition of 'elites' would perhaps make an appropriate introduction. The word 'elites' usually denotes a hierarchy or ranking of people according to a structure of positions whether in the political, economic, professional, military, academic or other realms. According to some people, it is the attributes or characteristics of certain individuals that determine how far he will reach; thus, those with the appropriate attributes will eventually reach the top and find themselves in a position of power *vis-à-vis* others in the structure or in society at large.

Others argue, meanwhile, that the structure of positions is due to the complexity and organizational needs of modern societies. Historically, only a small number of people of any one society exercise political and other powers in society. The question, however, is how these individuals end up at the top of the structure or pyramid of power, wealth, influence, prestige, etc., ... and who are the people likely to become members of the various elites? Another question is whether the elites actually represent the majority of the population or are they 'elites' in the sense that they have their own 'clubbish' tendencies that allow for some circulation of membership but impede the recruitment of members from outside their circles.<sup>2</sup> An important

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at PASSIA on 4 November 1996 as part of a joint project (with the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv, and the Center for Strategic Studies, Amman) entitled "Palestine, Jordan, Israel - Building a Base for Common Scholarship and Understanding in the New Era of the Middle East."

<sup>2</sup> See William A. Welsh, *Leaders and Elites*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979. The book gives definitions and analyses of elites in different political contexts.



then we have to be careful not to underestimate other social, economic and political forces that control the society. In addition, we have to admit that by choosing this elite-approach we are in effect taking an authoritarian and conservative view of society.

## Political Development and Elite Competition

For the sake of the argument implicit in the title, I would undertake, after a brief historical overview, to examine the development and institutionalization of the PNA as an elite phenomenon that involves competition among various Palestinian political elites. In addition, I would argue that the fragmentation and cantonization of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem limits and constrains the integration of the whole society and hence the ability of the Palestinian political elite to effectively standardize and enforce its power and influence across the three territories. Besides, the trend towards regionalization and the effects attendant on globalization whether in technological, economic or consumer matters constitute forces that serve to further constrain and limit the power and influence of the Palestinian political elite.

## Elite Historical Basis

The historical basis for the emergence of the Palestinian elite was religious and it revolved around the Islamic *Fath* of the country. In particular, families associated with the *Fath*, with the holy places in Jerusalem and other localities, with Salah Ed-Din and with other religious personalities, associations and functions assumed traditionally elitist positions in Palestinian society. As a result, these families came to have a special status in the society and referring to them as 'notable' families was an accepted practice. Throughout the centuries, these families were able to use their religion-based privileged status to gain more advantages and power in economic, political, social and other areas. Thus, these families became dominant and assumed the overall leadership of the Palestinians. An outstanding example of this dominance is the family politics and coalition during the British Mandate period.<sup>3</sup>

With the disintegration of Palestine and the creation of Israel in 1948, the family elite was jolted from its position of power but continued to assume important functions. Jordan integrated the Palestinian family elite into its administrative, political, economic and social structure. Other family elite members made it elsewhere in the Arab World or beyond. The role of the

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<sup>3</sup> See author's master's thesis on *Leading Palestinian Families and their Socioeconomic and Political Impact, 1917-1948*.

after 1948, in spite of the fact that it was seriously weakened first, due to the failure suffered by the leadership of elite families in 1948 and then, due to the shift in the center of power from the West Bank to the East Bank, between 1948 and 1967.

In addition, Palestinian family elites were characterized as self-contained groups whose primary motivation was their own interests and those of their kin rather than those of the society as a whole. This localism and familism, if one wishes, contributed to the weakness of family elites and their potential role as a political and social leadership for the whole society in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

## The PLO as a Challenge to Traditional Bases of Elitism

With the War of 1967 and the emergence of the PLO, family elites received yet another jolt. The basis for extending influence and power over the whole society became political commitment and involvement. Revolutionary ideology of liberating Palestine became a basis for status, privilege and elitism rather than the old systems and traditional bases. It could be argued that PLO elitism was a combination of traditional and modern bases, of which the latter was related to engagement in the political and military struggle to recover Palestine.

It was clear, however, that elitism as a social manifestation of power relationships in Palestinian society continued and, in one sense, with the hierarchical political and quasi-military organization of the PLO this elitism was reinforced. The PLO, according to another view, sought to be the major if not only center of power in Palestinian society. Accordingly, it was not interested in the emergence of a competing power in the Occupied Territories; hence, the passive role allotted to the inhabitants of the territories that focused on non-cooperation with the Israeli authorities. When there was a perceived threat to the influence of the PLO center, as with the autonomy plan of the late 1970s, the PLO hurriedly established bodies, such as the National Guidance Committee in 1978, to consolidate the center-periphery relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Moving on to more recent history, the local leadership and elite of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was not capable of transforming itself into a viable national leadership. To a great extent, the allegiance of the overwhelming

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<sup>4</sup> Shaul Mishal, "Nationalism through Localism: Some Observations on the West Bank Political Elite", in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4, October 1981 pp. 480-481.

<sup>5</sup> Shmuel Sandler and Hillel Frisch, "Evaluating Shared Rule Arrangements on the West Bank: The Problem of Palestinian Communal Structure", in *Middle East Focus: Canada's Magazine on the Contemporary Middle East*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (May 1984), p. 9, 12.

cies of fragmentation and cantonization of towns and villages of the West Bank and Gaza Strip also played their role in limiting the possible emergence of a society-wide leadership. When the Israelis were looking for a leadership capable of delivering, there was no question that such a leadership existed only within the PLO. Local elites could deliver only at the local level under certain circumstances but they definitely could not deliver at the national level. The Oslo process is the prime example: while the 'local' Palestinian delegation was sitting down in Washington to negotiate, the top decision makers in the PLO were conducting parallel secret negotiations. It was clear to everyone that only the Oslo negotiators could deliver.

## **Palestinian Society: Is it Run by Elites?**

The return to the homeland of the PLO and the transformation of power from a liberation movement to a national government necessitates asking if Palestinian society is being run by elites. The hierarchical structures, whether in politics, security or governmental administration point to the presence of elites that sit at the top of these hierarchies and exercise influence and control. But hierarchical structures by themselves do not necessarily point to elite-hegemony or to the absence of social and political forces that vie for power and influence with those in formal power positions.

The institutionalization of Palestinian government also changed the role of grassroot organizations and political groups. No longer is the role expected from these organizations and groups focused on mass mobilization to confront and end occupation. Rather, they are expected to coordinate with the National Authority and to transform themselves into organizations that work toward the same political goals as prescribed by the political leadership.

The relationship between the new elites in the PNA and the local elites in various spheres differs according to need and mutual interests. Thus, it is clear that the PLO adopted the policy of co-optation of members of family elites whether in Jerusalem, the West Bank or Gaza. The relationship is thus mutually reinforcing: the PNA needs these members, who in turn need the PNA to legitimize their position of relative privilege and prestige in the society. Both benefit from the relationship that confirms that power relationships in Palestinian society, under the new conditions, are elite-based.

An important question that needs to be addressed is how much of a presence does the Palestinian political and governing elite have in the economic and entrepreneurial spheres? The relevance of this question concerns the practical implications it has on the nature of the social structure, the distribution of wealth in the society, and Palestinian politics in general.

do they have with intellectuals and academic elites? The common complaint that intellectuals and academics feel marginalized may in fact be related to the question of recruitment of new elite members and its accompanying problems. It is expected that in elite-based social structures, academics and intellectuals usually play a bridging role between the elites and other groups in the society. In one sense, some intellectuals and academics end up becoming the legitimizing spokespersons for the elites. With the coming home of the PLO, its strongest popular base is in effect the thousands of the rank and file who returned home with its leadership. Thus, there is no apparent pressing need to use the intermediary function of academics and intellectuals in the West Bank and Gaza to win a broader base of potential recruits.

## Elites: Are They Best for Transitional Periods?

In periods of transition, the potential for loss of order and control is greatest especially when a whole society is involved. Accordingly, there are pressures, both from within the society and from outside, for social structures that would ensure law and order and that would provide the needed stability. Apparently, elite-based social structures are more qualified to fulfill this function since they do not have to answer for a wider constituency and hence their ability to deal directly and effectively with sources of instability for the society and its governance system.

This view, however, should not be considered out of specific socioeconomic and political contexts. If we take the Palestinian case, the history of Israeli occupation and its resistance has meant that there was no legitimate civil authority for almost a third of a century. Accordingly, what emerged during this period were grassroots political, social and economic organizations, which operated relatively freely in the broader context of occupation and the oppression it generated. This accordingly has meant certain expectations of the population with respect to the conduct of government and civil life. These expectations are not necessarily in agreement with the thesis that elite-based social structures are best for transitional periods. In fact, some would argue that the overwhelming participation of Palestinians in the elections for the Administrative 'Legislative' Council and for the President of the PNA, on 20 January 1996, is proof of exactly the opposite point of view: the need for democratic and pluralist systems that would secure the needed stability for the society and for the governing authority. Thus, exit and opinion polls conducted prior to and on election day show Palestinian voter expectations of an open and free system of governance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See polls conducted by the JMCC, Jerusalem and CPRS, Nablus on the topic of elections and voter expectations.

With the fragmentation and cantonization of the territories, the result of Israel's obsession with security, the elite-based structure would have to accommodate itself to the effects of such fragmentation. Assuming that the structure is indeed elite-based, then the problem becomes, how would the political elite maintain its hegemony over three different territories, each with its own unique characteristics? The tendency to seek a security-oriented answer is strong because, in effect, it is the most straightforward and energy saving answer especially when prevailing conditions are those of transition and fragmentation. But there are limits for the security-oriented answer, as the situation of East Jerusalem clearly illustrates and as the differences in socioeconomic, demographic and political contexts between the West Bank and Gaza illustrate. It follows then that elite-based structures that tend to rely on control methods to ensure stability would not necessarily be ideal in a situation such as that existing in the Palestinian Territories.

The security-oriented answer is feasible when relations between the PNA and the Israeli Government are smooth and there is agreement on issues and probable future scenarios. But when, as with the present Israeli Government, there are serious differences and divisions then the security-oriented answer has no legitimization within the Palestinian political context. The security-oriented answer has one major flaw because its reading of the Palestinian scene is strictly political. Politics is one of the concerns of Palestinians but it is not the overwhelming concern. In fact, there are indications that almost 50 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip regards economic issues as being more important.<sup>7</sup>

Of interest is the fact that in a survey conducted on a national sample in the first half of 1995, the ranking of influential groups in the society revealed popular perceptions of the stratification system that may come as a surprise to the groups ranked. The following list shows in order of frequency the various groups that were selected (*Source: Hanf and Sabella, Ibid. p. 67*):

<b>Group</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
University professors	90
Top levels of the security and police systems	83
Government members	78
Local political personalities	76
PLO leaders	75
Industrialists, bank managers, big merchants	75
Religious personalities/heads of religious communities	74
Spokespersons of the various political groups	71
Heads and members of municipal and village councils	59
Hotel owners and tourist and travel agents	47
Landowners	43
Heads of families/hamulas	40
Muhktars	31

<sup>7</sup> Theodor Hanf and Bernard Sabella, *A Date with Democracy: Palestinians on Society and Politics - An Empirical Survey*, Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, Freiburg, 1996, p. 65.

mercial, religious, tourist, local-municipal, real estate and traditional-family. Palestinians are intelligent since they assess, outside of the academic elite, who in fact has power and influence in the society. The ranking of the security and police top levels before the political elite makes sense since they are the ones to implement and have immediate access to the tools of power and control. It is clear that leadership at the local level and traditional family leadership no longer carry the influence and prestige they once had. The orientation of the population is towards national elites and influential groups rather than local groups. The ranking of university professors at the top of the list should be understood with this perspective in mind. In addition, the prestige accrued by university professors is tied to the high value attached to education by the society as a whole.

## Open Social Structure: Overcoming Constraints of Elitism and Fragmentation

Palestinians understand well the need for the integration of their society. The ranking of the influential groups in the list above is just one simple confirmation. Another is the fact that almost two thirds of Palestinians perceive themselves and their society as middle class. The tendency among the population is not towards an 'elitist' social structure but more towards an open social system.<sup>8</sup> Palestinian popular visions of the political order point also to a commitment by the population to democracy, government accountability, independent courts and freedom of the press. In addition, there is a strong desire for social equality among Palestinians, which is seen as dependent on the adoption of a wise fiscal policy by the government. At the same time, there is a rejection of any state-controlled economy.<sup>9</sup>

But where did Palestinians get all these ideas from? Clearly a variety of factors are responsible: the struggle against Israeli occupation and the development of grassroots organizations both internally and externally, the emphasis on education, contacts with Israeli society, technological change and the shop-keeping and entrepreneurial spirit of Palestinians. They are also aware of their limits as over three quarters of Palestinians believe that regional economic cooperation is needed in order for states to survive. Over seven tenths believe that coordination and cooperation will characterize relations with Jordan in the long run.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pp. 100-101.

with rising expectations as to economic development, political discourse and to a pluralist and open nature of society and its structures. Clearly it is much more difficult to fulfill these expectations without an open system of governance and institutionalization of power. In the short run, Palestinian society may do without such institutionalization. But there is serious doubt that in the long run it will succeed in overcoming the difficult challenges that lie ahead without an open social system and institutionalization.

## Conclusion

Elite-based social structures may be convenient for societies that are closed and that are characterized by conservatism and authoritarianism. In the Palestinian case, elite-based structures face constraints and limitations primarily from within the society. Some external factors or actors, such as Israel, are more comfortable with elite-based structures especially in matters pertaining to security. At the same time, these actors weaken the influence and power of the Palestinian elite-based structures by following policies of fragmentation and cantonization in the three Palestinian territories. Palestinian elites thus fall under conflicting pressure from within and without the society.

The way out of the dilemmas confronting Palestinian society is through the adoption of policies that would encourage the development of open systems of social structure, government accountability, economic development and institutionalization of power and influence. Indications are abundant that Palestinians are an intelligent and hard-working people: opportunities should become available to them to prove that they can mold a free and democratic society. In an age of regionalization and globalization, what applies to the Palestinians applies to their neighbors. Together, we can all help shape the future of our individual societies and the future of our region as a whole.

# POLICY IMPERATIVES FOR PALESTINE - VIEW FROM THE PNA<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Any policy on the Palestinian agenda is now an imperative. Palestine is still in the embryonic stage of development, and the general situation facing it is one of crisis.

## Present Crisis

The peace process is in a crisis, and there is in no mutual confidence between the parties involved in the negotiations - the Palestinians and the Israelis. This lack of confidence is a result of the differences between the Israeli Labor-led government and the Likud-led government.

*Labor government:* The general atmosphere was one of support for the peace process and for the efforts to arrive at a historic peace agreement. The government had a commitment to the peace process and to the transition to peace, despite the obstacles.

*Likud government:* There is no positive atmosphere regarding the peace process. The government is more intent on re-negotiating the agreements. There is a general negative attitude towards the process, the Palestinians, the Arab World and the international community. There is also a lack of governmental will to go ahead with what has been chartered in the accords.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given as part of a PASSIA Seminar on *The Foreign Policies of Arab States* on 20 December 1996.



For the first time, the Palestinian position is more readily understood and supported by the international community. We have kept our basic demand very simple, clear and to the point - to implement the signed agreements. This will lead to local, regional and international peace, which is clearly understood by countries around the world. Moreover, we have signed agreements with a state, a country, not a party or person.

The Palestinians always make the mistake, when talking about the peace process, of assuming that we have signed a peace accord. We have not signed a peace accord with Israel, we have only signed a declaration of principles. If it is implemented, we will arrive, in five years, to a stage where we - like Egypt and Jordan - will sign a peace agreement or accord with Israel. Thus, one should not criticize the PNA for its peace accords because they are not meant to ensure peace, but to serve as a mechanism for achieving peace.

## Policy Imperatives for the Palestinians

Of highest priority to the Palestinians is the implementation of all agreements (DoP of 13 September 1993, Cairo Agreement of 4 May 1994, Paris Economic Accords of September 1994, Oslo II Agreement of 28 September 1995, and various technical agreements).

The PNA demands concerning implementation of the agreements revolve around the following issues:

- Hebron withdrawal: there has been no agreement until now because Israel is demanding to re-negotiate the agreement and is trying to expand its settlements. It wants control over one-third of the city and demands the right to engage in 'hot pursuit';
- the economic siege/blockage;
- non-implementation of the safe passage;
- bypass roads: Israel is still expropriating land to build roads;
- ports: the air and seaports in Gaza, whose opening the Israelis are delaying, despite the fact that we agreed to there being an Israeli presence;
- expropriation and confiscation of land;
- prisoners: the previous Israeli cabinet, justice minister and president approved the release of 2,500 prisoners who are still in jail;
- further redeployment: this is the litmus test and the plan of action for the interim agreements. The areas were divided into A, B and C - to

September 1996. Accordingly, area B becomes A, area C becomes B then A, until eventually all of the West Bank becomes area A, i.e., under Palestinian control.

## Final Status Issues

The final status issues are the most important and the most difficult issues. They are all imperatives and will comprise the cornerstone of peace in the region. They include the following:

- Jerusalem: a central question for everyone;
- settlements;
- borders: the questions of sovereignty, statehood, etc.;
- water;
- refugees and displaced persons (the number is under dispute): our position on refugees is in accordance with UN Resolution 194; we will not accept any other basis. Israel does not recognize children of the original refugees. The year 1994 marked an important step towards Israeli acceptance of 194 but Israel has not attended the refugee working group meetings since then. There is currently a PLO committee in Gaza, led by Hassan Abdul Rahman, who is in charge of this issue.

## Security Situation

Concerning the security of the Palestinians both in general and in regards to the Israelis, we want to establish a democratic state structure and the elections, which were to a large extent free, were a step towards this. There is extremism on both sides and we believe that the two groups of extremists are making a coordinated attempt to torpedo the peace process.

The PNA is obliged, by the agreements, to hand over to Israel any perpetrators who are not tried and punished according to normal legal procedure. We have to either convict them or turn them over. It is a political choice, and during the recent incident we were threatened with a continuation of the siege on Ramallah. Palestine is not an independent state, but a self-governing authority restricted by agreements. Moreover, many perpetrators often hand themselves over to avoid being either caught or killed by the Israelis. There is a clear link between what we can do domestically and our agreement with Israel. Israel prefers having a Palestinian dictatorship.

In terms of economic development, we want a normal, functioning economy, with low unemployment and a thriving private sector. Unfortunately, the PNA is faced with the following problems:

- *Lack of funds:* There was never any money to begin with and thus no foundations for the state. We are dealing on one side with an international agreement and donors, and on the other with Israel. The aid that the donors speak about is not always forthcoming, and only one-third of what has been promised has actually been allocated.
- *Failed agreements:* Israel is trying to block any economic agreements that do not meet the economic desires of Israel. They are allowing Israeli goods into the Palestinian market but do not allow for the free movement of Palestinian goods. The economic agreements are not in favor of the Palestinians, but they were the best we could succeed in reaching.
- *Closures:* The economic situation is further complicated by the closure, which is preventing normal economic activity and causing unemployment. We once had a boom of direct foreign investment, especially in Nablus and Ramallah, but many investment opportunities have diminished with the situation.

## Issues Facing the Society

There are also various issues facing the society, including the following:

- *Institution building versus clans:* The rule of tribes has been a major factor in the social ties, and people prefer to solve social problems and political issues according to tribal (*ashir*) laws.
- *Ruled law versus tribal law:* Palestinian law is based on and influenced by seven laws - Israeli, Ottoman, Jordanian, British, Egyptian, PLO and PNA. There are different laws in all areas, and the laws in Gaza are different to those in the West Bank. The PNA is trying to codify them all into a single law.
- *The PNA image on the streets - apathy versus support versus resistance:* The PNA has been under criticism for its human rights violations and it recognizes that this is an issue. It has been trying to institutionalize the teaching of human rights values in the schools of the public security agencies and to hold seminars on human rights issues.

For the first time, and in spite of some initial hesitance of Syria and Libya, there has been total Arab support for the PNA's position with regards to the peace process and its demands. There is more solidarity with regard to the Palestine Question than previously, and all the Arab nations have supported the DoP and Oslo.

The region is also facing the conflict between Syria and Israel, which is quite complicated. It is a conflict of *primos-inter-paris* - the first among equals. There is also the question of Egypt versus Jordan and which one is the focal point of the Middle East. Israel, as part of the region, has to accept the primary role of Egypt as a social, political and cultural leader.

## **Syria**

Our relations with Syria have been bad for reasons related to politics, idiosyncrasies, security issues, mistrust, etc. The current relations between us are basically the culmination of a negative relationship that evolved during the 1970s with the Syrian intervention in PLO affairs, which led to splits within the PLO and Fatah. Until the 1990s, there were over 6,200 PLO/Palestinian prisoners in Syrian prisons: at least two of them have been there since 1966.

