

# The Romantic Moment in the Palestinian National Project

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Many researchers have pointed out the marginality of the Palestinians inside Israel within the discourse of the Palestinian National Movement, especially in the post-Nakba period. In this period, the formation of the Palestinian National Movement, the Palestinian national project, and even the Palestinian national identity, took place without the significant participation and influence of the Palestinians in Israel. In the post-Nakba period, one could notice a rupture dividing the Palestinians in Israel, and the other parts of the Palestinian people, with respect to their political conceptions, tools of struggle, and even the concept of national identity. However, during the post-Oslo era, political-ideological currents became more aware of the importance of the role of the 1948 Palestinians within the national project. Such a development came as a reaction to their marginalization in the negotiations, as well as the marginalization of their problem that constitutes in fact, part of the Palestinian cause. Likewise, the post-Oslo period produced the discourse of the Jewish State, as an active political discourse transcending the academic theoretical occupation with political systems, to become a discourse that conceives the essence of the State as a central variable in determining the national and civic status of the Palestinians in Israel. Accordingly, the post-Oslo period has produced two tracks that appear to be contradictory, and yet in fact, are complementary in essence: the increasing importance of strengthening the role of the Palestinians in Israel within the Palestinian national project, on the one hand, and strengthening the discourse of citizenship and its potential, on the other. The last decade witnessed two political shifts that contributed to the enhancement of the debate about the status of the Palestinians in Israel and their role within the Palestinian national project. The first shift is the erosion of the Palestinian national project and the absence of unanimity upon it, something that coincides with the precision of the Israeli Zionist colonial project in historic Palestine, as it becomes clear through: 1. An intensified presence of the Jewish State, that exceeds its ethnic-national nature towards a national-religious character, regarding itself and with respect to the 1948 Palestinians; 2. Strengthening of colonial control of the 1967 areas together with a systematic endeavor to lead the Palestinian State solution to failure; 3. Preserving the division of the Palestinian people (and while I am saying this, I do not mean to overlook the Palestinian national responsibility for this division).

The second shift, which I consider to be a historical paradox, yet remains dangerous considering its abstract-dogmatic nature—and not due to its theoretical-political and national basis. It expresses itself in the shift in the attitude of the Palestinian National Movement towards the Arabs in Israel, from a marginalizing attitude to a romantic attitude. That is, the view that the center of the national project is located at the heart of the experience of the 1948 Palestinians. Both views are shortcomings of the National Movement. For the marginalization of the 1948 Palestinians, that culminated in the Oslo agreement, was seen as a lack of understanding of the role of the Palestinians of 1948 and their status as part of the Palestinian

people, and the Palestinian cause. At the same time, such a romantic view is an expression of the undergoing crisis of this Movement under the internal division, the dispersal of the Palestinian diaspora and the erosion of the national project. Such a romantic view bases itself on the idea that it is possible to imitate the political experience of the 1948 Palestinians in order to exit the Palestinian crisis, namely the crisis of division and the absence of a political horizon and negative political diversity and so on. Such paradoxicality is reinforced in an interesting way in view of the romantic approach of the National Movement towards the 1948 Palestinians, at the time in which the National Movement in the 1948 region adopted a pragmatic approach towards the general National Movement.

This romantic view is not baseless. Apart from the inner crisis of the National Movement, the Palestinians in Israel provided a model of joint work and struggle in recent years, such as in the case of the struggle for the defense of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the struggle against the Praver Plan, the discourse disproving the Jewish State (developed by Balad), the establishment of the Joint List, the recent election of the Chairman of the Follow-up Committee, as well as their overall collective political action. The Palestinian historical reading recently began to emphasize the national Palestinian aspect, and to neglect Israelization in the history of the 1948 Palestinians. This reading is a selective ideological reading that is similar to the older reading, that considered the Palestinian in Israel to be a part of Israeli society in the best case.

This romantic view is based on the claim that the political struggle of the collective national project in the 1948 area has reached a state of perfection and luminescence. Yet in fact, this project relied on the ideological basis of the different political streams, so as to establish various national projects transcending the joint project—represented by the idea of survival and resistance—yet definitively without dismissing it. At the same time, citizenship was one of the factors that contributed to the organization of their political action, despite the fact that it was one out of many factors that differentiates the Palestinians in Israel from the other Palestinian sectors.

The return to ideology, and to its authority, resulted from the collision of the Palestinian political project inside the Green Line, with the solidity of the Jewish national religious State. The return to ideology constituted a state of compensation for the hardness of the political reality, and the inability to change it under the current balance of powers. In the past two decades, the Palestinian political discourse focused on wrestling against the Jewish State in order to deconstruct its essence. This speech constituted a qualitative shift in the Arab political discourse and revealed clearly the contradiction between the Jewish State, and democracy. More importantly, it revealed the shortcomings of the two-State solution accompanied by the preservation of the Jewish character of the State. It has also put Israel in an unenviable place. As a reaction, however, the Jewishness of the State became more solid, while the Palestinian National Movement found itself in general, confronting an Israeli colonization confidently continuing its occupation.

To determine the official historical moment (taken as a determination that does not disprove the shifts that took place before it), in which the two projects collided with the solid walls of Jewish colonialism, we should point out the moment of the return of Netanyahu as a project (and not as a person). This moment obliged the 1948 Palestinian political trends to return to their solid ideological starting points, as a leap from a reality that cannot be confronted, as it happened in the mid-1990s. Netanyahu's discourse and project brought the conflict back to 1948. Around 1948, all the segments of the Palestinian people united into a single national unit, before their departure, dispersion and division. Around 1948, the Palestinian people

returned to be a single historic block confronting the Zionist project: 1948 is the zero-point represented by the unity of the Palestinians before the division, whose role is the object of everyone's thoughts.

The state of the Palestinians' romantic view of the political experience of the 1948 Palestinians, is part of a historical process that began with the transfer of the national and the political center of struggle from the diaspora, prior to 1987, to the Palestinian territories, occupied in 1967, after the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada. Through the Oslo agreement, which contributed to the reduction of the national project in the mere establishment of a State on this part of the Palestinian homeland, up until the move of this center to the 1948 area, after this eroded project reached a crisis and a dead end in the recent years. This romantic moment represents an important moment for re-establishing the status of the 1948 Palestinians within the national project, or at least, for providing a positive Palestinian approach towards this part of the Palestinian people; and yet we should highlight the fact that such an attention cannot be disconnected from the shifts of the discourse and the struggle of the 1948 Palestinians during the last two decades. At the same time, this romantic moment is dangerous, for it may not grasp, while being wrapped by its romanticism, the political context that determines the discourse and the mechanisms of the political struggle of the Palestinians inside Israel, as well as the context of citizenship that it lacks, unless a comprehensive Palestinian national project, that puts the seclusion of the one bi-national state at its center, can be crystalized. At that moment, this romanticism shall become a stage, not a moment; a decisive historic stage for the national project and for the status of Palestinians inside Israel and to their role within the national project.

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