

Full Length Research

Identity and entity in contradiction: The case of Palestinian schisms and divisions

Salwa S. Farrag

Lecturer of Political Science, Suez Canal University, Egypt. E-mail:farragsalwa@yahoo.com

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The Palestinian identity was born in crisis. For Palestinians, identity and being a political entity have never been the same because the Palestinian national project lacked particular regional and social domains. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) personified the moral-political representation of the Palestinians and was an expression of their identity. However, the PLO adoption of the 'settlement program' in 1974 has been the primary factor behind the schism in their political regime. This adoption represents a withdrawal from the main ideas upon which they founded their identity, the ideas that considered the Palestinian people and its land and political project identical. Moreover, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 has not achieved a national existence for the Palestinian people on its land due to the failure in transforming the Palestinian Authority into a Palestinian State that can redefine Palestinian identity and due to the ensuing power struggle. These factors pushed the Palestinian identity into an acute crisis. In addition to the religious component that was introduced with the emergence of Hamas. These political schism have posed a serious threat to the Palestinian identity.

Keywords: Political Schism and Divisions, Palestinian Identity (Culture), Palestinian Nationalism.

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INTRODUCTION

The political schism and the ensuing conflicts surrounding authority have deepened the crisis of the Palestinian political system, as Fatah and Hamas resorted to violence and killing as a means to resolve internal contradictions until the crisis reached its peak and led the political system to reach a dangerous end, (Maged Kyaly, 2012) with the Palestinian identity crisis and problems of legality being the most obvious results. The PLO considered establishing the Palestinian authority on the part of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

as away to achieve a nationalistic existence of the Palestinian community on its own land. However, doing so before resolving the refugees' cause and the establishment of a nation amidst the schism between Palestinians on the Oslo accord and its annexes led to a further deepening of the Palestinian identity crisis (Hegawy, 2000).

This issue resulted from the absence of the representative institutions that Palestinians lack and the failure in transforming the authority to a state that may re-

crystallise Palestinian identity in addition to launching conflict around authority between both Fatah and Hamas.

This study is interested in reviewing the effect of this schism on Palestinian identity from a structural and functional perspective that deemed the identity crisis (building a state) as one of the most important problems facing the political development problem in the modern political system.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following question:

What are the clearest changes that happened to the Palestinian identity as a result of political schisms and divisions?

In doing so, the research may also tackle several secondary questions as follows:

- 1- What are the circumstances of the establishment of a contemporary Palestinian identity?
- 2- What is the effect of the adoption of leadership on the political settlement program in the Palestinian political crisis?
- 3- To what extent did the rise of political Islam and the integration of Hamas' movement to authority affect Palestinian identity?

The importance of the research is primarily in handling the current issue that touches upon the future and present of the political Palestinian system as it analyses one of the clearest problems (the identity crisis) through the political schism.

The study also traces the problem through a scientific methodology (structural and functional) considered to be a theoretical method in the political system.

In its attempt to answer the above question, the study will also do the following:

- 1- Study the effect of the schisms (divisions) on the Palestinian identity.
- 2- Know the circumstances of the establishment of the modern identity and the adoption of a settlement program by the leadership.
- 3- Analyse the influence of the rise of political Islam and Hamas' entrance to authority.

METHODOLOGY

The study resorts to the structural and functional hypothesis of Gabriel Almond, which emanates from the fact that the crisis of the political system is a result of a lack of progress and its structure and inability to answer the requirements and understand the issues or respond to the needs and requirements of the other social

systems, be they economical, social, cultural or otherwise.

Almond and Powell find that the development crisis in the political systems is represented in the following circumstances (Gabriel Almond, 1980).

1-The problem of building the state is linked to identity and an allegiance to the community in light of the presence of the local affiliations that are stronger than the affiliation towards the community.

2- The problem of building the state is linked to the inability of the central authority to unite, control and subjugate all the groups of the community to its authority.

3- The problem of participation: the lack of any participation problem and the absence of participation mechanisms of citizens in the process of decision making in the political system.

4- The problem of division: not dividing the political system of merchandise and services in a just way to citizens.