During the Gulf War, we were on two different fronts, with Syria backing the US and the PLO backing Iraq. The peace process was the bottom line in the conflict with Syria, with Syria rejecting the Palestinian acceptance of the peace process. The Palestinians argue that there are two levels in the talks: the Palestinian level and the Arab level. The Palestinian side is on a lower level playing field than the Arab states, but Syria does not understand or accept this. The Syrians felt antagonized and left out by the process, and believed that they had not been consulted in the matter. They were offended, and subsequently dropped out of the talks. Only recently has the PNA reached a similar level to the Arab states, and only in the recent Arab Summit did Syria accept the Palestinian position in the peace process.

Farouq Kaddoumi, who is second in command in the PLO, has his own interpretation of the peace process. In fact, he was a major supporter and convinced many to join him in his support in 1993. The agreement would not have passed the central council of the PLO without his intervention. He has a sound and legal position: moreover, he understands the relationship and idiosyncrasies between Arafat and Assad who share no mutual understanding. The Ba'athists will never forgive Fatah for taking away its mass support in the Arab World.

and Syria in their negotiations and regarding the implementation of UN Resolution 425. The PLO is trying to improve its relationship with the Lebanese regime, which is skeptical of the PLO's role in Lebanon.

### **Jordan**

Confederation with Jordan is one of the hypothetical outcomes of future negotiations. Legally we are obliged to implement the PNC decision of 1993, i.e., to establish two states. We may eventually have a confederated state, i.e., some kind of a Palestinian-Jordanian union, but we first need our own independent state. Many support the idea of a confederation, but in fact it is not practical because we have two different political systems - a monarchy and a democracy. How can we combine practically? Many issues have to be worked out and there are strong lobbies on both sides that are against the notion of confederation. Attempts at confederation have not worked out in the past, for example, the Iraqi-Jordanian confederation. Moreover, the US and the Arab nations may not allow it.

Palestinian-Jordanian relations are good, and we have even signed an economic agreement. King Hussein was the first Arab leader to be received on PNA territory. There are also extensive Palestinian-Jordanian social relations.

## **International Relations**

The PNA's relationship with the international community is extremely important. Over time, the PLO and the PNA have been accepted, and most countries accept the Palestinian point of view, which is the demand to implement the agreements. This relationship is reflected by the many mutual governmental visits: Chairman Arafat, in addition to other Palestinian officials, has visited many foreign countries. In return, various foreign heads of state have visited the PNA, such as Chirac. In contrast to this relationship, Israel has been antagonizing its two main supporters, i.e., the US and the EU.

As for the donor countries, two-thirds of the funds promised to the PNA have not been allocated. The World Bank may be squeezing the PNA politically and the EU countries have long implementation periods. European aid is more forthcoming through direct bilateral aid than through EU aid, and the EU countries prefer bilateral relations.

# PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE PEACE PROCESS<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
*Head of PASSIA, Jerusalem*

To give a general overview or background to the current situation of the peace process, one can say that we now find ourselves in a gray area where there is no black and no white. In Oslo, a culture of peace was started between Palestinians and Israelis based on acknowledgment of the other and mutual recognition. This encompassed a revolution in thinking on the part of the Palestinians: the acceptance of a two-state solution and a reduction of the Palestinian territory to 22 percent of its original size. But it also encompassed a revolution on the part of the Israelis: the acceptance of the PLO as partner in negotiations.

Israel today, especially since the murder of Rabin and the election of Netanyahu, is a divided society. The agreement in Oslo between Labor and the PLO was built on the idea that separation of the two societies is the only way to achieve peace; this separation should be built on the principles of portioning, phasing and testing. Likud, however, does not want to leave, but to share the West Bank. Since the election of Netanyahu, the culture of peace has been forgotten, and he has invited the whole region to a culture of fear. During the attempts at crisis management in Washington following the opening of the tunnel in September, the Likud recognized Arafat, but Netanyahu still refuses to accept the Palestinians as equal partners. It is questionable if the Palestinians can go through all the suffering again - the uprooting of trees, the demolition of houses, the closures - in order to convince Likud of the need for a culture of peace.

For a long time, no Israeli would deal with the PLO because they were considered terrorists. In Oslo, they saw that there is no alternative to Arafat and now this is even recognized by Netanyahu. The other thing is: Who created Hamas in the first place? It was Israel that encouraged this alternative leadership. Now, you cannot put the *genie* back into the bottle as easily.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a briefing session (Delegation from the Canadian Embassy, Tel Aviv) held at PASSIA on 22 March 1997.

in the political landscape, for example, by founding the Islamic Salvation Front in Gaza. We should not make it an enemy; dialogue is the tool. The Tel Aviv bombing springs out of the mentality of revenge, out of the mentality of the Middle East that demands 'an eye for an eye'. It is the same mentality that demanded the killing of Yahya Ayyash.

Arafat is a maestro of tactics. He cannot ignore or work against Hamas. He has to play the card of Hamas. He has to feed Hamas, nurture it and use it in the game with Israel. During this transition phase, he wants and needs everybody to be with him in the house. Thus, he has already appointed two people affiliated with Hamas as ministers.

Netanyahu is inviting people to conflict. This has been more than obvious in his decision to start building the new settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim. Arafat has so far controlled all the protest marches, but how much longer will he be able to contain people's frustrations and anger? The suicide attack in Tel Aviv has shown that Arafat cannot control everything any longer. But also, Hamas is part of the Palestinian house. Islam is deep-rooted in Palestinian society and it can easily be politicized. Netanyahu has underestimated this. Now, the culture of fear is governing the scene; there is no more trust between Palestinians and Israelis.

We should not leave Arafat and Netanyahu alone in this situation. The peace process has a regional dimension that should not be ignored. We should invite the regional leaders to join in the efforts to move forward with the peace process. We should involve Mubarak and King Hussein in the process. What we have been building since Oslo are not just illusions; thus, we should not let one person turn back the clock because he wants to impose his personal debacle, his corruption, on the region.

Cairo has supported the process from the beginning; it has even taken Arafat by the hand and led him to the negotiation table. For Arafat, Cairo is the only Arab strategic alliance in the peace process because of three reasons: Camp David, the Egyptian-Washington alliance and the Egyptian-Gaza special relationship.

Now, talking about Amman, everything that affects the Palestinians also affects the Jordanians. There is a hidden agenda on the Palestinian-Jordanian relationship: the so-called Jordanian option that has been propagated by Likud as well as by Labor, the hatred between King Hussein and Arafat with the Palestinian fear of Jordanian interference in Palestinian issues and the fact that the West Bank is a prison without access to Jordan. It needs the access over the Allenby Bridge to breathe.

cess of the peace process. Thus, we need to open it up. Arafat needs to know that he is not alone, and Israel needs to see that it is not ghettoized but welcomed in the region.

We are now going through a phase when people are shaken, afraid, worried and confused. Peace cannot be exclusive, peace must be on a basis of equality and justice. We must send a message to the Israeli public opinion so that the Israelis realize that we are not prepared to lose everything. If not, we will all become Hamas. We will all become so depressed with nothing left to lose that we will be ready to sacrifice our lives.

Netanyahu is not in favor of separation, he wants a *de facto* bi-national state with two political regimes; he favors a system of apartheid. How can we convince Israeli public opinion that we need a government that negotiates with us?

What will happen when Arafat dies? It took us 40 years to build up this leader and to develop him from a 'terrorist' into an acknowledged leader and partner in international organizations. There is no other legitimized, elected leader. When Arafat is not there any more, we will be back to square number one. To have the peace process fail would also be a major setback to the democratization of Palestinian society. In the first elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), we have had an overwhelming majority of Fatah candidates. It is the old guards of the PLO, the nobles and the young generation of the *Intifada* that have been elected. The question is if this will indeed be the new leadership. Now, they have to prove their ability as leaders; the old assets will not be enough. People such as Hanan Ashrawi have already been elected because they have proven themselves.

As for the role of the Israeli Arabs in the peace process, they could have a certain impact but the problem is that they are divided in four groups: the ones that seek autonomy within Israel, the ones that want to maintain their Israeli citizenship but in an Israel that does not consider itself as an exclusive Jewish state, the ones that want to become Palestinian citizens, resident in Israel and the ones that have the idea of exchanging settlements for refugees. There is no consensus in the Israeli Arab community, and sometimes there are even confrontations. The majority do not have an explicit position in the transition process; they want to wait for its results and then think about their positions.



# THE FUTURE OF THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Gabi Baramki

*Advisor, Ministry of Higher Education*

and

Dr. Ma'rei Abdul Rahman

*General Director, PLO Department for Arab and International Relations*

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi:* I have the pleasure of welcoming you all to this roundtable discussion, the purpose of which is to address the future of the Palestinian identity, and to discuss the relationship between returnees and the people in the homeland, as well as the future of the PLO. For the past three decades, the PLO has been the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Whilst Palestinians are currently building a civil society in part of the homeland under the umbrella of the PNA and the elected representatives of the Legislative Council, the question is how the relationships between the PLO, the PNA, and their constituencies in the homeland as well as in the Diaspora are likely to develop.

We all know about the important role Palestinians have played in the development of the Arab identity and the Arab National Movement, and it was only in the 1960s, that Palestinians moved away from depending on the Arab consensus to achieve Palestinian self-determination. The Arabs in general moved from *qaumiya* [Pan-Arabism] to *iqlimiya* [regionalism] and started to struggle for a Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian or Iraqi identity. Meanwhile, Palestinians started to develop their own national movement in various dimensions.

In the late 1960s, there was a serious decline in the role of the Palestinian elite, i.e., the big families, landlords, and intelligentsia, and the society witnessed the emergence of middle-class groups from amongst businessmen and residents of the refugee camps. They succeeded in redirecting the PLO, which was established during the Arab Summit of 1964. The PLO remained, from 1969 until Oslo, the embodiment of Palestinian national ambition. Throughout all these years, what helped to maintain and strengthen

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a presentation and roundtable discussion that took place at PASSIA on 10 May 1997.

Today, following the signing of the Oslo agreements in 1993 and the historical mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO, Palestinians are negotiating with the Zionist leaders. Does this mean that the dimension of the resistance movement that has united Palestinians and helped them to maintain their national identity and struggle for freedom and independence has been lost? How do Palestinians define themselves today? I truly hope that this session can provide the answers to these and many other questions.

### **Dr. Gabi Baramki**

Palestinians have always defined themselves in relation to somebody else; they have always defined themselves *vis-à-vis* the Jews and Israel. By doing this, they have taken the same approach as the Israelis, who labeled the Palestinians as 'non-Jews'.

Palestinians lived under Ottoman occupation for more than 500 years, and they became part of the Arab Liberation Movement, defining themselves as 'Arab-Palestinians', without looking at the religious differences in their ranks. Today, Palestine is much smaller than it was before and it is delimited by other Arab states and the Mediterranean. Palestinians do not feel, and have no desire to feel, that they constitute just another part of Greater Syria or the Arab Nation: they have their own identity. And the only solution to overcoming the old definition is for them to have their own state; only then will they be able to define themselves as 'Palestinian-Arab'.

The Palestinian identity is built on a sense of belonging to the Palestinian homeland and the pride attached to being part of the Arab-Islamic identity, with its culture and heritage and the unifying force of the Arab language. Two major factors have influenced the development of the Palestinian identity: the first, the government of part of the homeland by other Arab states since 1948; and the second, the Palestinian Diaspora. Differences between different groupings of Palestinians arose over time because, being scattered all over the world, they were unable to communicate with ease. The communication between the people of Gaza and the West Bank, for example, was only made possible when both areas were occupied by Israel in 1967.

The people in the homeland experienced the pressure, the torture and the daily problems related to life under occupation, but they were able to live on their own soil - to live in the homeland. The people of the Diaspora experienced a far greater degree of liberty but had to cope with being parted from Palestinian soil. They were allowed to move around more freely and to

Today, we are witnessing a sad development. The 'inside' part of the people had the chance to participate in, or rather witness, the democratic experience - however limited - of the Israelis; as a result, it always resisted the idea of becoming part of an Arab regime, such as Jordan. The 'outside' has experienced something else - the rule of the PLO. In the PLO, it was necessary to take decisions quickly and to maneuver in a secret and flexible manner. The 'outside' experienced the leadership style of a revolutionary movement.

The Palestinian state, it was assumed, was destined to become the 'spearhead of democracy' in the Middle East; this, unfortunately, no longer seems to be the case because the state is being built by the 'outside', by the people that were part of this revolutionary experience. In building institutions, the most important thing is to keep in mind the objectives, instead of emphasizing the disparity between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Palestinians should aim at building a civil society that forms the base of an autonomous state and that serves as a democratic example for the region.

### **Dr. Ma'rei Abdul Rahman**

Until today, a Palestinian state - as a center for all Palestinians and a democratic model in the Middle East - has remained a dream. Oslo has brought recognition of the existence of the Palestinian people by the enemy, but it has not provided an answer to the quest for a Palestinian state.

Even though there is no doubt concerning the existence of a Palestinian people, there is no cohesion, no unity of this people. There are huge differences between the refugees and regular citizens, between the cities and the countryside, between Moslems and Christians. This can to a large part be related to underdevelopment and the lack of industrialization. The large differences and problems between the 'inside' and the 'outside' are just a part of this greater framework: the 'inside' has been confronted with reality; the 'outside' has merely been dreaming the dream of liberation.

The structure of the PLO cannot serve as a basis for building the state because of all its defections that have now come to the surface, such as personal interests. There is an urgent need to develop critical and constructive dialogue with the PNA instead of concentrating too much on the 'inside'- 'outside' conflict. Another important issue is the necessity of taking responsibility for the Palestinian Diaspora, and particularly for educating and training its youth.

*Dr. Mohammed Jadallah:* Even though the PLO is no longer so powerful, the PLO vision is as clear as ever before and Palestinians still feel the same attachment to and affection for their homeland. The whole discourse on the 'inside'-'outside' relation is a question of two different standpoints that clash: one that favors liberal democracy and one that rejects it. What Palestinians face now is the necessity for them to liberate themselves from the occupation whilst simultaneously building their state.

*Dr. Nabil Sha'ath:* I would like to stress the positive contributions of the 'inside' as well as of the 'outside' to the building of a homeland and the national identity and their interdependence during the different stages of Palestinian steadfastness and resistance. Without the 'inside', the people in the homeland and their steadfastness and resistance, the 'outside' would have been without a cause and all the 'outside' Palestinians would have been assimilated in various countries. Furthermore, without the 'outside' and their sense of belonging, their commitment and their struggle, which took place under extremely difficult conditions unlike those experienced by any other liberation movement, the 'inside' would not have been released from their prisons and become free. Both parts of the nation were needed to complement each other and to work parallel and together for a homeland and a national identity.

The main problem in today's scenario is not between the 'inside' and the 'outside'; it is the gap between Gaza and the West Bank - geographically, politically and demographically. Palestinians, it is clear, need to work hard to close this gap. In such a complicated situation, it is important to go step by step and, instead of blaming the PNA for everything that is going wrong, everybody should engage in constructive dialogue and criticism. Oslo has been but one of the possible strategies for achieving a Palestinian state. Were this strategy to be unsuccessful, other strategies would have to be adopted.

# PALESTINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THE RETURNEES AND THE PEOPLE OF THE HOMELAND<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Ali Jirbawi

*General Director, Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights, Jerusalem*

and

Mamdouh Nofal

*Member of the PLO Central Council*

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi:* Welcome to another meeting on "The Future of the Palestinian National Identity." While some scholars claim that the Palestinian identity began to evolve in the early 1950s, others insist on referring in this regard to the roots of the Arab National Movement and the early days of the Arab awakening, which occurred during the period of Ottoman rule. The former group support their position by saying that during the early 1950s, the Arab countries in the region respected the decision of the Political Committee of the Arab League to maintain the Palestinian identity and therefore, with the exception of Jordan, did not grant citizenship to Palestinians.

The spirit of a previous meeting on this subject was dominated by self-critique and by the exposure of the psychological, cultural, and geographical gap between the West Bank and Gaza. At the end, scholars were encouraged to envisage a practical mechanism to close that gap and to provide for a national chemistry between the different social strata. With regard to the question of the 'outside'-'inside' relationship, it was said that today's transitional phase provides an excellent opportunity for the differences to melt in one pot.

## Mamdouh Nofal

The meeting today not only provides me with an academic forum to express and discuss my thoughts, but also with an opportunity to meet with the Jerusalemite community that is fighting a daily battle to maintain its existence. I believe to discuss the topic of today is vital and important in a national dimension: it deals with the number of returnees, venues for the re-

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a presentation and roundtable discussion that took place at PASSIA on 26 June 1997.

turn of 14,000-15,000 Palestinians, and it is an extremely serious issue. The return of these Palestinians, which came after a compulsory migration that lasted for many years, coincided with the development of a political governing authority. The returnees accepted their positions and responsibilities and now hold various ranks in this new system. The Palestinian national identity concerns people's ties with the homeland, wherever they reside. And what I aim at by discussing this issue is to contribute to the formation of a practical program to deal with the performance - good or bad - of the Palestinian Authority and the new political regime. This should not be perceived from the angle of 'inside'-'outside' relations, but from the view of one people consisting of citizens, residents and returnees, including those who will return in the future.

One of the major elements we have to address is the impact of proposed political solutions on people's relations as one nation. This will lead us to crystallize - in the shadow of a political solution - our identity. We are not the only ones who suffer from the problems of the 'inside'-'outside' relation and forming a national identity. There are other examples of suffering in the Arab and African countries. I could name, for example, Iraq, Algeria and South Africa. It is useful to examine these cases and to understand how they have succeeded or failed.

In discussing the issue I would like to refer to five historical phases, which may help to clarify how our identity evolved and to shed light on the process we went through.

The first phase (1947-64) is the one in which the how, why and wherefore of the 'inside'-'outside' question arose. The 'inside' means those Palestinians who stayed and remained steadfast in the land of Palestine. It comprises two categories: those who stayed in what became Israel according to the boundaries of 1948 and those who stayed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The 'outside' means those who were forced by various means to leave - many of them during the exodus in 1948 or 1967 - and includes all refugees, displaced persons, and any other Palestinian who has been denied the right to return to Palestine. All these groups, with their different standards of living, live in the neighboring Arab host countries or in the Diaspora in Europe, Africa, or America.

The second phase (1964-87) started with the announcement of the establishment of the PLO at the Arab summit in Cairo and lasted until the early days of the Palestinian *Intifada*.

The third phase (1987-90) covers the first years and events of the Palestinian *Intifada*.

secret negotiations, this phase was characterized by a hidden conflict, which was occasionally exposed, between the 'inside' and the 'outside' Palestinians.

The fifth phase (1993-97) is the phase of agreements and the establishment of the PNA, the first national political elections and the inauguration of the PLC. In my view, this phase should be studied most carefully in a serious and objective manner because it will have a great impact on the future of the Palestinian national movement.

Each of the five phases had its own peculiarities and a specific leadership; moreover, each was influenced in different ways, both regionally and internationally. In the years 1947-87, for example, I would say that the Palestinian political decisions and actions were in the hands of the 'outside' more than those of the 'inside'. The Palestinian identity, during this phase, was threatened with being lost, with total disappearance or assimilation into the regional Arab identities. Palestine as a country was no longer on the political map, and its leaders and nationalists became members of various movements, e.g., the Arab National Movement, the Moslem Brotherhood organizations, Leftist groupings and the Communist Party. This was the situation up to the early 1960s when, from within the groups of Arab nationalists and their Pan-Arab movement, the Fatah movement, including its new leaders, was born: it was then that we started to witness the awakening of a Palestinian movement and the formation of an independent Palestinian identity. I would like to emphasize that, once again, the 'outside' was in control of the political decision-making as well as the political acts.

In the early years of the Israeli occupation, which began in 1967, the 'inside' started to re-arrange the Palestinian house, and attempted to form various forums and circles of 'inside' leadership. The 'National Front' that could have developed into the first local leadership was prevented from doing so by the Israeli occupation forces. At the same time, 1967-69, the beginning of military resistance undoubtedly strengthened the 'inside' and allowed it to take the 'lead'. While the Israeli occupation crushed the National Front, the Palestinian resistance groups and the PLO failed in their attempts to form their national institutions in Jordan, which resulted in the Palestinian exodus from Jordan after the bloody events of September 1970.

During the years 1967-70, there was a balance in power between the 'inside' and 'outside' leadership. The situation, however, did not continue for very long. Following the PLO's exodus from Jordan to Lebanon and its military experience, we formed our 'state' in Lebanon. In fact, we 'hijacked' Lebanon. There was no thinking or planning concerning Lebanon. We simply concerned ourselves with our duty to complement the 'inside' resistance.

the country; this is exactly what we wanted. Only then were we free to take our very first step towards the real return to Palestine; we could finally concentrate on thinking of ways to support the struggle 'inside'.

I was a military official in the PFLP during the years of our 'state' in Lebanon. Once again, I repeat, the Lebanese state had been 'hijacked.' My daily concerns were related to the battles in the Lebanese Bekaa Valley, to the defense of our refugee camps and to the standing of Kamal Jumblatt. I was not involved in any way whatsoever with plans for the 'inside', with which I did not even have any direct contact. I do not recall that I, or anyone else for that matter, spoke about or even mentioned Nablus, Hebron or Jerusalem. We had worries, suspicions and fears concerning the idea of involving the 'inside' in our institutions 'outside'. Our fear was based on the possibility that a group of leaders might develop in the 'inside', and that this group would be capable of taking independent, political decisions.

