

The Joint List and the Political Discourse

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Imam Ali (may God have mercy on him) said, “When the people of the truth are silent about falsehood, the people of falsehood will think that they are on truth.” Usually this silence is legitimized on “moral” grounds, most of which comes from “preserving the existing or alleged unity,” “fear of being accused of planting seeds of discord,” and the tendency to “maintain the status quo.” As well as other justifications and slogans, which are mostly aimed at covering up the state of weakness and acquiescence of the silent party or parties.

In the practical context, Arab experiences show that the unity, agreement and summits of the Arabs have always worked in contrast to the interests of the nation. They legitimized the invasion of Iraq, the bombing of Libya, the aggression against Yemen and the never-ending conspiracy on Palestine. Palestinian national unity meant, the silence of the left factions on the singularity, aberration and corruption of leadership, and finally facilitated the passage of the Oslo agreement. It still provides the legal cover for the Oslo agreement’s manifestations and consequences, primarily the futile negotiations and security coordination. While the “secession” of the Left factions in the cases of the Refusal and the Salvation Fronts from the above, has enabled the preservation of the Palestinian achievements and prevented the slide towards unworthy solutions and results. Consequently, its results were more positive for the Palestinian arena.

We present these examples to demonstrate that unity at all costs, is not always the best and most useful option for people, especially if it is not the result of a genuine national objective, and is not based on a clearly defined national program. A schism is better than an agreement, as there are conditions and objectives that are supposed to govern any agreement. There is no point in confusing short-term tactical needs and requirements with long-term strategic needs and goals. Encasing this alliance with such coverings does not change any of its contents. Here, we mean the coalition of the Arab parties that participated in the Knesset elections within the framework of the Joint List. This coalition was important at the tactical level in enabling the Arab parties to overcome the barrier of raising the threshold, which was placed to thwart their success in the elections and remove them from the parliamentary game. However, it did not exceed this scope, and did not necessitate the elimination of fundamental differences, and the killing of the discussion and the internal political movement, both which act as the breathing lung for political action.

A quick historical reading of the examples of coalitions between the political movements inside Israel, indicates that what raised the ceiling of the Palestinian national consensus, and maintained the national identity and its symbols, was the unity of discourse, not the unity of the parties. The unity arose on the basis of dialogue and sometimes conflict between the different forces, and not through circumstantial alliances, despite their tactical significance as we have previously mentioned. Burdening such coalitions with what they cannot bear, and

having unlikely expectations, places us in the face of a great disappointment that could lead to a real setback in terms of performance and political discourse.

Examples of Previous Tactical Coalitions and their Impact

In retrospect, it is possible to evoke many examples of electoral alliances, most notably the example of the unified Arab list, in which the coalition continued for more than one election period, due to the need of its joint parties for such an alliance. This was considered a successful electoral coalition, which won the desired seats and satisfied its members who have increased or changed with each election.

Another example is the list of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality Party and the National Democratic Assembly (Balad) Party that fought the 1996 elections following the formation of the National Democratic Assembly.¹ The list won five seats in the Knesset elections, including a seat for Dr. Azmi Bishara, representing Balad. Although it was considered a pioneering experiment, it was not encumbered with more than its true weight of being an electoral list, which was dismantled shortly after its goals were achieved with both sides achieving their electoral objectives.

In reviewing what happened, we see that the benefit of dismantling the list of the National Democratic Assembly and the Democratic Front parties which fought in the 1996 elections, contributed more than its formation. The interaction and discussion between the two sides contributed to the enrichment of political action, and later the launch and dissemination of a more advanced discourse than the discourse of “peace and equality.” This discourse was the abolition of the Jewishness of the State and transforming it into a State for all its citizens.”

“Unity and Conflict before the 1990s”

In the late 1950s, specifically in 1958, the Popular Front was founded. This was an alliance that included the communists and nationalists, but it only lasted a short time. As its agreement was broken due to the conflict between the two parties, and later prepared for the launch of the “Land movement,” which placed the nationalists within a framework. The conflict continued during its existence with the Communists, and ended after the authorities suppressed it in 1964.

The 1970s and 1980s were almost free of alliances, with the exception of unity within the framework of national bodies such as the Committee for the Defense of Land and the Union of Arab University Students, etc. While, in contrast, the period witnessed a bitter struggle on the symbols and identity. This conflict began and continued from the early 1970s, with the start of the Abnaa el-Balad Movement, and intensified during the late 1970s and mid-1980s, with the establishment of the Progressive Movement and later the Islamic movement. During this conflict, the Land Day marches became “battlefields” on the Palestinian flag, which the Abnaa el-Balad Movement insisted on lifting, in an affirmation of its symbolism of identity and belonging. On the other hand, the Israeli symbols of flag and anthem were present in this conflict. As the Communist Party has frequently been criticized of raising the Israeli flag in

¹ The National Democratic Assembly was formed primarily by the Abnaa el-Balad, *Sons of the Land* Movement, the Charter for Equality and the remnants of the Progressive Movement.

the First of May demonstrations and in the opening of its conferences with the “Hatikvah,” the Israeli national anthem.