Terminology:

1- Palestinian schism: points to the fact that there was progress following the leadership adoption of the political settlement in 1974 until the signing of the Oslo accord in 1993 (Bishara, 2014) and the ensuing political schisms that led to changes in the functions of the political system, as well as the launching of conflict between Fatah (Dabed, 2010) and Hamas that embodies the political schism institutionally and geographically as a result of the events of June 2007 (Burton, 2012)

2- The identity crisis: the problem of building a state and the process through which people turn their loyalty to tribes and smaller villages to the stronger central political system, meaning that they define themselves based on a national or patriotic identity (Burton, 2012).

Gelner defines identity or the national tendency as being "a political principle that considers the political unity and nationalistic unity as harmonious" (Gelner, 1999) he believes that matching the political and national limits (national identity) is achieved for the first time in industrial communities and that the national identity became defined as seeking to harmonize culture and government while giving culture a political role and not roles (Gelner, 1999).

The nation is an entity that belongs to a certain age and a certain historical event; it is a social entity that is linked to a certain type of a modern regional government, the nation-state (Gelner, 1999). The Stanford Encyclopedia indicates that the term "nationalism" refers to two topics, the first of which is the trend that the members take in ensuring adherence to their national identity, which refers to the causes that are linked to the concept of nation and national identity defined through the mutual origins, ethnicity or cultural ties. The second topic is linked to the

actions that the members of the state take to achieve a certain aspect of a political image or preserving it, either through the dominance of a complete or incomplete government (Stanford, Nationalism).

One: Contemporary Palestinian identity

This concept is different from the contemporary Palestinian identity in that it adheres to the concepts of affiliation and different adherences as it expresses a certain political state noted for its collective nature based on complete awareness among the citizens of a certain region to live together in a community that is characterized complete dominance. This point to the fact that there are certain elements that binds the region: the borders, the government, and central law.

Until the last third of the twentieth century, Palestinians considered themselves apart of the social and political fabric of the Levant; in general, they considered themselves to be part of a wider Islamic link, and with the rise of national tendencies, they defined themselves as part of the Arabic community after failing to achieve the aims of Arabic unity and the disintegration of the unified Arabic movement (Al Bzour, 2015). The first signs of the nationalistic movement and identity that Palestinians expressed fully appeared during the confrontation of the British mandate and the dangerous colonial Zionist project in harmony with the general trends in the region without cutting ties to the Arabic movement as Palestinians developed their identity, one that is linked by geographical and political borders, and developed nationalistic institutions by resisting British and colonial Zionist occupation.

This feeling of the patriotic identity for most Palestinians is not linked to the awareness of modern trends, be they political, social or legal, i.e., the ideology of the concept of nationality that formed the basis of the political and ideological elite.

The Palestinians' poverty led to their deprivation of the chance to develop rules of self-governance and its institutions; this resulted in developing the Palestinian identity, as there is no embodiment of this identity in a certain official authority. The sense of patriotism that should have been developed by the PLO faltered regionally and internationally compared to their compatriots in the neighbouring Arab countries.

The war in 1948 led to the disintegration of Palestinian society and the usurpation of most lands as well as the disappearance of the political region that was established before 1948 (Ben-Zvi, 2016). This led to a break in Palestine's attempts to establish a national identity and apolitical entity where identity and entity are no longer expressed in the political or social lives of the Palestinians (except for culturally). The Jordanian Palestinians and those living on the strip are citizens of Jordan, but the Israeli identity is being forced on them,

especially those who lived in occupied lands before 1948, which resulted in the refugee diaspora camps as well as Palestine being considered a part of the refugee crisis. They were never allowed to express their identity legally, institutionally or politically. Even so, they resorted to joining the nationalistic, Islamic or communist movements.

The Palestinian identity was not strong enough to impose itself on the Arab communities at that time, so the Palestinians' role was marginalised, and the government of most of Palestine disappeared after several months of announcing its identity. The Palestinians were thus deprived from ruling the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and they instead ruled themselves as the West Bank was annexed to the kingdom of Jordan. Gaza came under the Egyptian administration, which led to a fading of Palestinian national identity.

The evacuation of the Palestinians and their diaspora is the cornerstone of all political and social isolation and marginalisation in shaping the Palestinian national identity. The refugees in the diaspora camps raised the flag of Palestinian nationalism that fell down in 1948 (Zelkowitz, 2014) and rebuilt their nationalistic movements, while the armed resistance found the necessary methods of political pressure that had to develop to ensure Palestinian identity.