With the *Intifada*, the 'inside' forced itself upon us and demanded recognition. Our fear did not diminish; on the contrary, the prominence of the Unified Leadership of the Uprising and faction leaders, as well as contacts between the Bush-Baker administration (in the White House and the State Department) and the 'inside' and between Europeans and the 'inside', led to the public becoming familiar with the names of personalities from the 'inside'; thus, our fears were realized. The question with which the PLO leadership was obsessed during the Bush-Baker years was: Is it possible that the American Secretary of State, James Baker, is planning for an alternative PLO leadership? Knowing that Yitzhak Shamir constantly declared that intention, there was suspicion and fear of an American-Israeli project in that direction. Baker had told personalities 'inside' to inform the PLO that if it intended to put obstacles before the American plan, it would be destroyed. Washington, in addition, had asked the Soviets to freeze contacts with the PLO, the Europeans to confront the PLO, and the Arabs to withdraw their support of the PLO. The role of the PLO was to be behind curtains; it should not have a seat at the table. At this point, the 'outside's' fear proved to be well founded, and the conclusion that we reached was that there might be an American-Israeli deal with the 'inside' at the expense of the 'outside'.

One of our major battles was the struggle concerning the formation of the delegation to the negotiations. The formula that we reached was that a Jerusalemite Palestinian scholar from the 'outside', Walid Al-Khalidi, would join the Jordanian delegation in what came to be the joint umbrella for the delegation. Another element of our fear concerned the possible imposition of a Jordanian solution. It was at this time that the hidden struggle between the 'inside' and the 'outside' began in earnest.



sions. He did not wish to see the Washington negotiations bear fruits, although his feelings were not based on the personal ambitions on the 'outside' leadership, including his own, but on the belief that a solution should come through the PLO in its capacity as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and that the PLO should not be bypassed. Otherwise, the door would have been opened for other schools of thought concerning bypassing the PLO leadership.

There are many files and long stories about the formation of the delegations to Madrid and Washington, as well as about the rounds of talks themselves and about possible scenarios. In fact, all of this has nothing to do with real and practical negotiations that can lead to a solution. Another chance for the PLO leadership to conduct direct negotiations with Israel, which even occurred a few months before the secret talks started in Oslo, was the 'door of security'. Those individuals who participated in academic workshops, initiated by the American Academy of Art and Sciences to discuss issues of security, may recall how direct or indirect messages were passed back and forth. Occasionally, the Israeli security establishment went so far as to issue clear statements to the effect that Israel would not object to the return of hundreds, if not thousands, of PLO men to the 'inside' if they were to take responsibility for internal Palestinian security. The stand of the Israelis was based on their belief that the 'inside' Palestinians were not capable of taking on such a role.

The Oslo talks were conducted behind the backs of the official Palestinian delegation. The PLO leadership was very much aware of what it was doing in order to maintain its control over the delegation. It exchanged, at the same time, 32 questions and answers with the US administration, by which it intended to prove that the official delegation was composed of conservatives and hard-liners, whereas dealing with the PLO would be much simpler. Those who participated in the Washington talks will remember the two different languages used by the Palestinians in dealing with the Israelis and Americans. In addition, a draft of the Oslo Agreement had already been signed with the initials of the Palestinian negotiators an hour before the official delegation left for Washington. The aim of all this was to show that the position of the 'inside' was one of principles only, lacking political weight, and that its representatives were not qualified to bear sole responsibility for reaching agreements. When the PLO leadership showed flexibility, especially with regard to the question of security, it was able to reach a position whereby it had all the political weight. It was finally recognized that Abu Ammar - not Haidar Abdul Shafi or Faisal Husseini - was the only individual who could provide security.

because of the fact of my return to and work for my homeland and not to and for a substitute. There has been a clear assimilation between the 'inside' and the returnees, those who, a few months ago, were referred to as the 'outside'. In the homeland, for the first time, political elections were conducted, a government was formed, institutions were established and a real marriage between the 'inside' and the 'outside' took place.

There are 75,000 employees in the PNA infrastructure and institutions; only 14,000 of whom came from the 'outside'. In the security apparatus, we have 43,000 employees; one third of those with top positions having come from the 'outside'. When we talk about 40,000 employees forming the political base of the regime, I would say that they represent a new formation resulting from the melting together of the 'inside' and the 'outside', which has led to new conceptions and possibly, a new language.

Today, in the new political environment that followed the election of Netanyahu, there is no viable political vision of the future: the proposed solutions do not meet the aspirations of 3.5 million Palestinians in the Diaspora, and especially those of the refugees and displaced persons.

I would like to confirm here that, having taken into account the long history of our struggle, one should not fear for the safety of our national identity. Those fears were realistic but they are no longer reasonable, due to the enforcement of our identity through the practice of defending the Palestinian homeland and the strong sense of belonging. During the early phases, the Palestinian identity was threatened by some people's notion that Jordan would be able to absorb the Palestinians and consequently diminish the Palestinian identity.

This may mean that we should be more far-sighted than the Soviet Union; there, after 70 years, each citizen returned to his national identity and we witnessed the collapse of the union. Therefore, any new attempt to ignore our identity or to force its assimilation will lead to a war between those making such attempts and the Palestinians. I cannot imagine that there is any leader who would be prepared to destroy his state or shake its stability in order to assimilate refugees or displaced Palestinians (who struggled all their lives to return to Palestine).

### **Dr. Ali Jirbawi**

I would like to thank PASSIA for inviting me to contribute to this roundtable meeting and I agree with the previous speaker in that the question of Palestinian national identity is of great importance, especially now. But, contrary to his position, I believe that the danger is still prevalent and the future of our identity is not finalized. I want to add that the 'inside'-'outside' problem

no marriage or melting or assimilation; the process of melting is only an illusion. Those who claim to have witnessed this process do so based only on the fact that they have occasionally seen instances of a type of chemistry and working relations between different groups here and there.

I would also say that there is not only one identity. There is, for example, the national identity, which has gradually developed since the early days of the British mandate in Palestine and the times of the Grand Mufti, Hajj Amin Al-Husseini leadership. There is also the second identity, that of factions. The factions were mainly perceived through their tools, which were faxes between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. The third identity, the political identity, has not developed with regard to the issue of citizenship and its two faces, i.e., rights and duties. The current, most visible identity is the one related to belonging and to defining this belonging. The Israeli aggression exercised in the Judaization of Jerusalem and the recent case of Jabal Abu Ghneim, for example, are both examples of instances of the Israelis coming up against the Palestinians' sense of belonging to Jerusalem and their rejection of Israeli policies.

The American passport has great political value; it is a tool that enables one to travel all over the world without a visa. Our travel documents, meanwhile, are those of a Third World country, and we even need permits to travel between our own cities.

The fifth and current phase, which the previous speaker, Mamdouh Nofal, referred to as a phase for the evolution of a national program, stands, as I would put it, at the crossroads between support for and opposition to the national program. The opposition, however, is of no strategic importance as it does not have any political weight. In other words, there is no alternative to - but also no strategic plan for - the national project.

Today, we witness a mechanism concerning the political factions that pertains to the famous saying; "I am the son of Fatah. I vote for it only." I would say that the other factions have finished, whether we like it or not. The Fatah faction was successful in its attempts to become the Authority. The other factions have no potential for renewal or modernization to become new political forces. Those who leave these finished factions today and seek a new role in society, such as the post of a director or general director in an institution, have to realize that the only positions available are to be obtained through the Fatah faction, which has become the authority. I am sorry to say that the national program has been transferred to the program of the authority; and this authority, in all respects, is disappointing.

I am extremely sorry to hear that we had to be forced into exodus from Lebanon in order to discover that we have a national program, a national

involved itself in many unnecessary problems that reflected on the situation of the 'inside' as well. The philosophy of steadfastness that was devised by the 'outside' for the 'inside' was limited to only a few tools and resources for the 'inside', to enable it to carry out instructions from the 'outside'. On the other hand, the mistake of the 'inside' was to accept and authorize the 'outside' to lead it on the basis that the 'outside' was far less restricted by the daily pressures of the Israeli occupation.

The decisive issue regarding the future of the Palestinian identity is how to overcome the disappointment; we have to realize that we are currently facing a clash between various Palestinian identities in the Palestinian land. Our greatest dream has always been to end the occupation and for all Palestinians to return to the homeland. We never really thought about the fact that, in the course of 30 years, different Palestinian identities emerged and developed in different locations. When they finally met for the first time, in the homeland, they clashed and confronted each other in their efforts to achieve a national program and unification. I repeat that the national identity is in danger.

One of the mistakes in the previous phases - being the fault of both the 'inside' and 'outside' - was that the relationship between the two was not one of partnership or equality. It was based on an authoritarian stand from the 'outside' *vis-à-vis* a receptive and weak 'inside'. At the same time, the 'inside' leaders looked down upon their own constituencies from 'above'. The connection of the PFLP, for example, with the 'inside' link, Zahira Kamal, was a relation from 'above', sending instructions and orders. On the other hand, Zahira Kamal, as a representative of the 'inside' PFLP, was obedient and followed instructions to the letter.

The claim that assimilation, or unification, now exists is an illusion. Those who have returned are not part of the 'inside', and this is especially true of those who have not been given senior posts. I would say that there is a worrying, but not yet explosive trend. No, we are not about to witness an explosion, but these issues will certainly be components of future internal explosions. On the very same day on which our symbol of unity, 'the glue' that holds us together, Abu Ammar, will vanish, all these problems will come to the surface and will undoubtedly lead to chaos.

The relation between the returnees and the people of the homeland is a relation between a group of influential returnees who came back for reasons of self-interest and to govern the locals. On the political scene, there is a general consensus that all the agreements signed until now or on the way to being signed are bad agreements; those who support them and those who object to them agree on this. But the returnees accepted these bad agreements because they served as tools for their return to the homeland.

The role of the PLO has ended, but no one talks about it. The return to the homeland does not represent unification or assimilation, but only an attempt to govern. No matter how large the number of returnees holding positions in the PNA (14,000), it is at the expense of the 'inside', or some two million people, of whom only 50,000 are employed in the PNA. The new situation today is one whereby the normal people are seeing the attributes of authority (offices, cars, drivers, bodyguards, mobile phones, luxury, and corruption) embodied in a minority, which came from the 'outside' to govern the majority 'inside'.

These minority-majority relations are nothing new in the Arab World; we also have them in Iraq and in Syria, where the attributes of authority are the same. What is really disappointing is that a small group of people succeeded in controlling the political decision-making process in the absence of a democratic political system. An additional disappointing fact is that the community is not in contact with its leadership, even if some of the insiders are members of the negotiations or hold posts in the various ministries. The street does not know what is going on. Moreover, according to the new way of thinking of the Palestinian political regime it is not accountable. It is a regime brought by those from the 'outside', reflecting their experiences in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunis. The PLO experience was that of a governing body, which operated without the hindrance of providing services to the people, as it was functioning in other states that provided those services; therefore, when the PLO leadership became a governing authority 'inside', it was not able to provide services to the people it governed. Today, for the first time, Palestinian leaders exercise their authority and are required to provide services; regrettably, they are not accustomed to doing this, and there is still no mechanism to combine governing with the provision of services.

When we speak of the illegitimate wealth enjoyed by most returnees, there are connections between groups from the 'inside' and the 'outside'. There are many examples, e.g., the villas and castles on the Gaza seashore, the investment companies, banks, and share-holdings by 'Abu so-and-so' and the 'son of so-and-so' and the 'friend of so-and-so', all of whom have come from the 'outside'. I have to add here that the returnees enjoyed living in open societies 'outside', and their behavior was not exposed; but when they returned to the closed, limited 'inside' society, they found themselves and their practices exposed.

When the 'inside' complains, you will hear: "I spent 20 years of my life in Israeli prisons, why don't I get the same privileges as those from the 'outside', such as a tax-free car?" Another question that we have to ask is how can we build a civil society, in which people are held accountable for their actions, when we still hear about fake companies or the use of the old cover

'outside', even upon their return, still 'live' the illusion of security? Our society is a simple society. It cannot bear, after all these years of resistance and the *Intifada*, to see such signs of corruption, which no one attempts to stop.

From the social point of view, I would say that the returnees face difficulties in attempting to accommodate themselves to the 'inside' society. Thus, they started searching for other returnees, for comrades to form groupings inside the 'inside', which led to the emergence of new social and economic groupings, including the Authority. The feeling of the 'inside' is that the Authority's program is a program of mere economic investment, that it will not last long if the phenomenon of corruption is not stopped, and that the returnees are not committed to building the civil society.

The problem of today is a problem of real unification or assimilation between the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem and 1948 and the returnees from 'outside'. You may say that we have seen the phenomenon of a state being established in Gaza and semi-established in the West Bank, at the same time as it is totally absent in Jerusalem. The society will explode when the struggle for authority between the returnees and all the others, for a new leader, a program, a mechanism to govern will erupt; this will only happen when the tools of the Authority fail, but not before that.

### Discussion (Summary)

*Mamdouh Nofal:* The Palestinian identity is not only a matter of rights and duties; it has a more complex and deeper dimension, which goes back to the formation of the Palestinian personality and its aspirations and goals during the different phases of the Palestinian struggle. Identity primarily means a sense of belonging. The real problem now is not the differences between the former 'outside' and the 'inside' in the 'inside', but the one of the 3.5 million Palestinians who are still 'outside'.

*Dr. Ali Jirbawi:* Even though peoples, such as the Iraqi or Syrian people, experience problems and cleavages there is still a national identity. Such a national identity can be a useful tool in the struggle for a homeland or in the struggle for liberation; once these have been attained, it is, however, no longer sufficient and must be transformed into an identity that allows decision-making about how to build the homeland.

*Sheikh Jamil Hamami:* We should bear in mind the following five points: the critical situation regarding the peace accords, the lack of alternatives offered by the opposition, a feeling of shame when saying "I am a Palestinian" in this phase of corruption and against the background of the acts of the Authority, the fact that no one has the right to exert pressure against any-

*Dr. Mar'ei Abdul Rahman:* I agree that even though there clearly is a sense of belonging, the Palestinian identity is in danger. Maybe the shaping of a regional, Palestinian-Jordanian identity would be possible. The current identity crisis is not only an academic crisis, but reflects on the decision-makers and the Palestinian street. I hold the PNA responsible for these problems and think it should play a role in the crystallization of the new Palestinian identity; it should push the process forward instead of weakening it. The intelligentsia are also responsible as they merely look at what the PNA is doing without interfering.

*Hisham Mustafa:* I am amazed by the backwardness of Palestinian society, which I discovered upon my return to the homeland. A lot of time has been lost; for 40 years, Palestinians have thought about their personal financial and political interests and about the struggle against occupation, but they have done so without thinking about the common, national project, about the project of the people. They have not thought about building the political system or about issues such as the functioning of democracy in a cantonized system.

*Dr. Salim Tamari:* A local identity, as opposed to a national identity, is still prevalent in Palestinian society. The dream of the unification of all Palestinians in their state is dying, while the Palestinian homeland is merely another Third World country in the making. I am astonished that Palestinian society puts up with the corruption after all that it has been through. There is no real discussion of these issues, and people have stopped reading, writing and discussing since the PNA came to power.

*Walid Salem:* There is a Palestinian national identity that consists of several components such as religion and being part of the Arab World. The problem now is how to develop a political identity.

*Rema Hamami:* People are alienated from the national identity; Palestinians are losing their motivation of fighting for their identity. Priorities have changed; this is illustrated, for example, by the increase in the number of Palestinian Jerusalemites who have applied for Israeli passports. But such a demobilization is a normal process in the context of state formation. In order for a real unification between the 'inside' and the 'outside', a new, integrative system is needed. This cannot be achieved by the 'outside' simply coming in to rule over the 'inside'. In this respect, people with the 'inside'-'outside' background of Jibril Rajoub could be important bridges. The dynamics of elections and new coalitions could also serve as such an integrative force.

# NGO ACTION AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE - SHARING EXPERIENCES AND DEVELOPING NEW STRATEGIES<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
*Head of PASSIA, Jerusalem*

The socioeconomic behavior of the Palestinians tends to be very individualistic due to the various ups and downs in the political environment that shaped their lives throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In their struggle for freedom and independence they organized themselves under various rulers to preserve and develop their national identity.

Under the Ottoman-Turkish rule, they established cultural societies and various clubs to advocate on public policy issues and to mobilize the masses to achieve their goals. These organizations were traditionally based on religious and family affiliations and were led by prominent personalities.

During the British Mandate, Palestinians established a mixture of religious, family-related and political organizations to pursue practical and specific projects in the socioeconomic field as well as to express and publicize their political aspirations. The organizations of this period maintained the traditional linkage to the main families and prominent figures.

Under Jordanian/Egyptian rule, things changed. Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip established a variety of professional and charitable organizations to address the needs of certain social constituencies and to either assist, complement or oppose the respective ruler's policies. The leaders of these NGO-like bodies no longer came from the traditional background but from a new, educated political elite.

A new chapter in the history of the Palestinian NGO community began with the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the course of the June 1967 War. During the first decade of occupation, the

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a conference organized by the United Nations Division on Palestinian Rights, entitled "Ending 30 Years of Occupation – The Role of NGOs", which took place from August 25-28, 1997 in Geneva.



- the Israeli occupation policies and practices, which threatened their national identity and existence and left their future vague;
- the absence of a government or political national address to set strategies and lead the local resistance;
- the battle to maintain and develop their linkage with the Arab World.

The Palestinians adopted a strategy of steadfastness (*sumud*), which guided their lives during the first two decades under occupation. They succeeded in maintaining the *status quo*, in developing their human resources and in providing services to their society. They also secured the funding access for their NGOs, mainly channeled through UNRWA (refugees), Church-related institutions (charities, schools, hospitals), Jordanian governmental funds (municipalities, charitable organizations), Arab countries (to strengthen and preserve the steadfastness as decided at the Baghdad Arab Summit in 1978), as well as official US government funds through American private voluntary organizations (PVOs) that aimed at 'improving the standard of living'. The latter funding was coordinated with the Israeli occupation authorities, while all other aid, Arab and foreign, was directly arranged with the Palestinian recipients.

With the third decade of Israeli occupation, Palestinians initiated a new chapter of their resistance under the banners of the *Intifada*. This involved attempting to change the *status quo* (ending Israeli occupation) and to build a new society on national soil without waiting for a solution to come from outside. The *Intifada* succeeded in:

- Palestinizing and promoting national unity of the society, starkly reminding the world of the Palestinian cause, and gaining renewed recognition and sympathy;
- demonstrating that the 'Green Line' was a definitive border line, inasmuch as the Israelis were reluctant to cross into the OPT while Palestinians were not allowed to cross into Israel; Palestinian stones keep Israelis away from the OPT and Palestinian knives kept Palestinians away from Israel;
- encouraging the well-organized factions to form the United Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) and establish a wide range of popular and neighborhood committees, which, along with the foundation of various independent organizations, research centers and other institutions, increased the number of NGOs to over 2,000.

operating underground were added to the common mass campaigns and voluntary community work. They provided all kinds of services, promoted democratic values, and mobilized the masses to foster the *Intifada* and its goals. They also built coalitions, lobbied their cause and tried to build public opinion for their demands and aspirations. The diversity of NGOs and their activities during the *Intifada*, as well as their ability to maintain and even increase funding - the main source being the PLO, Arab states, European and US NGOs and governmental agencies - contributed a great deal to their institutionalization within the society, despite Israeli policies of outlawing and closing down Palestinian NGOs and grassroots committees

Pluralism has thus been a feature of Palestinian life for almost three decades, during which the absence of a national government and the Israeli occupation resulted in the establishment of hundreds of NGOs, many of which were established by political factions, partly in order to extend their influence in society by providing services; the NGOs were active in a variety of fields (e.g. labor and student unions, professional, charitable and health associations, women organizations, think tanks etc.). This not only resulted in a high degree of social and political mobility but also laid the foundation for a Palestinian civil society. It was also from within the NGO community that the technical committees were born. They were created on a consensus basis, representing all factions and political streams, in order to formulate Palestinian positions on many issues (e.g., housing, land, water, agriculture, education, health etc.), and, later, to assist the Palestinian negotiating team during the Madrid Peace Conference.

Following the Declaration of Principles and the subsequent agreements signed between the PLO and Israel, the Palestinians have acquired a new status, according to which they must perform many of the functions of a state, even though they have not attained formal statehood.