The many years of discussion and “conflict” have enriched the Palestinian arena of national action within Israel, as thousands of young people in universities and other struggle strongholds, were mobilized. They contributed to the process of charging and politicization. They had an impact among and within the different political parties, sometimes causing a “clash” between them, and internal cracks and fissures at other times, without affecting unity within the joint bodies.

Later, it enabled the establishment of the National Democratic Assembly, and hence the alliance of the Democratic Front and National Assembly. It enabled the production of a semi-unified discourse that was centered, on the one hand, on the affirmation of our identity and belonging as an integral part of the Palestinian people. While on the other hand, on the confirmation of the Jewishness of the State as a racist state that practices the policy of marginalization and exclusion against us, and strives to Judaize the public space inside the Green Line and in the West Bank.

Unity of the Discourse and Resolution of the Identity Issue

This discourse ended the long years of conflict and resolved the issue of identity, belonging, and associated symbols, foremost of which was the raising of the Palestinian flag. The flag was established, (especially after it became permissible following the Oslo Agreement), as a national flag for our people in all their places of existence. All parties, including the Communist Party and the Democratic Front, started to raise it. It also resolved the position towards the Israeli symbols, primarily the anthem and the flag, by describing these symbols, at the very least, as racist religious symbols linked to the Jewishness of the State and do not represent us politically, culturally or nationally.

The unified discourse that held the Jewishness of the State as a central link, later facilitated the work of the unified national bodies, such as the Arab Follow-up Committee and the Committee of the Heads of Arab Local Authorities. It pressed and embarrassed the Israeli establishment locally and internationally, as many international movements started to describe it, as an apartheid state. Therefore, it was not surprising that Netanyahu’s statement about the Arabs marching to the polls during the last elections raised international reactions, and evoked a reaction from the American president himself.

This discourse strengthened our national unity on our national and daily issues, after it reduced the area of disagreement between the national action bodies. It constituted a barrier to attempts of Israelization and integration on the margins of the State and Israeli society. It also disturbed and embarrassed Israel in the face of international bodies, having revealed its racist character and ethnic democracy. Particularly, as it was based on our Arab depth through communication, and building bridges with our national environment.

This discourse also enabled the creation of a state of public revival and unity, which is much deeper than the unity of the parties. It was accompanied by a national project that did not compromise on the confiscation of history and memory, and did not deal with it as part of the heritage alone. Rather, it deals with it as a fundamental card in the struggle against the institution and its policy. This project places their narrative opposite ours, and therefore,

refuses to relinquish the homeland in exchange for citizenship, and spurns the consideration of citizenship as a favor or moral generosity by Israel. It is a national project that brandishes the homeland in the face of those who also want to confiscate citizenship, after discovering that the “ethnic” state cannot be established in a multi-ethnic reality. Furthermore, dealing with the Arab citizens equitably requires the cessation of the monopoly of the State by one of its nationalities (Jewish), or it would have to reveal its true face as an apartheid state through the codification of racism, which Israel has tried to avoid over the past decades. This discourse has put the Israeli institution in a predicament, forcing it to resort to the enactment of a set of racist laws. Laws it did not have to resort to in the past, in order to deal with the Palestinian Arabs’ attempt to break the policy of domination and control that has burdened them for decades, and abort the discourse of confrontation. A discourse that has inspired the future by clinging to history, and linking parts of the solutions with a return to the roots or to the historical origin of the Nakba, where the problem started. By addressing them, the solution begins. While the stalemate of the two-State solution, makes this proposition or option, extend to the entire country.

On the other hand, we saw signs of opposite results that may be produced by the unity, within the framework of the Joint List that ran in the last Knesset elections in 2014. This may begin with the establishment of a discourse that could be called, “a discourse of retreat.” This began with Ayman Odeh standing for the Hatikvah, and continued with his “moderate” speech at the opening of the 20th Knesset session, and his participation alongside the Israeli leaders at the Holocaust commemoration ceremony.

Ayman Odeh’s discourse is making its way towards influencing the entire political arena, by integrating most of its parties under the wing of the Joint List he heads. It is infiltrating under the guise of addressing the daily life issues that concern people, and descending from the level of rhetoric to reality on the ground. This discourse, is not only satisfied with dropping the Palestinian national dimension of our program, but is reconciled with the Jewish State and its racist symbols. It foreruns a return of our people to a time before Land Day, the day that broke the crutches of power and rose against the policy of submission and entreaty. A day that taught us how to seize our rights by extracting them from their oppressors. (Incidentally, these terms are the “Democratic Front’s” rhetoric, produced by the struggle that accompanied and followed Land Day).

This discourse, which sometimes attempts to be enveloped with the cover of Martin Luther King, and other times with the mantle of Mahatma Gandhi, is actually an Israeli discourse that does not effectively exceed the ceiling of the Israeli Vicki Knafo. A woman who Ayman Odeh is following in her footsteps, from the Naqab to Jerusalem. We hope that it will not end, in the same way the struggle of the aforementioned woman, ended.

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