The leadership of PLO appeared as the representative of the Palestinians and the framework of the institution that embodies Palestinian identity as they patched the links among the groups of the Palestinian citizens according to the circumstances and economical, social and political problems. Additionally, they were able to reframe the Palestinian national identity through redistribution of the narrative in light of the diaspora, unification and occupation that resulted in social destruction (Frisch, 2012).

The organisation was enforced after the Arabs' acknowledgment of its representation of the Palestinians in Rabat summit 1974 resulting in its international acknowledgment as the representative authority of the Palestinians and the status of observer in the United Nations General Assembly. Aziz Heider indicates that the beginning of the establishment of Palestine as a nation and the shaping of their identity began after establishing the leadership in 1964; this process underwent a great push after 1967 (Ben-Ami, 2009).

In spite of all this, the Palestinian identity and the patriotic entity were not identical or matching, as the Palestinian patriotic project was lacking. The regional and geographical dimensions were not well defined in terms of declared social size, which are two essential aspects in producing or reproducing identity. It is true, however, that the issue of a political and mental entity requires re-compensation for the region's lack of imposing the presence of Palestine on the political map as a way to impose it later on the geographical map. However, the

Palestinians living in the occupied lands in 1948 were deprived of inclusion in the framework of identity and entity represented by the leadership, as Palestinians were being represented in Jordan as Jordanian citizens (Vicente Perez, 2014).

Two: The Palestinian identity after the OSLO accord in 1993 and the establishment of the PLO in 1994.

Palestinian patriotism is represented in the affiliation of all Palestinians, not only part of them; all Palestinians are represented by one memory and story that was created due to a need for belonging to Palestine and the Palestinian people. The chapters of the story include events before the NAKBA, its beginning, the experiences of the refugees, resistance and occupation, and protests that formed a deep human experience that occupies a central role in shaping Palestinian identity. This identity collectively helped Palestinians to mentally overcome the geographic division and isolation that was present both inside and outside of the Palestinian community (Sen, 2015).

The PLO's adoption of the program in 1974 represented a backwardness in Palestinian identity and a slackening in its patriotism, especially concerning the unity of the land and nation. The PLO was able to cover this transformation as it is symbolically represented, while the follow-up of the national project and resistance did not stop the political and structural changes from occurring in the Palestinian patriotic movement that fed another project different from the patriotic movement based on the unity of the nation and land (Ghanem, 2013).

This is clear in the following changes that led to political settlement with the Oslo Accords as a reference. The PLO considered that establishing administrative authority on the part of the Palestinian region in the Western Bank and the Gaza Strip might achieve, for the first time in history, a regional presence for Palestine (Hovsepan, 2008); sovereignty would have developed gradually, and self-governing might also have developed after this transitional step to an independent Palestine. Rashid Khalidi said that there was a regrouping of Palestinian society that went hand in hand with the "re-definition of identity" and that the citizens of the Western Bank and the Gaza Strip were at the heart of this identity, which became inherent from his point of view (Khalidi, 1997). The content that Khalidi discussed has not been clear until now because Palestinian authority was not grouped within an independent state, so the process of re-crystallization of identity may stretch beyond the current status of its establishment in the absence of geography and the state. Contrary to this transformation, there are dangerous changes being made to the patriotic project and the Palestinian patriotic identity as follows:

1- The Palestinian refugees found themselves

unacknowledged as a result of the accords signed, and their cause was transformed to a title in the final negotiations without any guarantees that provided them the right to return.

2- Ending the fighting with the enemy before resolving the refugees right-to-return issue is an inherent acceptance of the historical injustice from which they suffered and a final acceptance of the forsaking of the unity of the Palestinians as one nation. It also erases the idea on which awareness and culture as well as their contemporary identity was based.

3- The PLO held a monopoly on the patriotic political field, and institutions developed in return due to the fading of the PLO's role. Additionally, the refugees found themselves without representation, as authority was limited to the Western Bank and Gaza Strip, while the representative limits of the authority included Palestinians in all areas of representation.