With the establishment of the PNA, the Palestinian NGOs found themselves at a new crossroads with two major options:

- a) to be 'absorbed' within the Authority's structure, for one or more of the following reasons:
- many of them were established and funded by the PLO;
  - several of their leaders joined the PNA as a natural consequence of political events;
  - some lacked the creativity to cope with the new political environment and joined the PNA out of a fear of becoming extinct;

b) to remain independent and continue to work outside the government structure. This category, mainly NGOs from the opposition factions and those that are not directly related or linked to the activities of the PNA and its ministries, such as think tanks, research institutes, human rights or women's organizations, is divided into two groups:

- those, mainly in the Gaza Strip that tend to comply to the PNA Ministry of Justice's stipulations that regulate registration, functioning and funding;
- those that refused such regulation unless there would be a proper legal framework and are now in a dialogue with the PNA.

Another major change the Palestinian NGOs are facing is of a financial nature: after the occupation, they were the only organizations that promoted development, and this tremendous responsibility was met by millions of dollars in financial and technical assistance from various donors. After Oslo, however, the donor community diverted much of the funds that used to support NGOs to the PNA to allow it to set up its administration and infrastructure. The shift in funds affected to a large extent secular NGOs and their services, which in turn strengthened Hamas and other Islamic movements' social networks and weakened the forces within civil society that can act as counterweight against fundamentalists. A related problem is caused by the fact that the PNA, considering itself as the legitimate authority whose responsibility it is to decide on development goals and priorities, insists that all funds be channeled through its own agencies, which then allocate the money to the NGOs. In order to secure funding mechanisms for the NGOs that do not require going through the PNA, the World Bank came up with the idea of establishing a NGO Trust Fund, which is now being administered by the Welfare Association in cooperation with the British Council in the Palestinian Territories.

A third concern for the future of the NGOs has to do with regulation and registration. While there are still various laws - Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Egyptian, and Israeli - governing the Palestinian territories, the PNA Executive has still not approved the Basic Law, thus delaying the endorsement of all other laws passed by the Legislative Council, including the Law Concerning Charitable Societies, Social Bodies and Private Institutions, to which the NGOs are subject. At the same time, the PNA is pushing the NGOs to register, but there is still some confusion as to which ministry is responsible for registering which NGO. This does not apply to the NGOs in East Jerusalem, which are forced to abide by the regulations of the Israeli

or as private companies, or according to stipulations set by the Ministry of Interior.

As the PNA works to regulate its NGO community, there is great concern among the NGO and international donor communities about the way in which the PNA will establish its mechanism to govern, coordinate and share responsibilities with the NGOs under its auspices. The legal and regulatory frames within which NGOs operate are an indicator for governmental performance *vis-à-vis* society in general (e.g., freedom of expression and assembly, human rights). In Egypt, most NGOs are subject to Law 32 of 1964 requiring NGOs to refrain from 'political' activities and empowering the Ministry of Social Affairs to interfere in their elected councils, thus keeping governmental control over their activities. In Jordan and Yemen government officials encourage the establishment of substitute organizations affiliated to governmental institutions that are to compete with those already existing. In some cases, such as Sudan and Iraq, the NGO sector is completely repressed if not co-opted. In Yemen, cases were reported in which state authorities went as far as 'advising' members of syndicates on how to vote in the syndicate elections.

In recent years, coordinating efforts within the NGO community have increased considerably although the coalitions have a rather limited mandate. The main reasons for these coalition-building efforts are to complement each other's work, to develop a stronger voice by being represented as a group, to strengthen one's legitimacy, to widen the recognition of one's activities, to build bridges, exchange experience, and expand connections.

Traditionally, many of the NGOs were members of the General Union of Palestinian Charitable Associations, or part of professional unions. Today, the most active body is the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) with some 70 members. There is also a trend among NGOs to create networks among organizations with similar activities, such as the Educational Network in Ramallah, Women's unions, the Association of Palestinian Policy and Research Institutions (APPRI), currently comprising of five research centers, and the Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP), which aims to promote solidarity with the Palestinian cause and to mobilize NGOs inside and in the Diaspora. A broader effort to bring together Palestinian and other Arab institutions was launched with the Arab Research Network, gathering NGOs from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon.

Building a strong NGO community in Palestine is a precondition for enduring political stability and legitimacy, economic growth and sustainable development, and has three complementary aims:

- strengthening democracy and civil society (NGOs serve as a catalyst for creating a climate of tolerance and pluralism and help establish democratic structures);
- working towards a constitutional government in their role as intermediaries between interest groups and the government.

These goals should ideally be part of the criteria according to which the relationship (project identification and prioritization) between funders and Palestinian NGOs is shaped. Nevertheless, there is also a danger that NGO activities are geared towards the interests and agendas of the donor rather than local development priorities. Dependence on donors may lead to the NGOs re-prioritizing their own agendas, i.e., in order to obtain the needed funding to run projects, they may tend to reformulate their self-stated goals and to adopt development approaches dictated by the donor's aid system.

NGOs may have less money than before but their determination is still strong and they are not going to give up. NGOs need to develop a long-term vision and to restructure themselves for the challenges of a new era. For the coming years, as part of their state-building efforts, the priorities for the Palestinian people will be establishing/reconstituting institutions, improving human resources, applying the rule of law, restoring the services sectors and infrastructure, and focusing on priority areas thus far neglected by the donor community, mainly Jerusalem.

# PALESTINIAN NGOs AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO POLICY MAKING<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi

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In order for a genuine civil society to exist, several basic conditions must first be met. First of all, the judiciary, executive and legislative powers should be totally separated from each other. Another condition for a civil society is, of course, democracy.

The existence of democracy undoubtedly helps in the establishment of a civil society, but its absence does not necessarily mean that a civil society cannot exist. During the occupation, for example, the absence of democracy did not prevent the establishment of NGOs and other organizations, all of which constitute an important element of civil society. We have NGOs and an NGO network, which adopted a very firm stand when certain individuals, such as Iyad Al-Sarraj, were arrested. It also staged demonstrations during the teachers' strike. In fact, it was the only institution that stood by the teachers and voiced its opinion on the matter.

Not everything works perfectly, but we are not talking about a static situation but a process. To try to evaluate the current situation is like looking at a glass that is two-thirds empty and one-third full. It would be incorrect to say that all of it is empty, yet to say that it is full would be untrue, because most of it is empty. Basically, we are talking about two different processes: one to establish a civil society, the other to establish democracy, yet the two are undoubtedly linked together. A democratic society cannot be consolidated in the absence of a civil society or the components of a civil society. The components of a civil society, meanwhile, cannot be developed without full democracy. In Palestine, we often see processes that are incomplete, which is due, in part, to the fact that we as a society are going through a period of transition.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at the PASSIA Training Program on Policy Analysis on 29 August 1997.

two processes of developing a civil society and democratization are taking place at the same time, and some people are filling, while others are emptying. The Authority is emptying because it is easier for it to do that, and because it does not want a strong civil society. People active in NGOs, however, through their work, are filling in order to establish a civil society. The picture at present is not very positive, although it is not as bad as it was a few months ago and will probably improve. The current unsatisfactory situation is directly related to external factors, not least of which is the crisis between the Authority and Israel. The more the relation between the Authority and Israel improves, the more the domestic situation deteriorates.

One major condition for the establishment of a thriving civil society is the presence of a real parliament or legislative council, unlike the one we have now: I mean one with power, influence and the authority to legislate. A free press and freedom of expression are also essential components.

Democracy is conditional on endorsement of the principle of authority circulation, which is something that is never mentioned in the Arab World. According to this principle, you can form a party, declare that your objective is to possess the authority and then develop your campaign until you succeed in reaching office. You could, for example, even compete with Abu Ammar for the presidency. One of our major problems is that most, if not all, of the political parties have a very weak role, which is due, in part, to the fact that they often become dependent on the Authority for funding. With regard to the issue of containment, King Hussein, who often contained the opposition and party leaders, is very clever in this respect.

What exactly is an NGO? The proposed NGO law states that NGOs are societies or institutions that do not seek to make profits with the aim of distributing them to their members. Each NGO should meet three conditions:

- It should be independent from the Authority.
- It should be an institution that serves the public interest.
- It should be an institution that does not aim at making a profit in order to share it among its members.

It should be noted that to make a profit for the benefit of the NGO itself or the institutions it represents, such as cooperatives for instance, is allowed. It is not necessary that these NGOs be large. In principle, in the Second World countries, as few as three individuals can form a society or organization.

- charitable societies;
- grassroots societies and organizations that try to organize the public, such as the various labor unions:
- developmental organizations, e.g., agricultural or medical committees;
- research centers, such as PASSIA;
- institutions that defend the rights of specific groups in the society.

Some of the organizations can be divided into different categories. Women's organizations, for example, can be separated into the women's centers and the women's movements. A good example of institutions that defend the interests of certain groups is the Union of the Handicapped, which struggles for the rights of the disabled. Some of these NGOs may disappear when they achieve their goals while others may continue. In other countries there are para- or semi-governmental organizations, which differ from the NGOs inasmuch as the government is responsible for them and, in some cases, supplies them with funding, although they still enjoy relative independence. A good example is the BBC. The private sector, meanwhile, plays an essential role in the economic development of society, but it is clearly not an NGO sector because it seeks to make a profit.

Another question of interest when looking at the NGOs in Palestine is whether their number is large or small, and whether it is sufficient. The number most often mentioned is somewhere between 1,200-1,600, which means an average of one NGO for every 2,000 people, which I do not consider to be too high. On the contrary, many villages do not enjoy most of the services provided by the NGOs in other areas. France boasts one million NGOs, which means, on average, one NGO for every 56 citizens. I have no figures for the Arab countries, and Palestine may be one of the few Arab countries that have a relatively large number of NGOs: yet, there is definitely a need to increase the number, especially in view of the fact that the majority of NGOs are small and function at the village level. Remember, even a village cooperative or youth club would be considered an NGO.

The larger and more effective West Bank NGOs, of which there are approximately one hundred, are linked to certain historical elements and to the needs of society. In the late 1970s, an important political event took place, namely the endorsement of the Camp David Accords, and this had a tremendous effect on the Palestinian society. For the first time, the Palestinians were forced to realize that they could not count on external assistance and had to rely on themselves. This change in thinking, which coincided



pendence, and the leaning toward self-organization in the society, which explains why there was a large proliferation of national institutions. The Camp David Accords eradicated the belief that the Arab armies - including the Palestinian army - would come and liberate us, and a deep sense of self-dependence was nurtured. It was this realization that motivated the Palestinian resistance to move inside the homeland and to assert the importance of the domestic front, thus paving the way for the *Intifada*.

The *Intifada* - if we consider it not merely as a phase of stone-throwing but as a comprehensive rising of the whole society - did not start in 1987. One of the reasons for the historical consolidation of the NGOs is the fact that the occupation used to quell all development, leaving no opportunity for the society to count on itself. The second reason was the absence of restrictive governmental departments. Worthy of note is the fact that although an occupying state or authority is more brutal than a national state in suppressing the population, it has only a limited ability to curb domestic social development.

From the 1970s onwards, the NGOs had an enormous influence on development philosophy and policies. A good example is the field of health. In 1967, 67 percent of the total primary health care clinics were governmental; in 1992, only 28 percent were governmental while 28 percent were NGOs. The apparatus of the Jordanian Government remained as it was, but did not develop, thus allowing the NGOs to take its place. The same thing occurred in agriculture. Today, all pre-school education is run by the NGOs.

The NGOs clearly played a very important role, not through their activities alone, but also through their developmental philosophy. If you go back to the literature of that period, you will see that there was a large debate on whether or not we were living in a stage of steadfastness. It was the NGOs that introduced the idea of resistance and also, that their efforts were a part of that resistance. According to their philosophy, since the aim of Israel was to annex the occupied territories, build settlements and deport as many Palestinians as possible, then it was incumbent on the NGOs to establish facts on the ground, build the institutions of the infrastructure, and help people to remain in the country and continue with their lives.

Financing was always an important issue, and there was consequently a great deal of interaction between the NGOs and the outside world. In 1985 a large conference on the subject of funding was held at the Arab Thought Forum, where 126 NGOs decided to boycott the US aid. This decision was also a political position and a clear indication that the NGOs play an essential role not only in politics, but also in the formulation of policies.

sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Its action had enormous consequences, because it led to a large number of social and political institutions inside the country expressing their support for the PLO, and such popular support undoubtedly affected the resolutions taken by the Arab Summit concerning the organization.

The NGOs also affected the various concepts and policies. For example, when the health NGOs adopted the modern concepts of primary health care, they were doing something totally new, because the traditional structure of the governmental health apparatus and that of UNRWA were biomedical, and the importance of primary health care had not yet been recognized. The health NGOs were successful in introducing their new way of thinking because they were able to adapt to an international approach, which became popular following the international conference that was held in Alma Ata in Kazakhstan in 1979 during which recommendations were addressed to ministries of health throughout the world calling them to focus on primary health care. The Palestinian NGOs, therefore, brought to the Palestinian society a modern concept that had worldwide support, which is why they were able to obtain funding. This is a clear example of how the NGOs can indirectly affect governmental policy by supplying information to the ministries and directing them in a certain direction.

A good mechanism for influencing policy is to establish a correct pattern and, by adhering to clear goals, good planning and a professional attitude, show that it works. In addition, mobilization and organization of certain sectors is crucial in order to achieve good results. In the case of primary health care, for instance, we attempted to protect ourselves from problems before they occurred, and we built positions. These, together with studies, research, conferences, and workshops allowed us to reach a position.

Also important in this context is dialogue and cooperation. The health NGOs, for example, cooperate a great deal with the Ministry of Health. We asked the Minister why the ministry continues to open clinics in places that have clinics run by the NGOs instead of reaching an agreement with the NGOs to establish clinics where none exist. The Minister agreed to sit and listen to us because we have the same goal and because we serve the people.

Among the tools we use in empowering the society are education, training, knowledge, and material support. The local councils, for example, are not NGOs and face a major problem because they do not possess even the minimum of administrative facilities. Moreover, they do not know how to lobby. There must be communication and mutual support in order to achieve

is very important to provide as much information as possible without access to information, it is impossible to have any influence.

With regard to the NGO legislation, the NGOs rejected the law presented by the government through the Minister of Social Affairs, because it was very restrictive and placed many conditions on registration and licensing. The individuals who formulated the law completely disregarded the unique role played by NGOs, choosing instead to treat them the same as charitable societies. One of the major controversial issues is that in order to obtain a permit, you must first obtain the approval of several ministries, including the ministry most involved, such as the Ministry of Health in the case of health NGOs, or the Ministry of Education in the case of those NGOs involved in education, in addition to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. Then, the registration must be renewed every year, because the law states that there should be annual elections, and in the event of the death or resignation of a member of the board, he can only be replaced following the approval of the minister concerned. In addition, in order to obtain external funding, the NGO must again obtain the approval of the ministry. Moreover, it is not allowed to retain funding for certain projects for more than one month after the project has ended or to possess funds that are not transferable, such as property and the like. If NGOs protest, the Authority says that they do not want transparency or to operate according to terms of reference. Therefore, in response to the law, the NGOs took the following steps:

- They waged a major campaign against the law, during which they attempted to establish solid contacts with the ministries and members of the PLC.
- They appointed lawyers to conduct a comparative study of NGO laws throughout the world, while other lawyers were instructed to propose a law, send copies to the members of the PLC and then present it to the government. Meetings are currently taking place between the NGOs and PLC members in order to convince the latter of the necessity of adopting the new law.

In Gaza, the Authority pressured the NGOs to register at the Ministry of Interior. The NGOs - in the absence of a Palestinian law - asked, "According to which law are we supposed to register?" The answer they received was, "We want you to register according to the Ottoman Law of 1909."

There are several issues with which we are particularly concerned. One example involves the deficit of the Ministry of Education. It is estimated that the universities have amassed a deficit of US\$26 million, which means that even if we deduct the European donations of US\$8 million, we are still talk-

discussed by the Cabinet a few days ago. Now the Ministry of Education is proposing to add 'university taxes' on food and cigarettes, but this is a blanket policy, similar to the ministry's decision to raise fees. The real question is whether we need such a large number of colleges and universities. This is a basic issue, which is related to the policies of the country.

With regard to the number of hospital beds, we have approximately 1.2 beds for every 1,000 citizens. In Israel, the figure is 6.1, and in Jordan, 4.2. Each bed costs approximately US\$33,000 per annum, and if we raise the number of hospital beds from 1.2 to five, we will be quadrupling the expenditure of the hospitals. Elsewhere in the world, NGOs talk about a golden figure that many countries attempt to reach, namely one bed per thousand population, which they say would be sufficient on condition that there are also primary health care centers. The problem we have in our country is that the hospitals are mainly involved in primary health care as opposed to specialized treatment. Within a two-year period, the rate in our country will be 1.7 beds per thousand, and it is very clear that our attempts to meet demand are unlikely to succeed.

The holding of elections is another good example of micro and macro-level policies. In the case of the Palestinian elections, there was more of an emphasis on dealing with the micro issues, which included, for instance, the shape and position of the ballot box and where to place the ballot card. What was not focused on was the law according to which the elections were to take place, the duration of the electoral campaign, nor even if there was any intervention in the voting process.

It is important to distinguish between the micro and macro issues and to work on the micro issues, but whilst looking at the general framework. It is the way in which NGOs approach various issues that distinguishes one from the other. There are NGOs, for example, that focus only on small details, while others deem that they have a larger role that involves dealing with the macro as well as the micro issues. Palestine is a small society, and any modification in the macro policies will affect the life of the society as a whole. The donor countries also have an effect on the policy issues because having a small and weak economy means that any investment these countries make in a certain field will have a general effect.

Unfortunately, certain factors sometimes prevent any real influence. We were unable, for instance, to influence the Ministry of Health when it came to the establishment of new hospitals, because the ministry was already influenced by external pressure from the donors. As an example, someone told the Japanese Government that we needed a hospital in Jericho, in spite of the fact that Jericho already had a hospital and to build a new one

invest the money elsewhere failed, and eventually they told us, "You either take the money for the hospital or you get nothing."

Another issue to be raised is the conflict of interests between the various NGOs. In any society in the world there are different interests, and democracy is the civilized mechanism to organize these interests. In the absence of a balance between the various interests, the society would explode or be suppressed by an authority or a civil war could erupt. Democracy, therefore, is clearly the right and sound mechanism by which society's interests should be organized. In some Arab societies the existence of different interests is ignored, which serves the interests of the ruler. Centrality of authority undoubtedly has a negative effect on the ability of the NGOs to influence policies. The basis for understanding different interests is to understand that there are differences. If this is agreed on, then one can talk about a mechanism of cooperation and democracy; otherwise we could reach a point where all the people dress in exactly the same manner, such as in Korea, for instance.

In some cases, the traditional society prevents the NGOs or other institutions from affecting policies. The issue of ensuring equality between men and women faces many obstacles, including the traditional structure. In dealing with the issue, there are three basic options: to intervene, in spite of the fact that such efforts will collide with the traditional structure, to obliterate the traditional structure, or to interact with the structure and try to affect it. In all cases, it is best to avoid a violent confrontation that will make it extremely difficult to implement change, or to surrender to the traditional structure, which can lead to containment of the movement by the traditional society.

In conclusion, I think that there is a need for us to answer two basic questions: Will NGOs be necessary in the coming phase and, whether the answer is yes or no, why?

# GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY - RELATIONSHIPS AND ROLES<sup>1</sup>

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## Government and Civil Society

If we look at the relationship between a government and the civil society/NGOs and about how the activities of one can complement those of the other, we are basically talking about government versus the citizen. In this respect, the NGOs act as a cushion that prevents the two groups from clashing. There are two political concepts involved in this relationship, namely, liberty and authority. The former is a key pillar of any democratic society and its protection is one of the most basic responsibilities of a democratic government. It is therefore a very important concept and one of the human being's inalienable rights, which existed long before government itself. Most people refuse to live in bondage, which explains why the phrase 'Liberty or Death!' is often heard. But we are not talking about liberty in absolute; liberty has limitations that involve various kinds of restrictions on the individual. Legal limitations, for example, prohibit driving at high speed; social limitations condemn doing certain things in the street of which society does not approve; economic limitations, meanwhile, restrict the possibilities of doing or buying things.

A primary source of tension in a democratic society stems from the complicated paradox of practicing liberty under governmental control. But without governmental control, the result would be chaos. Citizens opt to have order as opposed to disorder, and make a voluntary contract with the government that allows it to limit our freedom in order to prevent chaos from prevailing in a society. Order is a very important concept in terms of governmental control. Nevertheless, the best civil society is one that enjoys the most liberty. At the same time, the purpose of every government is to exert its control over its citizens but not to confuse the right to control with the right to ter-

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at the PASSIA Training Program on Policy Analysis on 30 August 1997.

the law, while the latter practices it outside the limitations of the law whilst maintaining that its actions are legitimate.

When a state is going through a crisis situation such as war or occupation, people begin to think of liberty not as a right, but as a luxury. During a crisis, the security and welfare of society in general becomes people's number one priority, and the fundamental rights of the individual take on only a secondary importance. Liberty exercised under peace is therefore totally different to liberty exercised under a crisis. During a crisis, people do things to protect society, and to do this they sometimes limit the liberty of individuals; this has happened in every democratic society without exception. Regardless of the level of democracy within a state, liberties are always curtailed in the event of a crisis. At this stage we need to see how this concept applies to Palestinian society, particularly with regard to the relationship between the PNA and the NGOs.

