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## II. The Future of the Palestinian National Identity: The Relation Between the Returnees and the People of the Homeland

Speakers: Mr. Mamdouh Nofal, Dr. Ali Jarbawi

*Participants:* Dr. Salim Tamari, Dr. Rema Hamami, Ibrahim Mater, Hisham Mustapha, Dr. Mar'ei Abdul Rahman, Sheikh Jamil Hamami, Dr. Riyad Al-Malki, Walid Al-Assali, Walid Salim, Dr. Moussa Dweik, Diana Safieh, Mohammed Sami Jaber, Usama Halabi, Anis Al-Assali, Muriel Asseburg, and Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi.

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**Mr. Mamdouh Nofal:** Member of the PLO Central Council; Military Advisor to Chairman Arafat.

**Dr. Ali Jarbawi:** Professor of Political Science, Birzeit University.

### SUMMARY

#### *Introduction*

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi* welcomed the participants to the second meeting on *The Future of the Palestinian National Identity*. After summarizing the main ideas of Rashid Khaldi's recent study on the Palestinian identity, he noted that while some scholars claim that the Palestinian identity began to evolve in the early 50's, 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. He added that the former group support their position by saying that during the early 50's, 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.

*Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi* referred to the previous roundtable meeting on the same issue by saying that the spirit of the aforementioned meeting had been dominated by self-critique and by the exposure of the psychological, cultural, and geographical gap between the West Bank and Gaza. He added that at the end of the previous meeting, scholars were encouraged to envisage a practical mechanism to close the gap and to provide for a national chemistry between the different social strata. With regard to the question of the 'outside'-inside' relationship, he said that today's transitional phase provides an excellent opportunity for the differences to melt in one pot. He added that many existing taboos were being exposed.

#### *Dr. Mamdouh Nofal*

Dr. Mamdouh Nofal expressed his gratitude to PASSIA for organizing a workshop on such an important and vital topic and added that he was happy to be in Jerusalem. He said that the meeting had provided him not only with an academic forum to express and discuss his thoughts, but also with an opportunity to meet with the Jerusalemite community that is fighting a daily battle to maintain its existence:

Discussion of the topic of the workshop is vital and important in a national dimension: it deals with the number of returnees, venues for the returnees, how the civil society has dealt with them and how the relationship has developed. The topic involves far more than discussion of the recent return 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 '48 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*.

The fourth phase (1990-93) covers the period of political initiatives, negotiations, conferences and meetings in Madrid and Washington. Due to the 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 Muslim Brotherhood organizations, leftist groupings and Communist parties. This was the situation up to the early 60's when, from within the groups of Arab nationalists

and their Pan-Arab movement, the Fateh 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 that began in '67, the 'inside' started to re-arrange the Palestinian house, and attempted to form various forums 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 compliment the 'inside' resistance. With the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Sharon unwittingly did us a great favor, for we were kicked out of Lebanon and liberated from governing 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 Beka'a 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.

Concerning the actual negotiations, it was not only Shamir who worked to obstruct them; Abu Amar was doing the same but for totally different reasons. 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 about 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 Amar - not Haidar Abdul Shafi or Faisal Husseini - was the only individual who could provide security.

Today, I am in Jerusalem. I am no longer from the 'outside', not because I do not wish to fit this description or because I am somehow giving it up, but 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 in the years 1947-64, 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 Jarbawi***

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 has not ended: from my point of view, it is deep-rooted and when searching for its roots, we will discover many aspects. I would say that there has been 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 axes 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 where the Israelis came 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 need permits to travel even 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 Fateh. I vote for it only." I would say that the other factions have finished, whether we like it or not. The Fateh 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 Fateh 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 program to be realized on Palestinian soil, and not in Jordan, Lebanon or Tunis. The big mistake of the 'outside' was that it forgot the 'inside'. It 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'. As Mamdouh Nofal hinted, 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 Amar, 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. In other words, saving themselves was more important to them than saving 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 names that the 'outside' enjoyed for acclaimed security reasons? Isn't this the time to use your proper name and to stop hiding? Or do those from the '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 that 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 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 and fall, but not before that.

### ***Discussion (Summary)***

*Mamdouh Nofal* stressed that the Palestinian identity is not only a matter of rights and duties but that it also 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'.

*Ali Jarbawi* stressed that 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* recalled to 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 anybody in this phase, and finally that the first and last responsibility lies with the Authority.

*Mar'ei Abdul Rahman* agreed that even though there clearly is a sense of belonging, the Palestinian identity is in danger. He suggested that 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. He held the PNA responsible for these problems and demanded that it play a role in the crystallization of the new Palestinian identity; it should push the process forward instead of weakening it. He noted that the intelligentsia are also responsible as they merely look at what the PNA is doing without interfering. He then disagreed with a couple of points mentioned by the lecturers.

*Hisham Mustafa* expressed his astonishment concerning the backwardness of Palestinian society, which he had discovered upon his return to the homeland. He noted that 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.

*Salim Tamari* mentioned that a local identity, as opposed to a national identity, was still prevalent in Palestinian society. He also said that the dream of the unification of all Palestinians in their state is dying; the Palestinian homeland is merely another Third World state in the making. He said he was astonished that the 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 Salim* added that 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* noted that people are alienated from the national identity; Palestinians were 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 she remarked that such a demobilization is a normal process in the context of state formation. She said that in order for 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.