4- The "inside " and " outside" problem in Palestine is linked to a new reality that had a decisive effect on the concept of entity and identity, and the PLO was established to express the needs of the Palestinian diaspora. Therefore, the partition figures and exile examples control the conversation surrounding identity, and after the Oslo Accords and the issues linked to obtaining citizenship, the system of sovereignty controls this conversation (Elgindy, 2015).

5- As the PLO was being marginalised as a political-mental entity that represented Palestine and their project was being summed up in a geographical project on the Western Bank and Gaza Strip, every Palestinian grouping had its agenda and priorities. Those involved in the 1948 war fought against fanaticism and for the right to express themselves and their identity as a national minority. The Palestinians in the Western Bank and Gaza Strip, resisted by fighting the occupation and establishing an independent state. The refugees who bore the burden of the Palestinian uprising since 1965 and who were subjected to several authorities felt marginalized and felt that the aims of the government superseded their right to return. There was no link or framework that bound them to the PLO (Maged Kyaly, 2012).

Therefore, there is a connection between the Palestinians and the limits of the patriotic project that sums up the community in the political participation in the Gaza Strip and Western Bank as a result of collective disintegration, the fading of the representative institutions that embodied Palestinian identity, the absence of the unified reference, and the national failure of the political movements in their mission either by settlement, negotiations, intifada or armed resistance.

This somewhat explains the loss of popularity in the PLO and different factions with regard to the monumental rise of Hamas that expressed the religious tendencies in the Palestinian identity while affecting the national component represented by PLO and its factions. Identity

does not exist in a vacuum, and Palestinians were isolated from the strategies of the ideological affirmation of the social representatives resulting from their social and political conflicts, who also form the backbone of Palestinian identity.

Three: The appearance of Hamas in Palestinian identity Hamas came to define patriotic identity and its social and political expressions, as it resented Islamic identity but not the patriotic secular-based identity as framed by the PLO and the movement seeking to Islamise the nation and reshape its political culture and identity based on the culture emanating from political Islam, which banished Palestinian heritage and the ensuing national identity and political entity that expressed it. This appeared in the transformations that occurred while Palestinians were defining their identity.

Myaray's 1994 study indicated that Palestinian identity is the strongest in the region, followed by local identity, Arabic identity, and finally religious identity. Another of his studies, conducted in 2008, shows the slackening of national identity and an increase in religious identity and other traditional forms of identity, as the percentage of Palestinians claiming religious identity as their primary identity increased from 17% and 22% in 1994 to 34% in 1997, 38% in 2001, and 43% in 2006 (Myaray, 2004).

The percentage of those considering the Palestinian identity as their primary identity decreased from 66.9% and 70.1% to 57.4% in 2001 and 50.5% in 2006. The percentage of those who defined themselves as Muslim or Christian reached 55.8% in 1994 and rose to 88.1% in 2006. Those feeling affiliated with their tribe was 47.1% in 1994 and increased to 78.4% in 2006, which reflects to a great extent the balance in the forces shaping the two groups in with regards to the results of the polls (Myaray, 2004). الأخذ ضرر الخط جاد بي على الفلاسطينيين هوية تطور

Abu Rahma's 2011 study defined the small percentage of those claiming national identity as an average of 32.68% and 81.7%, while the percentage claiming Islamic identity reached an average of 36.11% and 77.8%. The researcher thus reports that this may constitute a change in relative appearance for the sake of the Islamic component of Palestinian identity that is linked to its progress in politics and society. He also indicated that there is a possibility of conflict due to authority, which in essence is an expression of a strong crisis including all components of Palestinian identity and its political as well as social revelations as a result of the secondary identities becoming primary identities and placing them into the "other" category that eclipses all other categories of identity (Abu Rahma, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The schism persists, and within this framework, the participation of all in the crisis of the political system

poses many challenges to the Palestinian identity and entity, leading to further disintegration and fragmentation in the absence of a common goal for all Palestinians. Additionally, the absence of representative institutions that express an identity that matches the political project in the absence of an agreed-upon national reference to resolve disputes and define strategies of unified work also contributes to these challenges.

This creates the responsibility of encouraging Palestinian identity in its ideological and cultural-symbolical meanings as well as the political entity through renewing the basis of the Palestinian national project I and motivating anew national vision that seeks to reconcile Palestinians, Palestine as a country and the national project. This necessitates rebuilding the PLO and reconsidering national project that matches the nation, the land and the political project.

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