## The PNA and Palestinian Civil Society

Prior to Oslo, and mainly in the 1980s, Palestinian society witnessed a huge increase in the number of NGOs. In the absence of a Palestinian national government, the organizations played a major role in society; first, in fighting the occupation and in mobilizing others to fight the occupation, and second, in providing people with the services that are normally provided by governments. But then, in July 1994, the PNA was established and an entirely new entity came into being. Now, it is very difficult for anyone who has had a great deal of liberty to have to suddenly share it with someone who has come into his house, particularly if that other person believes he has the right to be in control. Before the arrival of the PNA, all the power was divided between the different political and charitable organizations, etc., whereas now it is in the hands of government. The situation today could be compared to that of a middle-aged man who marries, and whose wife comes into the house and starts complaining she does not like this and she does not like that. It takes the husband a long time to become accustomed to the idea of sharing his 'space' and having someone tell him what to do.

All the PNA wants to do is to divide the political and the non-political issues. What constitutes civil society, what is its political role, does a political role even exist? One school of thought brings in the political associations, while the other maintains they have nothing to do with civil society, so it is a matter of different ideologies. In our particular society we were unable to separate the political parties from civil society because of the occupation.

and Gaza. Financial support to NGOs working in the Occupied Territories dropped from a high of US\$220 million in 1990 to a low of US\$60 million in 1996 for two particular reasons: first, the Gulf War, and later, the fact that donor funds were diverted to finance PNA projects and were restricted to NGOs that supported the peace process. From the very beginning, the relationship between the PNA and the NGOs was edgy, not least of all because the latter were concerned that the former would curtail their activities. This fear was unfounded because the PNA never intended to supplant the NGOs, despite the fact that there are some serious problems within many of the different organizations. When the NGOs mushroomed in the 1980s they did so legally and illegally, and many resembled a family business; someone would simply give titles to his wife and children, and then, after 'establishing' his NGO, go to Jordan for funding. This is but one of the ways in which a few bad apples spoiled the box.

The uneasy relationship between the two parties deteriorated when, in September 1995, the Palestinian press published a draft copy of the NGOs Law. The law was supposedly prepared by the Ministries of Justice and Social Affairs, although to be more precise, it was written and proposed by one man who shall remain nameless. When the press came out with their story, people thought the law was a final draft, but it was not. The draft law reflected a narrow view of the role of the NGOs in Palestinian society and an effort by the PNA to interfere in their internal affairs, partly by attempting to draw a clear line that separated their political objectives from their social, cultural and developmental objectives. Strong opposition by the NGOs led the PNA to call on the NGOs to send their written objections to the Minister of Justice for consideration. At present, the law is still on the PLC's agenda waiting to be reviewed, amended and approved.

The fact is that the NGOs made a mistake by overreacting and not keeping things in perspective. Their second mistake, meanwhile, was to go to the donors to complain before discussing the issue with the PNA, thereby turning the whole affair into a very political issue, which did little to improve the NGO-PNA relationship. By the time they approached Abu Ammar he was so upset about their visit to the donors, who had subsequently addressed their complaints to him, that the reception they received was anything but cordial. The President saw himself as a father figure, and he felt betrayed because the NGOs had chosen to take their grievances to the donors. In reality, both parties were to blame for the tension: the PNA because the law, which curtailed the freedom of the NGOs, had not been studied in detail, and the NGOs because they overreacted and voiced their anger in the press, despite the fact that the subject of their anger was a draft law that was still under discussion.



fiscal ability and organizational capacity, not to mention popular support. The people would not allow the PNA to take over the NGOs because so many of them benefited from their services during the pre-PNA period, particularly those who were in prison. People were pleased when human rights activists stood up to the PNA to condemn abuses and corruption because they felt that the NGOs were speaking on their behalf. As angry as he was, President Arafat would not have succeeded in closing down the NGOs.

Now we come to the question of whether or not the PNA wants to control the NGOs; the answer is yes. It wants to control them because it believes that this is its role as a government. It does not seek control over every single move, but it does want to feel that it is responsible for making all the rules. If the fact that the role of government is to rule is accepted, then these NGOs fall within the domain of government and should be ruled by government; they cannot be independent entities associated with donors. Even in the US there is a law that stipulates that if one receives outside funding, he must disclose this money to the government, and he must have a license to operate and accounts that are open. This is exactly what the PNA wants, i.e., for the NGOs to operate legally and to be accountable to the government. It realizes, however, that the NGOs are less bureaucratic and far more organized and efficient than the governmental agencies. They are also more responsive to the needs of the community and more cost effective. And finally, they are popular with the people, which makes it easier for them to build bridges with the outside. Whilst recognizing these advantages, the PNA requires the following from the NGOs:

- that they be legally registered;
- that their activities be officially supervised;
- that their spending be properly monitored;
- that their funds be audited on a regular basis;
- that their sources of income be made public;
- that they publicly declare their loyalty to the Palestinian cause.

Obviously the PNA would prefer the NGOs to declare their loyalty to the PNA itself, but it knows that because of groups like Hamas, etc., it would be unreasonable to expect all the different NGOs to accept the idea. The PNA knows there are organizations that are against the peace process, and it would like them to adopt the political agenda of the PLO; it has enough sense to realize, however, that this will never happen. At the same time, the PNA believes that having control over the NGOs would eliminate duplication, corruption and internal feuding. In general, it wants the NGOs to exercise their right to be NGOs, but whilst complementing the efforts of the

How can we draw a borderline between freedom and authority? It is very important to tell government, "These are your limits," particularly in the case of a society that was colonized and is still in a crisis situation. At the recent donor meeting in Washington, for example, Dr. Nabil Sha'ath and Dr. Mohammed Shtayyeh, instead of talking about money or projects or why the donors are delaying the transfer of funds, spent the entire time listening to the complaints of the donors. Not surprisingly, the donors expressed their opinion that they could not continue providing money to the Palestinians unless they were absolutely sure that the money was going to a good cause. As democratic societies, they could not accept the idea of giving the Palestinians money that would be spent on building palaces for a few, rather than improving the quality of life of the Palestinians in general. Sha'ath and Shtayyeh came back having made no progress at all, simply because the whole meeting had focused on the corruption within the PNA.

At this point I would point out that the corruption is not, as many would have us believe, widespread. There is a great deal of mismanagement, but only very little real corruption and what corruption exists involves those at the top; those at the bottom have no access to large amounts of money. In dealing with the issue of corruption, it is my view that we need two things: first, for the PNA to accommodate the NGOs and to refrain from becoming involved in their internal affairs, but whilst maintaining a supervisory role within the limits of the law, and second, for the NGOs to accept the authority of the PNA, which is only attempting to perform the role of a government. The two parties need to work out a working relationship to be able to function peacefully; should they succeed, Palestinian society will be much stronger and more democratic. Thus, it would be possible to have both liberty and control within the framework of a legal system.

Once the PLC passes the NGOs Law, the NGOs should abide by it, regardless of their reservations; they can always lobby to have it changed at a later date. But they must accept it, because the PLC represents the people. The government must be allowed to fulfill its role – unless anarchy is the desired alternative. One has to remember that the PNA has its own problems, of which many are not always aware. A good example involves the NGO Trust Fund that was recently established by the World Bank. The PNA sought control over the money, but the World Bank denied its request; however, what it did do, for the first time in its history, was to give the money to a Swiss-based NGO - not a government - which is now responsible for approximately US\$14 million and for executing, monitoring and managing the project. So you see, the PNA's hands are often tied, yet it is being attacked all the time and has become very defensive as a result. I think we should all make a bit more effort to understand the position of the other side, whether we are in the NGOs or the PNA.

# THE PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND CIVIL SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

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In the following I will outline the structure and decision-making process of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and explain the role of its members as well as the constraints they are facing. In addition, I will illustrate the work of the PLC members with some case studies from the Jerusalem constituency.

The PLC is very aware of both the role it must play in continuing the struggle against the Israeli occupation and the duty to establish a democratic, Palestinian civil society with its own laws and regulations. Ours is a rather military society, which is reflected in our institutions, including the universities, and it is my belief that this kind of military atmosphere poses a real threat to the development of democracy.

## PLC: The Elections and Members

The elections for the PLC were held in accordance with the Oslo Accords, and 88 members, in addition to the President of the PNA, were elected. A major battle had to be waged against the Israelis before they would agree to recognize Jerusalem as an electoral constituency and Jerusalemites were given the right to participate in the elections, both as voters and candidates. Jerusalem was supposed to have nine representatives, but for unspecified reasons, President Arafat reduced the number to six. Following a lot of pressure, the number was then increased to seven. Those elected included four out of the five Fatah candidates and three independents.

No political parties participated in the elections except for Fatah, although a few of the independent candidates are associated with the Islamic and Leftist groups. The Executive Authority mistakenly believed that the fact that the majority of the Council members are from Fatah implies that the Council

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a workshop held on 12 September 1997 at PASSIA as part of the Training Program on Policy Analysis.

tempts to polarize supporters using various means.

A bloc of approximately 20 ministers and counselors are considered direct supporters of the President, including figures such as Tayyeb Abdul Rahim, the General Secretary of the Presidency and Marwan Kanafani, the President's Counselor. Then there are 20 members whose interests are tied up with those of the President. Another group of around the same size remains in between and, so far, its members have resisted the temptation to serve their private interests. The remaining 28 council members, including people like Haidar Abdul Shafi and Abdul Jawad Saleh, cannot be bought by the President: some of them have similar interests to those of the President, some are in the opposition and some are in between.

Of those PLC members who are not Fatah five are liberals, ten are Islamists and 13 are independents. The liberals agree with the opposition to a certain extent, and it would be possible for us to form a bloc. The Islamists, meanwhile, are not so consistent in their support. As for the independents, some are silent sometimes, while others join the opposition in certain situations, and some heed their own interests.

## **Structure, Role and Decision-Making**

One of our most immediate priorities was to lay the foundations of democracy and establish the rules that would govern the functioning of the PNA. With this in mind, we formed 11 PLC committees, which included, amongst others, the Jerusalem Committee and the Security, Internal, Economic, Educational, Financial, Land and Settlement Committees. Although we had no parliamentary experience, we were able to learn fairly quickly due to meetings and visits abroad, not to mention the advice of foreign experts who provided us with an insight into the basics of parliamentary life and duties.

At that stage, we realized there was a need to form a legal committee in order to have what is called 'legal unity'. When the Authority arrived, three kinds of laws existed: Jordanian in the West Bank, Egyptian in Gaza and the Israeli military laws. In other words, a criminal in Gaza could be punished in a totally different manner to one who had committed exactly the same crime in the West Bank. In the first year alone, we finalized seven or eight laws, including the most important, the Basic Law, which separates the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Authorities. We also formulated the Labor Law and the Local Councils, Local Elections, Currency and Tax Laws. To be frank, we were surprised by the lack of cooperation on the part of the Executive Authority when we presented laws for endorsement. For example, we have been waiting for the Basic Law to be endorsed by the

laws. When we spoke to President Arafat about the issue, he was very evasive due to his reservations about certain aspects of the law, including the section that states that the chairman of the PLC is to replace the president for a period of two months until elections are conducted in case of the president's death or incapacity. President Arafat, although agreeing in principle with the 'death' part, was not so happy about the part that referred to 'incapacity'. Instances of 'incapacity' due to sickness or mental illness are not totally unknown in Arab history: King Talal of Jordan and President Bourqibah of Tunis are just two examples of Arab leaders who were replaced due to their being 'incapacitated'. In the end we held a meeting, canceled the reference to incapacity and retained only the part referring to death. Although we were flexible, in the public interest, the law has not been endorsed, and this has led to a serious rift between the Executive and the Legislative.

As for our immediate task, i.e., legislation, there are two ways of enacting laws. According to the first way, the Executive Authority presents the Legislative Council a draft law for approval and it is then subject to a first and second reading. Laws presented this way are prepared by a special legal team and approved by the Cabinet before they are submitted to the Council. Once we have discussed the law, we return it to the Executive Authority with our comments. Any amendments made by the Executive have to be brought before the Council for a third reading. Only once the law has been endorsed does it become a law.

Alternatively, a PLC member may present a draft law to the Council's chairman for approval by the Council members. Once this has happened, the draft law is transferred to the Legal Committee, which discusses it further and puts it into the proper format so that it can be submitted for a first reading. The law is then discussed item by item, approved in a second reading before being presented to the Executive Authority for its comments and returned to the Council for approval. Finally, it is sent to the PNA Chairman, i.e., Arafat, who has one month to endorse it. If the law is not endorsed, it is discussed once more and, subject to its obtaining the approval of the majority of members, then becomes effective.

## **Problems and Constraints**

PLC members feel that they are being prevented from monitoring and enacting laws and that an attempt is being made to turn them into a mere tool in the hands of the Authority. For instance, when the report of the General Control Committee was issued we formed a committee of Council members to investigate the report, which mentioned things in general but without specifying names. The committee worked day and night for two months and

ministers, deputy ministers, and general directors, were involved in embezzlement, the wasting of public funds, and the misuse of power. Nevertheless, our demand to dissolve the Cabinet and for the President to form a new government was rejected by Arafat, who claimed the report was unfair to the ministers. We were unable to do anything except give the Executive Authority until the end of September to form a new government. Certain individuals who are not accustomed to being held accountable for their actions do not want the PLC to function as it should because they realize that were this to happen, their interests would be threatened. Nevertheless, our efforts will continue. We must be allowed to lay the foundations for future generations.

We discussed the report in an open session in the presence of the media and the French News Agency. I tried to have included in the report a section saying that the president should appoint a prime minister, but the Council rejected my proposal. I once asked the President, "Why do you carry such a heavy burden? You should plan for the future and dedicate yourself to affairs of state. Appoint a prime minister to run the daily affairs for you: let him attend the parliamentary sessions and deal with our problems, instead of constantly allowing yourself to be drawn into confrontation." But Arafat likes to have everything in his hands, and he does not like to allocate responsibility to anyone. Even ministers cannot take decisions in the field of their specialization without first referring to Arafat.

On several occasions, for example, we were discussing important issues in the presence of the President when a number of council members came to the podium, one after the other, with papers for the President to sign. I cannot expect the President to help me pay for my children's schooling or pay my rent, and at the same time oppose his decisions or be a part of an investigative committee. The fact that the majority of Council members or a good number of them have tried to serve their personal interests has undoubtedly affected the performance of the Council. There are, fortunately, about 15-20 Fatah members, known as the old militants, who would support us to the end. There are other groups that support us but only on certain issues.

Sometimes it is possible to reach a consensus on particular issues, such as corruption: remember that the result in this instance was 51 votes against one. But when we oppose the President on a specific issue, then the number becomes less. I could get everyone, even Marwan Kanafani and Tayyeb Abdul Rahim, to support some decisions, but do not forget that some people do not vote when Abu Ammar is present. This is not because they are afraid, but due to their own interests. When we wanted to discuss the issue of corruption and other violations, a group of members tried to have the discussion take place behind closed doors without the presence of the press, but the Council voted to read the report openly before the public.

situation is that we expect to 'lose' the support of every PLC member who becomes a minister as in the case of Hanan Ashrawi and Abdul Jawad Saleh. This is the game that Abu Ammar played, and they fell in the trap. With all due respect to Hanan, she went to Nablus to protest against the arrest of Sarraj, and there Abu Ammar offered her the position of minister, and she took the oath at the same session and came out without saying anything about Sarraj. Abu Ammar is a very clever person and he knows how to polarize people. He follows the rule that says, "Neither let the wolf die of hunger, nor let all the sheep be killed." In the light of this problem, we tried to reach a decision according to which no Executive Authority member could belong to the PLC at the same time, but many Council members were not enthusiastic, for obvious reasons.

To change things on the ground is not easy. Under the present circumstances, we are not able or prepared to form a national opposition party, although the seeds are there. At the same time, according to the law and agreements, the PLC will remain in office for the entire interim period, even if it continues for ten years. Only at the end of this period will a national Palestinian parliament be formed.

One tool of opposition often referred to is the no-confidence motion. So far, however, we have been unable to garner enough support to propose a vote of no-confidence, although it was discussed several times. Many PLC members are convinced that the Authority is not doing its job, and that the Cabinet is not effective, but if it came to an actual vote, they would be reluctant. If things do not improve there will be no alternative but to put the issue to the vote, but even then we will have to rely on the support of those individuals who have ambitions of becoming ministers or holding certain positions and have the most to gain by a change of government.

After the corruption scandal we gave the Executive Authority nine months to dissolve the present government and form a new, democratic government. If the Authority does not cooperate, my colleagues and I will enlist help from within the Council to ensure that a vote of no-confidence is passed. The Cabinet, in my opinion, is a failure. Normally 60-70 people attend the meetings, including the Executive Authority, Abu Ammar, the Central Committee, and the negotiating team, which means it is virtually impossible for a minister to discuss the affairs of his ministry. So what does he do? He discusses them with Abu Ammar.

When Arafat recently decided to appoint a new Minister of Youth and Sports without referring to the Council – which is against the law - there was much criticism from within the PLC. We have demanded that he be subject to a vote of confidence for some time now, but Abu Ammar rejected that request. We also decided not to deal with the minister, and we instructed

he told us he could not comply with our order because the President had summoned him and told him that it is he who gives the orders, not the Council, so things remained as they were.

Each constituency has its own offices and employees. There is certainly some competition, which diminishes cooperation amongst representatives of the same constituency. In Bethlehem, for instance, the four representatives clearly do not perform well as a team.

Another problem we face is that there is no recognition of our role and position on the part of the Israelis. There may be implicit unofficial recognition, but several times when we tried to intervene in certain problems in the Old City, the police prevented us from doing so. I remember one particular incident: a group of people contacted me to ask for my help in solving a dispute, but the other party to the quarrel contacted the police and informed them what was going on. Immediately, the police told me not to become involved. I once opened an office and was very busy for a whole month dealing with various problems, but even the Authority disapproved and eventually, Abu Ammar called me and asked me to close the office for good. In the end, we reached a compromise according to which the office was recognized as belonging to a PLC member, but not as a PLC office. The police still harass me, and everyone who comes to my office is searched. Just four days ago, the intelligence people forced me out of the car in a provocative way, aimed their pistols at me, searched the car, and took my licenses.

## Case Studies

Currently, we face a stage where the people have lost their confidence in the Authority in general, in the PLC and in their own representatives. Yesterday I attended an *atwa* (gathering) in Hebron pertaining to the conflict between the Shwaiki and Qawasmeh families<sup>2</sup> and we visited the village of

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<sup>2</sup> The conflict broke out when the mothers of the two families, who are sisters from the Qawasmeh family, disagreed over their inheritance, and their husbands and sons became involved. In the course of the clashes that erupted between the two families a shooting incident took place, initiated by the Qawasmeh family. A 55-year-old man from that family was shot and killed and his three sons were injured, while four other people from the Shwaiki family were also injured. The Qawasmeh house had been attacked by 14 armed people who set it alight with Molotov cocktails and the shooting continued for two hours. Finally an *atwa* was convened and it was agreed that the truce should last for three days, during which the Shwaiki shops in Jerusalem, Hebron, Ramallah and Bethlehem were to remain closed, while all members of the Shwaiki family, including the children, were to remain in their homes. At the end of the three days, a *jaha* (a group of notable figures), which included officials from the PNA and the PLC, proposed a second *atwa* but the Qawasmehs rejected the suggestion and told them they would have to go to Hebron, which they eventually did. The Qawasmehs had many demands, for example, that 14 Shwaiki families should be evacuated from the Jerusalem district, and that their shops in Jerusalem, Ar-Ram and Dahiet, including a JD 20 million glass factory with 40-50 workers, should be closed for a year. They also demanded the immediate payment of blood money of JD 100,000 although the mediators were able to lower the amount to JD 40,000. The ruling was clearly unjust, because the man was killed with a single bullet and the killer was unknown, yet 14 families were made to suffer. Later Faisal Hussein and Hatem Abdul Qader brought the Qawasmeh family the keys of the two houses whose ownership had caused the dispute.



ing to help, but then asked them why they had not requested help from their own representatives. They replied - and remember we are talking about village leaders, not 'ordinary' citizens - that they have never even met their representatives. When I investigated the matter further, I was surprised to discover that the Palestinian Embassy in Moscow had asked the Jordanian Embassy to transfer the body to the West Bank. Now who should do that, the Jordanians or us?

Not all representatives have a tangible presence. Even though the other Jerusalem representatives and I try to move among the people and deal with their problems, it is hard to see how we can really be of help to the people we represent. Take, for example, Emile Jarjou'i - he is a member of the Executive Committee and the PLC and the head of Caritas Hospital, plus he has his private clinic in the Old City and he is also involved with Maqassed Hospital: where is he supposed to find the time for all of that? He is not the only example...

Another problem society is facing is the unacceptable behavior and loose morals amongst many Palestinian youngsters. We understand that a great number of our younger generation need to be educated, on both the national and moral level, as their behavior has been negatively affected by the occupation and the present economic and social situation, which has led to many serious problems, including that of drug addiction. Jerusalem, unfortunately, lacks a capable body with the ability to gather these young people under its wing and guide them in the right direction. Nevertheless, the Jerusalem Committee reached a decision to do everything possible to find a way to provide young people from Jerusalem with education, clubs, lectures and job opportunities. Today, especially in the Old City, you will find that the father is a drug addict while the mother is ignorant and between them, the two parents are totally incapable of raising a large family, which is why you often find up to ten children from the same family hanging around on the streets. There is a great need for comprehensive social research to be conducted. The battle for Jerusalem could last another half century, and we have to prepare today's younger generation for the struggle ahead.

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They told the family that the evacuation of the 14 families from Jerusalem would contribute to emptying Jerusalem of its Arab population, so the Qawasmeh family agreed to give the Shwaikis one month to move to Sur Baher or Um Tuba (near Jerusalem). Initially, the Shwaikis refused to close their shops, but were persuaded to conform to the ruling, whilst they requested the President to intervene. Unfortunately, the Authority failed to investigate who was directly responsible for the murder; had it done so, a far better solution could have been found. Even though the area in which the incident took place is under the security jurisdiction of the Israelis, the Authority, had it wanted to, could have intervened through the District Coordination Office (DCO), and had the President chosen to contact the Qawasmehs and tell them that their demands were unfair, the dispersion of 14 families could have been avoided.

year now, but not through the Authority. We opened, for example, a club for the Palestinian-African community in Jerusalem, and we also opened the Old City Youth Club, but again, it was not provided with a budget by the Authority and we rely on contributions from various institutions and wealthy individuals, and to a limited extent, from the Authority itself. We were able, during Palestine Week, to collect US\$1,100,000 from Qatar to partially support the different institutions. The Jerusalem Sons Club has been in existence for some time. As for the Burj Al-Laqlaq Club, the building that originally stood on the site was demolished by the Israelis, and we were able to convince the Qatari delegation to donate US\$100,000, of which US\$30,000 has been actually received, to build a brand-new club.

During the summer vacation, and as part of the effort to care for the youth of Jerusalem, we conducted a Boy Scout camp, which was very successful. We hope to be able to hold similar camps on an annual basis, in addition to periodical activities. The clubs outside the Old City are in a better shape, which is the main reason why we decided to concentrate on those in the Old City. We have plans for other programs, for which we hope to receive funding from the donors. It is extremely important that we invest in the future of the younger inhabitants of the Old City.

Part of our recent activities in Jerusalem was the establishment of the *Su-mud* (steadfastness) Camp. At the beginning, the media were interested but they appear to have lost interest and nothing is written about it in the press, in spite of the fact that this camp represents the suffering of all Jerusalemites who live in fear of losing their right to live in Jerusalem.

Another issue with which the Jerusalem representatives are preoccupied at the present time is the confiscation of ID cards. Of course the mass withdrawal has a political aim, and the legal justifications are no more than superficial pretexes. Our efforts to win the battle by resorting to the courts have failed, and we lost all the cases that we took to the High Court. The cases then became precedents, which is why we now ask people to stay away from the courtroom. The decision to withdraw IDs is politically motivated, but I would point out that even by depriving us of our cards, the Israelis remain incapable of negating Palestinian rights in Jerusalem.

Actually, I believe that the Israelis will now reconsider their decision to withdraw IDs as although some 1,000 identity cards were withdrawn in the last 11 months, the number of Palestinian Jerusalemites increased by about 22,000. This was due to the fact that a large number of Palestinians, concerned about the possibility of losing their rights in Jerusalem, returned from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Moreover, residents of Dahiet started to look for houses in the Old City while the number of residents in the Shu'fat Refugee

that is brought to our attention.

The recent controversy over Maqassed Hospital, which is a national institution of which we are very proud, was also a matter we dealt with. The Authority, however, committed several mistakes when dealing with the issue, the most recent of which was to appoint a committee without first referring to the hospital administration, including Hebiyyeh himself. This even created problems with the Israelis, who refused to recognize the committee, and we received warnings from the Israeli Minister of Health saying that if the Authority attempted to make changes or otherwise interfere, "we will reconsider the hospital's license." Nevertheless, we met with Hebiyyeh and with Dr. Haidar Abdul Shafi and agreed to conduct elections for the administrative board of the Maqassed Charitable Society, comprising 12-13 figures from Jerusalem and the West Bank, between 15 and 26 September. Things should improve following the elections.

Naturally, Hebiyyeh was not very pleased to see his authority undermined and was quoted as saying, "If Arafat has any thing against us, then let him summon us or arrest me, and tell me what he has against me." In spite of the fact that Hebiyyeh has his weaknesses, it has to be said that he struggled very hard to turn the hospital into such a great national institution. Abu Ammar, unfortunately, was unable to let bygones be bygones and rejected our suggestion of a meeting with Hebiyyeh. Hebiyyeh said that his accounts were open and, in fact, the accounts were not the issue and embezzlement is a relative issue. We know of plenty of instances of embezzlement and the wasting of public funds in many PLO institutions. What is so shameful is that Hebiyyeh's accounts were open, and any party that wished to investigate them would have been provided with the required documents. I do not believe in acting on rumors: the only thing that counts is evidence. The hospital is facing a financial problem that the Authority made no effort to solve, there is no administration as such, and the closure is having an extremely negative impact on the hospital's financial situation: although ready to serve one million people, with the majority of Jerusalem residents insured with the Israelis and with Palestinians from the West Bank unable to reach Jerusalem for treatment, the hospital ran into very serious problems.

In relation to Jerusalem I should perhaps add that it was suggested to us that we establish some kind of a relationship with the municipality through some of its Arab employees and attempt to convene a meeting between ourselves and municipality representatives, in order to find solutions to certain problems in Jerusalem. We responded by saying that we do not recognize the West Jerusalem Municipality as it is based on the occupation of Jerusalem and accordingly, we could not agree to such a suggestion.

# DOES THE PEACE PROCESS MATTER AND, IF SO, WHY?<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
*Head of PASSIA*

Since the launching of the Middle East Peace Process in 1991, the Arab-Israeli conflict has entered a new chapter and, in many regards, the region is passing through an unprecedented historical phase. However, the anticipated peace 'dividends', in most cases, have yet to be felt; the peace process has gone through many crises and appears to have failed to reach the conclusions broadly aspired to.

The internationally applauded agreements reached between the Palestinians and Israelis since 1993 have – despite their unquestionable importance – thus far failed to produce the desired stability in the region as well as rapprochement amongst its people. With the signing of Oslo I, the Palestinian people hoped this would be the turning point after decades of conflict and a long history of sacrifice and loss. The future seemed bright and there was a genuine readiness to overcome the fears of the past and begin a new era of mutual recognition and cooperation. However, the region as a whole today is at a crossroads between fear and hope, and the possible future scenarios range anywhere between achieving real peace and stability to the emergence of a new circle of violence and confrontation.

Before considering if the Middle East Peace Process still matters, and if so, why, one must first look at what the peace process implies in the Palestinian-Israeli context. To do this, one can refer to the opening paragraph of the Declaration of Principles, signed on 13 September 1993, which reads as follows:

"The Government of the State of Israel and the PLO team in the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation (to the Middle East Peace Conference) ("the Palestinian delegation") representing the Palestinian people agree that it is time to put an end to the decades of confrontation and conflict, recog-

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at Wilton Park Conference (England, 27-31 July 1998), entitled "Peace and Stability in the Middle East: The Realities."

lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process.”

It can be gathered from the above, that the peace process has three major aspects: mutual recognition, peaceful coexistence and a historical reconciliation through a political process that consists of contacts, dialogue and negotiation. However, the unbalanced and unequal positions of the two parties are also clearly reflected. The Israeli leadership demanded explicit conditions to be met by the Palestinian leadership before signing the Oslo Accord, that is to “recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security” and that “the PLO renounce the use of terrorism and other acts of violence.” The Israeli leadership understood the accords as a truce; Prime Minister Rabin stated in Washington on 13 September 1993,

“We, the soldiers, who have returned from battles stained with blood, ...we who have fought against you, the Palestinians, we say to you today in a loud and clear voice, enough, of blood and tears, enough.”

He added, “Let us pray that a day will come when we all say farewell to arms.”

The Palestinians, on the other hand, understood the accords as the conclusion of long decades of sacrifices and losses. The PLO statement of 12 September 1993 read:

“Our people is anxious to welcome a new stage in its long struggle through the realization of the first tangible achievement on the land of its homeland. These tidings of this achievement would have not appeared without the dear sacrifices offered by the caravans of martyrs and *muja-heddin* for generation after generation...”

The sponsors of the Oslo Accords saw them as a “continuing process in which the parties transform the very way they see and understand each other,” as President Bill Clinton put it in his speech at the signing ceremony.

Today, approximately five years after the peace process began in Oslo, let us examine the various files of contacts, dialogue and negotiations.

Contacts are not something new or unexpected. In any relationship there are always contacts, whether in times of peace or times of war. The language or tools may differ, but they are always there. With regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, contacts have different faces and take place at different levels: between professionals, businessmen, academics, military, officials,

attend the same seminars and conferences, etc., but do these contacts lead to a genuine dialogue? The answer would have to be no, because any dialogue that takes place does so within the respective society, in other words, between Palestinians, and between Israelis, but not with each other.

The dialogue in Israel today, after 100 years of Zionism and 50 years of Israel, is based on an ideological dilemma: Now that the Zionist dream has been achieved and a Jewish state has been established in Palestine, where do the Jews go from here? Left or Right, Labor or Likud, that is the question that all Jews are debating. The Arabs, after 100 years of struggle for independence and unity and 50 years since the Palestinian *Naqba* (catastrophe), are asking a totally different question, namely, are we on the right track for Arab independence and unity? The Palestinian debate, meanwhile, revolves around the question, "Are we building another Arab regime? Are we combining the major elements of democratic values, statehood and sovereignty, or are we going off in different directions?"

In spite of the fact that the dialogue is limited to the respective societies - exposing the serious divisions in each - there is no denying the fact that the dialogue in itself is an extremely positive development. Today, there is an environment of coexistence; it is still not an environment of peace, but the two sides are seeing each other, going back to their own societies and having their separate dialogues. Having this dialogue at all is undoubtedly a step in the right direction to realizing the goals inherent in the opening paragraph of the DoP.

As to negotiations, there are taking place today inside negotiations within the Israeli Government, between Israeli ministers, and not only Labor-Likud or Left-Right, but also Likud-Likud, concerning Jerusalem, settlements, and redeployment, Chairman Arafat's political system and so on and so forth. Unfortunately, in spite of the Israelis' passion for dialogue and negotiations amongst themselves, they still remain reluctant to negotiate with their recognized partner in the Middle East Peace Process, the Palestinians.

The Palestinians, as a direct result of this Israeli reluctance, are obliged to put all their effort into consulting and negotiating with the neighboring Arab countries, with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.; they are negotiating the Palestinian national agenda with their so-called strategic allies in the region, because they need the Arab states' political, moral and financial support as the Israelis continue their attempts to avoid fulfilling their commitments and implement what was signed and agreed upon.

Does the peace process matter? The answer is yes, for the following reasons. The peace process, with all its flaws and setbacks, was successful in

namely recognition. The importance of this recognition is that it changed the base on which the two parties were standing.

Political Zionism has been based on two beliefs; the first was promoted amongst the Jews by the Anglo-Jewish author, Israel Zangwill, who wrote in 1901 the following:

“Palestine is a country without a people, the Jews are a people without a country. The regeneration of the soil would bring the regeneration of the people.”

This concept represented the demand of the Jews for Jewish exclusivity in Palestine, thus denying the existence of another people.

The peace process has brought about Jewish recognition of the Palestinians, their leadership and their legitimate rights, and acceptance of not only their existence, but also the fact that the two peoples, the Palestinians and Israelis, are destined to live in the land of Palestine/Israel together. As Rabin stated in his speech at the signing ceremony:

“to live together on the same soil in the same land ... live side by side with you in dignity, in affinity, as human beings, as free men.”

The cornerstone inherent in Zangwill's writings has therefore been shaken, the foundation on which its argumentation was based lost.

The second element of political Zionism derives from beliefs similar to those of Jabotinski, who frequently voiced the opinion that the Arabs do not understand anything but the language of force and that the only way for the Jews to realize their aspirations in Palestine was to fight the Palestinians. He was by no means alone in his belief. The philosophy, the education and the establishment of the Israeli army has been based on this notion.

In theory, this concept lost its validity when the Labor government accepted the negotiation process and the Madrid Conference ‘land-for-peace’ formula as a basis to reach an understanding with the Arabs and a settlement with the Palestinians. With this move, the concept of force or war suddenly lost much of its support and was eventually replaced by the conclusion that it is possible for the Israelis and Palestinians to achieve peace through negotiations as opposed to war. “We wish to open a new chapter in the sad book of our lives together – a chapter of mutual recognition, of good neighborliness, of mutual respect, of understanding.” (Prime Minister Rabin at the signing ceremony.)

the State of Israel or negotiating with the Jews, and it totally rejected any Jewish claim to any part of Palestine. The mutual recognition through the peace process has done away with the 'unthinkable' of the past. PLO Chairman Arafat, in his speech at the White House, put it this way: "Our people do not consider that exercising the right to self-determination could violate the rights of their neighbors or infringe on their security."

Of course, Palestinians are frustrated and angry that not all the dividends of peace are yet within their reach, but it would be wrong to say that the peace process has not opened the opportunity to one day enjoy them. The peace process has undoubtedly resulted in a new way of thinking, new perspectives, new approaches, etc., and has started a normalization process, but what use the Palestinian can make of such developments is an entirely different story.

## The Current Situation

For most Palestinians, life has worsened since the Oslo Accords and only a few talk about the ongoing negotiations in positive terms. Today, five years after Oslo the hopes for a two-state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and bring about a better life for the generations to come has been replaced by great disillusionment and frustration among Palestinians.

There are some positive aspects that arose following the signing of the Oslo Accords and the event of the PNA. New buildings have sprung up everywhere, beautification projects have given most cities a new outlook, and the streets are filled with people who are no longer threatened by curfews. Previously illegal symbols of the Palestinian identity, such as the flag, can now be seen everywhere and there are Palestinian stamps, Palestinian license plates, and Palestinian passports and IDs, in addition to uniformed Palestinian security personnel. However, beyond the symbolic level and the political system in the making - with the establishment of ministries and other governmental institutions, governorates, the Legislative Council, Bureau of Statistics, etc., the PNA has become the largest employer with some 100,000 employees - national sovereignty is still far from being achieved. Although the small changes in individual freedom should not be underestimated, they stand in stark contrast to the fact that it is still Israeli interests and goodwill that govern the life of the Palestinians in every aspect. The free movement within Gaza is diminished by the fact that hardly anyone can leave the Strip except, in some cases, to go to work in Israel, but not to visit relatives or friends in the West Bank or even Jerusalem, which also remains completely closed off to Palestinians from the West Bank.



changes have clearly occurred at the expense of the Palestinians.

The continued land confiscation and expansion of Israeli settlements remains central to the struggle for real peace and a viable Palestinian state. Although the Rabin government promised a freeze on settlement construction and the Oslo Accords postponed the issue to the upcoming final status talks, the existing settlements continue to expand at an alarming rate, especially around Jerusalem. Besides involving more confiscation of Palestinian land, the settlements are a strategic threat to any further Palestinian development as they prevent the towns' and villages' natural growth and destroy the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory.

The peace process was based on the implementation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 of 1967, which called for an Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied in the course of the June War. It was in the spirit of this understanding, that the Palestinian side signed the Oslo Accords. However, since then Israel has confiscated hundreds of thousands of additional dunums of Palestinian land and the number of Jewish settlers in the Palestinian Territories has increased considerably. That the Israeli side read the accords in a totally different manner with regard to the land and settlement issue becomes clear in the following statement by Israeli scholar Yossi Alpher, quoted in the *Jerusalem Post* (28 January 1994):

“The Rabin government accepts the principle of a territorial solution but it has locked into the [Oslo] Agreement the key manifestation of its predecessor's determination to prevent such a territorial solution – the settlements.”

Similarly, former Israeli key negotiator Yossi Beilin made the following statement:

“The [Oslo II] Agreement was delayed for months in order to guarantee that all the settlements would remain intact and that the settlers would have maximum security. This entailed an immense financial investment. The situation in the settlements has never been better than in the situation created following the Oslo II Agreement.”

(Quoted in *Ma'ariv*, 27 September 1994.)

As for the economic situation, World Bank and other statistics clearly indicate that the Palestinians are significantly worse off than they were before the Oslo Accords. Unemployment and poverty have reached unprecedented levels and the Israeli imposed restrictions as well as the prevailing

Within the West Bank, the Israeli isolation policies have led to particularly bad repercussions. Despite the fact that the territorial integrity of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was explicitly recognized in the Oslo Accords, the Palestinians are today divided into three separated entities: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The freedom of entry and exit between these three areas has become a mission impossible because of the ongoing Israeli-imposed closure. Due to the closure of Jerusalem, people who do not have a Jerusalem residency card cannot enter the city without prior permission, nor can cars with West Bank plates. The closure means a policy of siege, no freedom of movement, economic control and preventing access to sources of income. The closure has had devastating effects on the Palestinian economy and created losses that exceed by far the disbursements of the donor countries.

Security has been 'sold' as an absolute value to the Israelis; the fact that Palestinians also long for security is ignored. In the past two decades, thousands of Palestinians were killed at the hands of Israelis and tens of thousands more were injured. Moreover, they have been subject to arbitrary Israeli practices in terms of arrests, detention, house demolition, deportation, etc., and their lives have been 'guided' by Israeli military orders and restrictive measures as well as by the many violations perpetrated by Israeli settlers and ignored by the army. In the absence of a legal system there is no protection for individuals, their communities, or their towns and villages. Palestinian resistance and reaction to all of these practices has constantly been interpreted as 'terror acts' and violence. Today, in spite of the signed agreements, whose security-related terms and conditions were dictated by Israel, the security situation of the Palestinian people has hardly improved and they remain to a great extent exposed to arbitrary Israeli measures.

## Outlook

It is clear to all parties involved that the collapse of the peace process would prove perilous, as it would give rise to the extremists on both sides. To avoid this, the peace accords must be implemented as scheduled in order to restore the hopes of a disheartened Palestinian people and all those Israelis who opted for peace.

What are the options at hand? First, to maintain the *status quo*, meaning a continuation of Israeli policies and practices, including settlement expansion and the Judaization of Jerusalem. This would provoke and anger the Palestinians, thereby creating a powder keg in the Palestinian Territories that could explode at any time. If such confrontations were to erupt, it is doubtful

that are on a rise within Palestinian society.

Another question is that of how Israel would react. There are three possible scenarios: the Netanyahu government might order the army to re-occupy the Palestinian Territories, which would initiate a new vicious circle of violence; Israel might tighten the closure, including moving tanks around Zones A, B and C.; or it might recognize a partial Palestinian state. This would be most likely limited to Gaza, while the West Bank would either be annexed, occupied or given some sort of autonomy. All three scenarios would lead to a deterioration in Palestinian-Israeli relations and the eventual collapse of the PNA, which will ultimately open the doors for the Islamic movement to take the lead in the subsequent confrontations.

How can we avoid bloodshed? The only answer to this question is that the accords have to be implemented now and with no new conditions imposed by the Israelis. If this is not achievable, the Palestinians will consider themselves freed from the Oslo stipulations by the end of May 1999, when the interim phase officially comes to an end. Palestinians will under no circumstances give up their rights to freedom and an independent state and will fulfill their aspirations by declaring their state. This is not a dream but an inevitable fact: the Palestinians have the land (i.e., the 1967 borders as recognized by International Law and various resolutions), the people, their legitimate elected government, and the recognition.

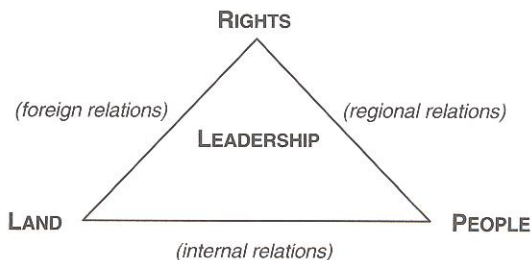
“Oslo is dead” is the most common sentiment heard in Palestine these days and even those who are still committed to peace and operating within the spirit and framework of the signed accords have lost faith that negotiations will live up to the Palestinians’ expectations. If the peace process is to have any further meaning for Palestinians it must deliver self-determination and a state as well as a tangible improvement in their daily lives.

# INTRA-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS: FROM THE INTERIM PERIOD – WHERE TO?<sup>1</sup>

Roundtable Discussion with Hani Al-Hassan  
*Member of the PLO Central Committee; in charge of the External Affairs Department*

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi:* In a meeting that took place in the early 1990s in London - during the Gulf Crisis and when the PLO leadership was weak, isolated, rejected and exiled in Tunis – a group of Palestinians came out with a working paper and some of them left for Tunis later on to discuss certain points with the leadership. Others, as you know, chose not to go. The famous Arab writer Hassanein Haykal says in his book that Abu Ammar was lost between two trends: one group was inclined to recognize Israel, while another shared the views expressed during the Stockholm meeting. Abu Ammar in his famous document declared the Palestinians' recognition of 242 and their readiness to negotiate with Israel and to renounce terrorism in all its forms.

What is the Palestinian issue now? It has three components: land, people and rights, all of which are connected to the soul and legitimate representative of the Palestinian issue, the PLO.



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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a roundtable meeting that took place at PASSIA on 8 September 1998.

the land into Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There is a new melting pot in Ramallah, which used to be a small Christian city where one could only live or set up a business if one had roots and relations there. Nowadays, whoever has the funds can move to Ramallah and open an office or shop there, thereby melting into this huge pot. Is this the society that we are looking for? Or do we want our society to remain one in which people 'belong' and remain loyal to their towns and villages?

Concerning the rights, what are our rights now, between the Interim Agreement period and the Final Status Agreement period? The most important issue is our internal relations, which govern our foreign and regional relations. Our society is disintegrating due to our frustration and desperation. The latest poll that was conducted by the Center for Palestine Research and Studies (CPRS) in Nablus showed that 36 percent of the population - and the figure is higher amongst educated and cultured Palestinians - is ready to leave the country now because of its dissatisfaction with the current situation. Anyone who has a diploma, the necessary contacts, and a reasonable amount of money is saying that this is not the type of society in which they wish to live. Therefore, I ask you, in the name of your love for your country, your commitment to your people and your aspirations for a better future for all Palestinians to work together in order to come up with a number of ideas concerning the issues we should be concentrating upon in the next few months, taking into account that most people agree on the need to declare statehood in May 1999. Another fact that must be taken into consideration is that we do not have an official Israeli partner who is committed to the signed agreements, while the Palestinian-American relations are devoid of any substance. I invite all of you to think together in order to help us as an academic institution to develop a position paper and thank you all for finding the time to attend this preliminary meeting.

Let me start by asking: Where are we today and to where are we going, taking into account that some members in the four forums that I mentioned say that it is essential to declare statehood despite the fact that the leadership is weak and facing internal problems, while others say that there should either be a bi-national state or a confederacy with Jordan? Those who favor the Jordanian option are not very vocal at the moment, but are waiting for the post-Arafat era to expose their views.

What is our role as academics and national institutions, realizing that our internal problems have led to the decay of our society and the absence of law or real authority, etc.?

*Dr. Gabi Baramki:* In order to reach a conclusion, we must be fully aware of the fact that these are all interconnected issues. Our internal problems are

deal with the situation whenever we want to lobby abroad, those with whom we speak always bring up what is happening here and the question of whether or not ours is a democratic society, and, if it is not, what we intend to do about it.

I think that it is very important that we start by solving our internal problems whilst forgetting about everything else, or alternatively, that we forget about our internal problems and concentrate on doing what each of us has to do and looking for new concepts. Concerning these concepts, are we heading towards a Palestinian state, a laic state in all of Palestine or a confederacy with Jordan? Maybe we should limit our discussion from now in order not to get lost later on.

*Dr. Hasan Abu Libdeh:* I think the real question that needs to be discussed is who are we? As individuals and as a society, we should always ask ourselves who we are. I believe that the Palestinian 'black box' disappeared during the last stage of the *Intifada* and the period of Oslo, and that without this black box, we can no longer have a national consensus on the issues of principles and social change or influence or change them. We ourselves are the source of the problem and we should rearrange the question of the Palestinian identity and redefine the specific essence of the Palestinian society. It was the weakening of the PLO that led to the weakening of Palestinian society and it is for this reason that we need to have a national consensus, either by reviving the role of the PLO or by finding an alternative.

Returning to the triangle, you speak about rights, but what are the rights in the absence of this black box? Are we talking about the rights of a part of the Palestinian people present in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or the rights of the Palestinian people as a whole? What people are we talking about? In the last four to five years, we have witnessed a process in which the roles and status of certain groups and individuals have undergone a significant change, and this must be taken into account.

As for the land, this issue is very clear.

It is my opinion that if there is no minimum on which all of us can agree, then there is no hope whatsoever. As a citizen, I am extremely concerned about the fact that there is no longer anything that warrants us sacrificing our lives; the thing that regrouped us in the past whatever our differences and regardless of our address is simply not there. The battle of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1999 should not be regarded as the battle of only the Palestinians who are here. We are all aware that there are disagreements concerning the definition of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, especially as any declaration of a Palestinian state will ignore 60 percent of the Palestinian people and take into consideration only

What I understand is that as of 4<sup>th</sup> May we will start a new page in our history: a page that will include a new society, a country with sovereignty, the end of the armed struggle, etc.

*Ziad Abu Zayyad:* The truth is that it is difficult to discuss these issues separately from the reality in which we live and without asking the question: Will this lead to the dissolution of the Palestinian cause? As to what Hasan Abu Libdeh said, Abu Ammar is our black box, and if he declares a Palestinian state on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May on the Palestinian land of 1967, all of us, not only the President, will find ourselves committed to certain things.

*Dr. Abu Libdeh:* The 4<sup>th</sup> of May marks the end of the Oslo Agreement and the beginning of a new stage.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* But where is the Palestinian land in all this? There is on one side the Gaza Strip and on the other the West Bank, which is divided into six main cities while the remainder remains under Israeli control. Jerusalem, meanwhile, is totally under siege and isolated by an organized continuous process that nobody can stop. This is our current situation and the geographic unity of the land of 1967 no longer exists. Can we - as a people or as a national Palestinian movement - now insist that it is essential to unite the Palestinian land in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem? I do not think that the current political equation would allow us to do this, no matter how hard we tried.

*Ziad Abu Zayyad:* This is documented in the fourth article of the Oslo Agreement.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* But our political partner is not respecting this agreement. I ask you, therefore, could we do it?

*Hani Al-Hassan:* I believe that all of us need to be politically courageous, realizing that this issue is important not only to us, but to the entire Arab nation. We have to fully understand the new reality and that in order to reap, one needs to sow. In 1963 Chairman Mao told us that if we were ready to revolt, he hoped he would still be around to write about it; nobody at the time believed that the Palestinian people would be able to endure a continuous confrontation lasting 33 years. Anyone can survive a short-term confrontation, but to survive one lasting such a lengthy period of time is quite remarkable.

During the recent sowing process, i.e., Oslo, Baker promised that if we moved to the 'American ship' and make certain concessions, he would

less than a Palestinian state. A series of meetings followed and we were all somewhat shocked when Baker and Bush got up and left the table.

Later on came the Oslo Agreement, which was established on the basis that Rabin and Peres had changed their political views and that Clinton, Rabin and Peres had agreed upon a new concept. Again, the belief amongst Palestinians was that the agreement would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state and that the declaration of statehood would most likely be made in November 1996. But then came the assassination of Rabin, and we found that the Israeli, as well as the American side, had deserted the table. Accordingly, we find ourselves heading for the 4<sup>th</sup> of May with the image of the land that was drawn at Oslo staring up at us from the table.

There are three things that should not be violated during the period leading up to May 1999, namely the land, the unity of the people and our national dignity, and anything that violates them cannot be accepted, even though all three have been violated in the past. I believe that it is impossible for the PNA, under the Oslo Agreement, to respect, for example, the issue of human rights as the agreement obliges the PNA to honor certain commitments that necessitate its turning a blind eye to the upholding of certain principles. I am not condemning its stand or laying blame, but the fact is that if I prevent those who want to continue the armed struggle from doing so, then I cannot say that I respect human rights. When I resort to drastic, unacceptable methods to gain access to information that will help me honor my commitments then I cannot claim to respect human rights. I have been at several meetings involving Abu Ammar and the leaders of various countries during which the latter have brought up the issue of human rights; after listening to Abu Ammar's explanations, they inevitably concede that he has no choice but to use certain unsavory methods in order to fulfill his commitments. Just imagine what would happen to these leaders if they used the same methods back home!

Now, how can we, in light of Oslo and under the umbrella of the Paris Economic Agreement, establish a national economy? I only have control over 23 percent of the water, which is clearly not sufficient, and one can only wonder how the ex-Minister of Agriculture was supposed to facilitate an agricultural revolution without access to water! The World Bank came with US\$12 million for the creation of the industrial zone in Gaza, only to say, once the infrastructure was ready, that it could not sign the documents that the Americans had brought because of the fact that there is no freedom to transport the merchandise from the industrial zone to Al-Majdal or El-Arish. The Oslo Agreement is standing there like a barrier in the face of agriculture, industry, commerce, human rights and the land.



no mechanism of implementation. The Camp David Agreement became a law in the American Congress, so the American Government was obliged to implement it. When the ship Achille Lauro was hijacked, I was asked to solve the problem. The four kidnappers came down from the ship and we were able to solve the problem peacefully, but then they wanted to take us with them in a plane and I told the head of the Egyptian Intelligence that I refused to board with Abu Al-Abass and the others. He ignored my protests, the plane was hijacked, and Rabin announced that the plane had been hijacked with Hani Al-Hassan on board. When officials from the President's office called me to ask why I had not given the Americans all the details, I told them that according to Camp David, the question was US-Egyptian relations and we as a third party were not recognized - my only role, which I was asked to play by the Egyptians, was that of mediator - meaning that it was up to the Americans or Egyptians to take the initiative.

In the Oslo Accords, as I said, all we have is dates, but even those, as Rabin pointed out, are not sacred. That is why the 4<sup>th</sup> of May will mark the beginning of a new stage that will follow one in which the unity of the land was not respected, the safe passage was not established, more and more of the land was used by the Israelis, and settlements were erected on any West Bank land in the immediate vicinity of water resources. There is no Palestinian city - except Nablus - whose inhabitants drink from a Palestinian well, and even there the well is polluted. Hebron relies on water from Kiryat Arba, Bethlehem on water from Kfar Etzion, and Ramallah on water from Givat Ze'ev.

I think it is important that we consider the positive things about our current situation. For one thing, the world is now standing by us for the first time ever. Europe is standing by us, and even Clinton's position is positive. Netanyahu, meanwhile, is taking advantage of our internal situation. I think we must agree that we can no longer continue to back the Oslo Agreements and that we must unite in our support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, meaning in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, but not Jaffa and Haifa etc. This requires a lot of legal preparation and a lot of careful consideration. If we are controlling only 15, 30 or 35 percent of the land, can we actually establish a state? Israel and the US are trying to make us accept the situation as a *fait accompli*, which brings us to the question: Is Arafat alone on this road or not?

In what direction should we go after the 4<sup>th</sup> of May? After Churchill, Chamberlain, Hitler, and Daladier signed the Munich Agreement, Chamberlain returned to England and told the 200,000 people who were in the streets to receive him that he had brought them the peace agreement of a lifetime. However, when he went to the Houses of Parliament, Churchill stood up

choose to avoid war, but in reality, you took the war. Six months later Hitler invaded. I believe that we the Palestinians are trying to avoid the confrontation, and not only the armed confrontation; nowadays, the unarmed confrontation is much more effective than the armed one.

As I said previously, Netanyahu is relying on us accepting the situation as a *fait accompli* and he wants the Palestinians and Jordanians to remain in the Israeli orbit from the security, political and economic viewpoints. He appears to have the NAFTA example in mind, with Israel playing the role of the US, Jordan that of Canada and the Palestinians that of Mexico; in other words, that of a provider of workers. However, because he does not want to have political problems, he is keen to see Jordan and Palestine become one political body. King Hussein, on the other hand, does not want to be a part of the equation, so the plan requires a lot of changes. Moreover, Abu Ammar and King Hussein have their problems, as do Abu Ammar and Netanyahu, which confirms the need for changes to the plan.

Can we, the Palestinians, continue to ignore that fact that we are so divided? The Oslo stage was very difficult and it totally divided the entire Palestinian society to such an extent that today, there is no political party, refugee camp or community that is not divided. Can we make the 4<sup>th</sup> of May the day that marks the revival of our national unity? And will the situation within the PNA enable it to adapt to this revival? The PNA rules now because it has the power, not because it is a suitable model and this power divides rather than unifies the people. There is a famous saying that says that when a revolution is transformed into an authority, it kills its sons, but being a model is something that unifies the people. The PLO, the PLC and the government cannot unite the people, unlike the National Council, consisting of 250 people, not 700 or 800, half of whom are from the military. Were the people to be united, the 4<sup>th</sup> of May could be a glorious day in the history of the Palestinian cause.

*Dr. Mohammed Jadallah:* In our society, there are three main groups that are capable of making a difference: the politicians, the different political parties – or what is left of these parties - and the academics. For the time being it seems that the politicians will play the bigger role; many academics attempted to play a political role but did not succeed, and the same applies to certain politicians who wanted to try their hand at being academics. We should not forget the military – our young people are being prepared to become repressive tools, as was the case with different groups of fascists. Who is going to lead in the upcoming stage? Will the different political parties be restored, or are the academics going to take the lead?

situation is so bad? Nothing is controlled and corruption is the name of the game whether on the inside or outside. The members of the PLC who were elected by the people and who have a mandate are not doing anything, nor are the members of the Central Committee. I hope that future meetings similar to the one being held today will lead to the reaching of a consensus concerning the role of the educated and academics in normalizing the Palestinian situation.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* We are agreed about the need to declare a state on 4<sup>th</sup> May, but are we ready for the 4<sup>th</sup> of May? The Arab and Islamic countries will support the declaration of a state, but the leadership is constantly complaining that it does not have an Israeli partner. We have all the elements necessary for an independent state, i.e. land, people, right, government and recognition, even if they have been violated, but we need to be sure that the Palestinian civil society is ready to support the decision. We are approaching the 4<sup>th</sup> of May as a Palestinian national movement without taking into consideration what is happening to the PLO and its institutions, whether there is a powerful national authority or not, whether there is corruption or not. We have to ask the question: Will the declaration that is made on the 4<sup>th</sup> May be merely another inapplicable declaration like the declaration made in Algiers?

*Samia Khoury:* There must be a real change in the performance of the PNA, the people, etc. before the state is declared. The people do not trust anybody anymore, especially the PNA, which does not seem to appreciate the fact that those same people who had to fight in order to be able to go and vote in the PLC elections and saw those elections as the first step on the path to democracy now feel that we are going backwards. It is unreasonable to expect people to back the declaration unless the performance of the PNA changes for the better. Even in the NGOs, which used to be so active, people no longer have the courage to say what is on their minds. The other day I saw someone who had written an article about the corruption in Russia and the US; I asked him why he is not writing about the corruption here and was not at all surprised when he said he cannot write anything because of the overall situation. There is nothing that really motivates us to continue the good work.

*Adnan Husseini:* We have put all our hopes in Oslo as if there is no alternative to it. I believe that after four and a half years, it is time that we find other mechanisms, but whilst continuing the negotiations with the Americans as mediators.

I believe that between now and the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, we should reinforce our institution building with the help of the PNA so that if the situation worsens, which seems likely, we will be able to survive. During the *Intifada* everybody

and the people were optimistic. Now, the institutions that we used to regard as sacred, including the religious ones, are being attacked, which is something that never happened in the past, even during the *Intifada*. That alone should tell us how bad things have become. How can we accept a religious judge being attacked in his office? The attack is a prime example of the way in which our principles, ethics and manners have declined as a result of the overall situation. Without improving relations amongst ourselves, we are lost. I am sure that if the Palestinian state is declared in May, Netanyahu will enter the Palestinian cities and there will be street fighting and much bloodshed, and in a way, I am rather hoping that this is what will happen as at least it would force us to develop our relations to the same level that existed in the past. We still have a lot of work to do and it is extremely important that we realize that without developing our institutions as a basic infrastructure, we will be unable to do anything.

*Ahmad Al-Batsh:* During the *Intifada*, the situation was quasi-controlled and the principles were the same for everybody; moreover, our dignity was not violated. Sure the land was violated, but it was not violated in the same way as it is now, which is why I am so concerned about the lack of unity. Since the arrival of the PNA, the voice of the cultured strata has not been heard and an increasing number of writers and journalists etc. have been and continue to be afraid to raise their voices, out of either fear or a sense of despair. As for the political parties, they are not seen on the political scene any more, in spite of the need for a national consensus. The military are dominating the society, and here lies a very serious problem. I told Abu Ammar that I am shocked to see those who once fought so bravely in the name of the national cause and who are now members of the preventive security acting so badly. Who should we hold responsible for what they are doing? Look at the person who was led into believing that by assassinating Abu Iyad he was being loyal to the Palestinian cause: who is responsible for that? The message is clear, and it reads 'catastrophe'. If we do not have a national consensus on this issue, then everything is lost.

There are, however, some signs that people have in fact understood the message: when Abu Ammar signed the first death sentence, for example, 30,000 people in Rafah went to the streets because they knew that they were implicated and felt obliged to try and get him to change the decision.

*Hatem Abdul Qader:* As I see it, the declaration of statehood is a challenge for which there is not a clear political agenda. From our own point of view, we have reached a stage where we feel that declaring statehood is important, but we have neither the financial capability nor the material assets that declaring statehood requires. The four years of PNA rule and the fact that

Another issue is that of the PLO, which is for me the main pillar and also the first and last defense line for the ambitions of the Palestinian people. The PNA, whether purposely or by accident, I would not like to say which, is minimizing the role of the PLO. This is extremely dangerous, and I believe that if the PNA fails, the PLO, upon which we have always relied, should be strong enough to serve as an alternative. We should rebuild the structures of the PLO using new mechanisms, a new policy, and new tools, but with the same principles and the same hopes. I am one of those who would like to see the PNA become a part of the PLO. We should create a body that is more powerful than the PNA and that represents every Palestinian, whether on the inside or the outside, in the form of the National Palestinian Council. When, in 1996, I participated for the first time in the National Palestinian Council meeting, which was held in Gaza, the members agreed on the nomination of 100 new members in little more than ten or 15 minutes, thereby proving their efficiency.

As to the role of the academia, their role has clearly changed. Most academics have been neutralized while the others are satisfied with merely being close to the authority. We should work on creating a new nucleus, but one with a national backing provided by all the population. As a son of Fatah, my orientation is Fatah, but sometimes in the PLC, I agree more on certain issues with a member from the Jabha Shabiyeh, for example. We should not lose hope

*Ziad Abu Zayyad:* There is no doubt in my mind that dealing with the negative effects of the internal situation - the military, the corruption etc. - requires a large number of meetings as the different issues will all have an influence on the future of the state and its people.

The PLO is the lifeboat that we can use to survive this stage. The dissolution of its role by the PNA is a problem, and we should rebuild all our national institutions - the Palestinian National Council, the Central Committee, and the Committees of the National Council - and give them a role. We should show the Palestinian people and the entire world that the PLO is not finished and that if the PNA fails, we will still have a lifeboat - the PLO.

As to the issue of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, we need to organize many, many meetings in order to discuss the possible consequences of the declaration. I am afraid that we have perhaps put ourselves in a trap by using the declaration to put pressure on Netanyahu, and in light of the current situation, I believe that we might have made a mistake by persisting in saying that we intend to declare statehood next year. The issue of the declaration was on the

during the last meeting. Abu Ammar was the first one to raise the issue and to speak about it during governmental discussions. Do we really want to declare statehood on the Palestinian land and therefore enter a struggle with the Israeli side? If I want to declare a Palestinian state on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May and apply my sovereignty, it means that I have to check the car of every settler before allowing him to enter the areas under Palestinian control. The settlers will not accept this, and there is bound to be bloodshed. So I ask, are we really ready for this?

Due to the internal situation, the people have distanced themselves from the leadership and from now until the 4<sup>th</sup> of May the latter should work hard to regain the trust and support of the former. I am really afraid of the consequences of the current situation in which we are not even capable of conserving the institutions that already exist.

What are Palestinians supposed to think when they learn that some members of the PNA are the financial partners of certain Israelis? The Israelis are exaggerating, saying things like Yasser Arafat is preparing for a major confrontation on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May and that the 'March of the One Million' was a kind of preparation for this. They also say that he is mobilizing the supporters of Fatah because they will make up the main camp in this confrontation and that he is holding or planning to hold secret talks with members of Hamas in order to mobilize them too. That is why the 4<sup>th</sup> of May should be the subject of a series of frank discussions.

*Dr. Jadallah:* Is this a new stage in the national Palestinian struggle, or is it the continuation of the old one? Abu Ammar did not consult with anyone when he started speaking about the 4<sup>th</sup> of May. Moreover, there is a high degree of indifference in the Palestinian street nowadays as there is no discussion between the PNA and the people, in spite of the fact that the declaration of statehood requires their backing.

*Dr. Abu Libdeh:* The 4<sup>th</sup> of May, whether we support the declaration of a state or not, will mark the end of one stage and the beginning of another, not only for the Palestinians, but also for the Israelis, the Arabs and the entire international community. There is a great need to identify our different strategic options. What would be the option if the declaration comes as the result of an agreement? Or as the result of what the Israelis want? Or of what the Palestinians want? Or of what the Palestinian society wants? Maybe we will end up with a state in Gaza and an agreement for the West Bank, resulting in the establishment of a sovereign state, meaning that we could practice our sovereignty in Gaza in a comprehensive manner while every Palestinian in the West Bank would be a citizen in that state.

*Dr. Abu Libdeh:* When we agree on a certain option, there should be no problem. Agreeing on a two to three-year program for the upcoming stage, for example, would give us time to realize the next stage of redeployment. On the Palestinian side, I think that there is a possibility that the 4<sup>th</sup> of May could represent the beginning of withdrawal from the Oslo Agreement; the leadership could withdraw, saying that it can no longer respond to the demands of the fulfillment of the Palestinian dream unless it does so. Of course, there is also the realistic option of confrontation, which is more likely to result in the minimum requirements of the continuity of the Palestinian people being met.

I believe that the main problem is that the 4<sup>th</sup> of May could turn out to be another example of the way in which a protest often starts, only for everything to get calmer and return to normal within a very short time, as was the case with the 'March of the One Million'.

Personally I did not approve of the march and I do not believe that we got anywhere near one million people to take to the streets, but perhaps we should look at it this way; since we proved that we are capable of bringing huge numbers of people to the street, then perhaps we should consider this as proof that we are capable of making the declaration of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May a reality.

We have to decide now: Are we dealing with the 4<sup>th</sup> of May as a decision, as a situation that will mark a turning point, as a negotiating position, or as a program? As far as I am concerned, it should be a comprehensive program with all its political and institutional aspects. Above everything else, the 4<sup>th</sup> of May should provide those from different political trends with an opportunity to retrieve the possibility of gaining the minimum possible under the current circumstances. We should not forget, however, that many things are necessary for the 4<sup>th</sup> of May to bear fruits, which is why we should transform this country into a 'workshop' starting immediately.

The PLC is going through a period of great changes and many problems. The coming period will be a very decisive one for the PLC, as it will determine the Council's future after the declaration of statehood, and there are many legal preparations that need to be carried out to ensure that there is no legal void. It is clear from what has already been said that the people are not participating in what is being done, which means that mobilizing and organizing them is of great importance if we want to make the declaration in May a realistic choice, and here I refer not only to the one million Palestinians inside, but also to the 3.5 million Palestinians in the Diaspora. The 4<sup>th</sup> of May should mark a natural humanitarian and political change that benefits

institutions and tools will once again be capable of organizing, preparing, and mobilizing for the future, and involving the marginalized people in the struggle as well as the national community. Anyone who is familiar with Eastern Europe will understand the problem that we are now facing without the PLO and its effective institutions and embassies.

It is vital that we realize the importance of proving to the people that there is still something worth fighting for, and in this respect, advocacy and mobilization play a major role. We should also understand the implications of not determining what kind of relationship we want to have with Israel, because regardless of whether or not we declare statehood or continue the negotiations, the unbalanced relationship that exists at present when it comes to issues such as employment and the economy, etc. appears destined to continue, and even though we might be independent in theory, we will remain occupied in practice. Therefore, one of the things that we should take into consideration is whether we are capable of organizing the local market in order to ensure that we have a capable and supervised workforce by May 1999. Can we take measures and make arrangements that will decrease the economic dependency from which we are currently suffering? Having said all this, I remain optimistic that the 4<sup>th</sup> of May could represent a hugely significant step in ridding the Palestinian society of the feeling of being an 'occupied people'.

*Dr. Zakaria Al-Qaq:* On the issue of mobilizing the inside, two weeks ago there was a meeting that was organized by the President's office and the two lecturers were Palestinians from the inside – 1948 – who were asked to give us an idea about their position *vis-à-vis* what is happening. One of them had conducted a poll in the Um Al-Fahm area and discovered that upon the arrival of the PNA, people had developed a real desire to take part in what was happening. However, more recently, and especially in light of the absence of rule of law and an effective court system, etc., many have made a decision that they would be wiser to invest their faith in and try to improve their conditions through the Israeli, rather than Palestinian, framework. They no longer want to have anything to do with the PNA for a variety of reasons, such as the social and economic situation and because what has happened over the last four years has effectively removed them from the circle. If elections for the PLC were to take place in Jerusalem today, there is very little chance that the same number of Palestinian Jerusalemites who voted in the first elections would do so again because of the current situation; a situation that is characterized by fatigue and anger with the performance of the PNA, a damaged social fabric, and the absence of a feeling of solidarity, etc. When a 60-year-old vegetable seller from Bethlehem goes to see a high-ranking policeman to protest against something but is hit and lapses into a six-hour



him a report stating the cause of his injury, can we blame him if he tells us that he doesn't want the current situation to continue?

To put it very bluntly, if some major changes are not made between now and the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, the declaration will not have the support of the people. Forget about reaching the Israeli society; it is the Palestinian people that we have to reach in this critical period. Look at our newspapers and ask yourselves, why do people like Ziad Abu Zayyad and Haidar Abdul Shafi whose articles people used to love to read no longer write? The position of the inside is unlikely to change, and as Ziad Abu Zayyad said, the refugees are the missing number in this equation.

*Dr. Baramki:* I agree with a lot of things that Hassan has mentioned, and I believe that we need a leadership that is capable of putting pressure on the PNA. The PLC, which used to be a source of pride for all Palestinians due to the way in which it was elected in such a fair and representative manner, no longer represents the people. The whole population was not happy with the fiasco of the Cabinet change, and the fact that the PLC did the opposite of what the people wanted by lending the new cabinet its support is proof that it no longer represents the people.

In order to prepare ourselves for the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, there is clearly a need for us to have a strong leadership, which necessitates the election of a new PLC that truly represents the people. It is a fact that all new parliaments need time to gain experience, and I can only hope that the new PLC, if elected, will learn from the mistakes of the current one. Without a new sound leadership, there is the real possibility that something spontaneous could happen; most revolutions have been spontaneous and when we have tried to control them, we have failed, which is why they should be avoided at all costs. If we want to start preparing for a strategy, we should start by preparing a leadership, not only individuals, but also a group of people that is capable of preparing for this properly. I spoke with some members of the PLC and others in the PNA and they told me that they had not agreed with what happened concerning the Cabinet, but that they had gone ahead and voted anyway, which just goes to prove that we need a more courageous body to prepare for the future. One has to be prepared for any struggle into which one is about to enter, regardless of whether or not it is armed. When we entered the negotiations, we neglected the majority of those who were qualified to give us advice.

*Hani Al-Hassan:* I personally do not agree with the Oslo Agreements, and I believe that the 4<sup>th</sup> of May will witness one of two things; either Netanyahu will win, or the Palestinian people will rise. I have learned that there are periods of high tide and low tide for every revolution. We are now living in a

to work with the authority, one should not combine s one's title with trade, if the people participating in the negotiations have business affairs with the people they are negotiating with, then it is a major problem. How could the PLC members be attacked only for the issue to be ignored? Democracy and reform is not a fruit that you simply go and reap, but rather a seed that you grow.

If the 4<sup>th</sup> of May comes and we do not transform it into a day of struggle, then I assure you that we will be in a great trouble. Ross is on his way, and he wants results, which means that there is likely to be a breakthrough in the next few months. One of the reasons why this is likely is that we are thinking that when the dates mentioned in the Oslo Agreement have passed, then the agreement will have come to an end. If they come and tell us that they will give us 13 percent of the land in zones A, B and C in return for our not declaring statehood, will we agree to this? From my point of view, I would prefer to have only ten percent of the land but without promising not to declare a state. The English and the Germans are saying that if a referendum takes place amongst the Palestinians and they express their support for the establishment of the state, then they would be happy to acknowledge the state. Clinton also said the same thing.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* What Clinton said was that he does not object to the idea in principle, but that he does not agree with it.

*Hani Al-Hassan:* While they were negotiating, Clinton left the room – he thought that the other two would continue to negotiate – and when he came back he said that the final solution lies in a Palestinian state. I do not consider that there are a lot of differences between the different political parties; sure they have different political views, but I sometimes find that some of my brothers from Hamas or other parties have personal views that are more similar to my own than those of people from Fatah. If the absence of unity continues, it will pose a major problem in the future.

In short, the message that I am trying to convey today is that trying to avoid confrontation means that we are practically accepting Netanyahu's concepts and that the decision to enter a confrontation might actually help stop it from taking place.

*Dr. Abdul Hadi:* Are the people here in this meeting ready to enter a confrontation?

*Hani Al-Hassan:* The people who are sitting here are those who are being tested; the people themselves are not being tested. We have all made mistakes, but if the situation continues, then any possibility of reform to fight

pressure on the leadership. The people are put into a type of confrontation, as mentioned in the Qur'an: "*Kutiba alaykimou al-quitat wa hou wa kourhon lakom.*" When the people went out to the streets in Deir Al-Balah, it was a message to the leadership that they are fed up. The reason why we took a decision on the issue of the tunnel is that at that time we only had two options: either to sit and watch the situation explode in the face of the PNA or explode it ourselves. Now, if we lose in this struggle then Netanyahu's concept will win and if we do not do anything, then we will lose the struggle. I believe that we will have a series of very generous offers in the upcoming months, and it is important that we keep asking ourselves this question: What will we gain from having control of more land if the building of settlements continues?

It is true that the PLC should be ashamed of itself - we told this to Abu Ala' yesterday; the PLC is going to be one of the most important institutions and it is very important that its members realize that none of them, without exception, have the right to 'bend the rules' or break the law. The PLC is viewed from the outside as being more important than the National Council. If we feel the need to form a new National Council, it implies that we need a new Executive Committee and a new Central Committee and that is why we should – along with our people outside – do our best to make sure that they are formed.

Finally, the people who are negotiating now should understand that we cannot negotiate on the television as we have done over the past two years, hoping that the Americans will take pity on us and displaying a willingness to do anything they tell us to do. Nothing can happen if people are afraid or unwilling to speak their mind. The academics should prepare their own vision of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, displaying courage and creativity and appreciating that their plan does not have to match that of the PNA.

# THE INTELLECTUAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF PALESTINIAN SOCIETY — ISSUES CONCERNING THE WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP<sup>1</sup>

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All thoughts expressed in this paper are based on recognition of the numerous facts that have emerged during the past century, which has been characterized by a continuous Israeli, Zionist expansionist policy. This policy is both dynamic and cumulative in nature, and has achieved most of its goals. Moreover, it has attained complete and steady support from the West, which, like it, has chosen to remain indifferent to the existence of the Palestinian people, their rights, their needs and their interests. The current situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is a reflection of these Israeli, Zionist successes on Palestinian and Arab land on the one hand, and a reflection of the failure or relapse of the Arab and Palestinian liberation plan on the other.

The Zionist movement, since its official inception at the Basle Conference in 1897, has encompassed an expansive outlook in conjunction with an ideological belief. Furthermore, in strategic terms, it has a long-term plan incorporating such a vision. Correspondingly, the Arab nationalistic plan regressed in favor of the nationalistic plan which, in turn, retreated in favor of the Islamic plan. In essence, the Islamic plan stumbled before ever rising.

If the Palestinian people cannot congregate on their land and exercise their right to self-determination, they will surely be incapable of halting the raping process before completion of the Zionist vision. The Zionist plan has succeeded in realizing that vision, with only a few minor issues waiting to be implemented such as the creation of a Middle Eastern market and the consolidation of the Israeli existence in some areas of Jordan, the Syrian Golan Heights, and South Lebanon through occupation or domination.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation given at a roundtable held at PASSIA on 15 December 1998.

Talking about the intellectual, social and political geography in the Palestinian society requires dealing with complexities and intrusions involving economic, social and political variables and their relation with the demographic variables in both areas (West Bank and Gaza Strip).

It is necessary also not to ignore the transitional nature of the present Palestinian situation when conducting any analysis of issues pertaining to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. On the one hand, Palestinian society is experiencing a transitional phase, moving from being a society under direct military occupation to a society governed by a 'national', non-foreign authority. This authority has civil powers without having sovereignty or control over the resources, borders and relations with others. Accordingly, this society, due to many factors, the most prominent being the economic and social variables, is undergoing a transitional phase: moving from a society dominated by traditional beliefs and familial ties to a 'modern' society, where ideally, the qualities of freedom, equality, political and intellectual multiplicity, the rule of law and citizens' rights rise above everything else.

Ever since the Palestinian Authority took control of the Gaza and Jericho areas in May of 1994, a new phase in the Palestinians' civil society began with the establishment of security and ministerial institutions. In order to prove its existence and its presence, the Palestinian Authority began clashing with all opponents of its policies, and a number of confrontations between the Authority's security institutions and local citizens occurred, with many wounded and killed and hundreds of others arrested. The Authority did not stop there in this battle of existence, but deliberately prevented some newspapers from publishing and impeded their work, interfering in their affairs and going so far as to issue a number of closure orders. This triggered the first division in the ranks of the people, between the supporters and the proponents of the agreements signed by the PLO and Israel in September 1993.

Correspondingly, the suppressive practices of the Israeli occupational forces and settlers continued unabated. Israel pursued the policy of military blockades and closures, separating between the West Bank and Gaza Strip areas and between both areas and the city of Jerusalem. This situation resulted in another type of division and distribution, and both types of division will cause the people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip massive losses.

This new political situation engendered a number of problems, including the appearance of signs of splits involving individuals and groups, signs of withdrawal toward self interest and individualism instead of the common and collective good, and the rise of familial fanaticism and the re-emergence of tribal loyalties. Invariably, chaos prevailed and all forms of corrup-

Instead of feelings of cooperation and solidarity, which had existed before this new political situation. The 'modern society beliefs' received a decisive blow, causing the voices of democracy and the rule of law to retreat.

Furthermore, the restrictive measures imposed on movement and communications between the West Bank and Gaza Strip has caused and will continue to cause grave consequences by threatening all efforts to establish a national system in the different political, social, organizational (unions), vocational and economic fields. Many of the joint institutions established during the Israeli occupation and before the PA took control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were afflicted with inner divisions, and the political parties and social institutions were not adequately protected from this onslaught of damage.

In addition, the continuous Israel occupation strengthened the geographical division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The rise of the Palestine National Authority led to a political division, due to its stance in regards to the signed agreements with Israel.

For the first time in modern history, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip find themselves governed by an elected Palestinian Authority, acquired by a political agreement with the occupational force. Both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, part of historical Palestine, have known only natural or compulsory integration under occupational forces, and an occupational force caused their separation. After the establishment of Israel in 1948 on 87 percent of the historical Palestinian land, the Gaza Strip was controlled by the Egyptian Administration while Jordan controlled the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The geographical, political and social separation continued until 1967, when the Israeli military occupational force dominated both areas.

The geographical, political and social separation resulted in a different experience in both regions (West Bank and Gaza Strip). The Gaza Strip suffered from a dense population, the development of refugee camps, poverty, and unemployment after the catastrophe of 1948. Meanwhile in the West Bank, life was also harsh. Poverty spread, and many social classes suffered from a lack of income and work opportunities after the displacement process and collective uprooting that resulted from the aforementioned catastrophe. However, both regions developed disparate experiences due to different political and economic situations: differences pertaining to quality but not the degree of cruelty, oppression and inhumanity.

In general, the citizens of the West Bank shared the following beliefs and ideas regarding the citizens of the Gaza Strip:

- the refugees' camps;
- social and political backwardness was prevalent;
- the Gaza Strip was characterized by continuous confrontations and its citizens were exceptionally bold.

As for the beliefs and ideas of the Gaza Strip citizens concerning their brothers in the West Bank, they can be summarized as follows:

- the citizens of the West Bank were more economically and socially advanced;
- the citizens of the West Bank controlled the decision-making process and monopolized Arab and foreign subsidies;
- the citizens of the West Bank felt superior to the Gazans.

The geographical separation between the two regions led to the existence of this psychological barrier, making it a fertile ground for negative conceptions and mutual suspicion to flourish. However, the glorious uprising, which started in the Gaza District, forced West Bank citizens to see Gaza citizens as more revolutionary, combative and prepared to sacrifice everything. This strengthened their feelings of respect towards their brothers in Gaza on the one hand, and rid the citizens of Gaza of the feeling that there was a wide gap between the two groups of Palestinians on the other. It also helped both West Bank citizens and Gaza Strip citizens to rid themselves of all previous misconceptions, and to surpass 'media' impressions about individuals and groups.

After the PLO transferred the weight of its political power from Tunis to Gaza, a new gap appeared as if in reaction to previous events. The process of concentration and consolidation began, including economic development in the Gaza Strip. A situation characterized by complaining and grumbling was seen in the West Bank, similar to the situation that had once existed in the Gaza Strip, with the public talking about the injustices that prevailed in the West Bank, and the privileges 'enjoyed' by the Gaza Strip in all the various areas.

## **Features of the Social and Economic Infrastructure That Remained in the West Bank and Gaza Strip**

Despite the influence left by the Egyptian Administration in the Gaza Strip and that of the Jordanian Administration in Jerusalem and the West Bank, both areas show dissimilarities in the social structure and topography. This led to the appearance of dissimilarities in values and performance. Both areas suffered occasionally from tensions between the incoming refugees

and the residents of the cities and villages, and from a high population density and problems resulting from the distribution of the inhabitants between camps, cities and villages. The West Bank is markedly different from the Gaza Strip especially in terms of having more geographical space and a variety of topographical areas, which resulted in both the establishment of a stable social structure and a lower population density in the former during the period of Jordanian control. However, this distinction was considerably shaken after the onslaught of settlement and the confiscation of agricultural land, hills and mountains which, in general, resulted in the diminishment of differences in population density and scenery in the West Bank.

It is no surprise that the Palestinian economy was destroyed once Israel subjected the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to military control: changing it to a dependent economy and forcing it to open its markets to Israeli products. During a quarter century of settlement building, confiscation of resources and usurpation of water resources, Israel managed to create dualistic societies within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Besides concentrating on isolating Palestinian population communities, it established an industrial and agricultural settlement community. In essence, the settlement community formed an extension of the Israeli economy and society, despite being isolated from its geographical environment and its population extending within the West Bank and Gaza Strip areas, thereby affecting the demographic and geographic features of both.

The settlement process not only deprived the peasants of their land or at least from cultivating that land, but also aided the process of transforming the peasants and most of the refugees to the status of hired help in the Israeli market. These peasants were not transformed into a Palestinian working class due to the absence of Palestinian capitalism capable of absorbing such a workforce; instead, they became daytime workers in the Israeli production process, but only for as long as they work in the Israeli market. As soon as they return to their homes in the villages and refugee camps, they return to the social class they belonged to before working in Israeli factories. This compulsory process of transformation into a working class leaves no room for the development of class relations, either within the working class in which the worker finds himself or with his peers from the same area or from other geographical areas. Thus, integration was impossible to achieve between those living in the Gaza area and their peers in the West Bank, and the distances and differences remained ingrained and unchanged. Indeed, by employing the tactic of separation and the policy of long closures in both regions the occupation authorities succeeded in widening the gap between them and increasing the degree of suspicion and mistrust. In spite of this, the common denominator, which was apparent to all, remained the submission of all Palestinian workers to Israeli discriminatory practices to the same degree. Also common was their joint hatred, animosity and struggle with regard to these discriminatory practices.



After the establishment of the PA and contrary to the expectations and promises of donor countries, instead of there being an improvement in living conditions, the poverty and destitution circle widened further, the rate of unemployment increased, and all societal classes were plagued by day-to-day living concerns. The condition of the middle class declined considerably and it turned into a poor class, similar to other poor working classes. This new social condition will lead it to express itself through new political institutions by electing political representatives or forming political parties to represent it.

As for the changes that occurred in the status of the working class and peasants, due to the Gulf states refraining from absorbing the Palestinian workforce on the one hand, and the work restrictions and closures imposed on those working in Israel on the other, not to mention the Palestinian Authority's policy of keeping the Palestinian economy a dependent and marginal economy, they led to deep transformations in the class structure, which can be summarized as follows:

- a sharp decline in the living conditions of the working class, involving increased poverty and destitution;
- the widening of the gap in terms of living conditions between the working class and the poor from the middle class and those working in the governmental sector;
- the disappearance of the special characteristics of the working and peasant classes. In its own way, the Authority relied more and more on the role of its security institutions to maintain general order on the one hand, and to confront these social classes on the other.

This situation led to the following:

- both the West Bank and Gaza Strip becoming hostages in the hands of Israel, which sought to guarantee the protection of the current political system;
- the Palestinian economy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remaining at the mercy of donor countries, increasing its dependency on the Israeli economy and preventing the rise of a national, Palestinian economy capable of protecting itself and its citizens;
- the rise of a new category of capitalists and influential people, and the rise of many corporations belonging to the PA, which are afforded no respect, and which have no legal basis and lack accountability;
- the emergence of a new middle class represented by the bureaucratic PA and the employees in its different institutions;
- the expansion of the circle of corruption and favoritism, the assault on the property of people, and disagreements regarding ownership rights;