

# The Constant in the Relationship as a Context to Understand the Transient

**Khaled Anabtawi \***

“Have you heard of a person who receives a dowry without a groom? ... I am eager to get a dowry, and let someone else get the groom.” With these words and this metaphor, Golda Meir responded to Levi Eshkol in one of the Mapai party deliberations, on the future of Jerusalem. We can draw on Meir’s statement in order to understand the historical dilemma of the Zionist colonialist project. The predicament of the Israeli longing and Zionist settlement ambitions to obtain land, sovereignty and expansion on one hand, and the indigenous Palestinian existence that constituted a barrier and a quandary to this, on the other. However, a profound observer of Israeli strategic policies over the past few years would imagine a scene continuing the Eshkol-Meir dialogue, with Netanyahu listening in so as to answer, trying to find a policy, that in his view, would solve this dilemma.

Perhaps the recent changes - as we argue - are capable of provoking our minds to carry out a reading, and understanding, of what surrounds and dominates the Israeli political scene from a change towards the Palestinians inside Israel.

This article attempts to present a succinct vision that reads the main changes in the Zionist political strategy toward the Palestinians in Israel in recent years. In addition, the article shows that there has been a shift in this policy, which has become evident over the past two years, coinciding with a strategic shift in Israeli policy toward the Palestinian issue in general. This can be referred to as a shift from a policy some call “conflict management”, to attempts to resolve it on the ground unilaterally. This is being done, by imposing certain facts that would later become a reality and a ceiling within any possible settlement. A reality the colonialist project can reconcile with. It also briefly discusses what is happening in the internal Palestinian arena, at the level of elites in particular. The influence these activities have on the Israeli changes, and their affect on them.

## **Understanding the Constant in the Relationship as a General Context to Understanding the Transient**

Before presenting any vision on the political transition, I must undoubtedly and inevitably confirm, that speaking about a change in Israeli politics, does not in any way assume that the movement of political change is traveling on a journey governed by a “linear” equation. Where it moves from “one type of relationship” to “another” completely different from what preceded it. This is not the type of equation that generally rules the movement of political history, nor do we seek its analysis in particular. As a change in the pattern of the existing relationship, or policy, does not necessarily mean a cut from previous patterns of the relationship.

These lines, and subject area, will not allow for a historical analysis of the relationship of the Palestinian society inside Israel with the Israeli regime. However, there are general constants that can be inferred to as a general context for understanding the relationship historically, although its manifestations varied in different periods. Speaking of a shift in the rules and equation that governs the relationship between the Palestinians inside Israel and the Israeli regime, specifically, does not assume the elimination of a constant ruling in this relationship. This constant is briefly represented in regarding the indigenous people as an existential threat, to its colonialist project. Thus, the indigenous people must be obliterated, distorted or controlled. Conversely, we can point to the changes in the manifestation of this constant at different intervals.

In order to understand the relationship with the Arab society inside Israel, it is necessary to define the context of the colonialist project. This can be done by differentiating the nature of the Israeli colonialist system from other systems and projects. This distinction can be summed up in regarding the Israeli colonialist project as a continuous State project that has not concluded, although it did not originally begin with the State. It is a project that also bears characteristics of religious Messianism. Furthermore, it imposed citizenship on a segment of the Palestinian people who became a minority within their homeland, although this minority is part of the Arab and Palestinian majority in the region. Thus, the existence of this segment and their citizenship constitutes some of the manifestations of the dilemma and the existential challenge to resolve this project. This dilemma was expressed well by Golda Meir, who defined the relationship between them (i.e., between the Arab national group inside Israel and the Israeli system). Thus, we cannot understand this relationship with its constant and changes, in isolation from this context. From the general context mentioned above, it is possible to refer to three levels that rule this difference in manifestations. In other words, the changes in politics and relationship that are influenced by them, although they intertwine in a dialectical relationship:

- Israeli level: linked to the nature of the system, project and Israeli society.
- Internal level: changes in Palestinian society inside Israel.
- Regional level: regional transformations and to a further extent, global changes.

### **From “Conflict Management” to Attempts to “Resolve the Conflict”**

In the past two decades, it has become generally clear to the Palestinian consciousness that there is no Israeli partner who is truly interested in pursuing a settlement that realizes even the minimum legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. What successive Israeli governments and specifically the Netanyahu government is doing is “conflict management,” in order to maintain the status quo and ensure Israeli superiority. However, an observer of Israeli politics will see that since Netanyahu took office again in 2009, especially since his last term, the context of “conflict management” has somewhat narrowed in the breadth of policy transformation toward a unilateral solution at several levels. This makes us read attempts to close and resolve the conflict in some aspects, not just manage it.

We will attempt to provide a quick overview of this transformation, analyzing the changes that occurred at the first of the three levels mentioned above (the nature of the system, project and Israeli society), while briefly addressing the second level. This is a quick understanding of the changes taking place in the Palestinian society inside Israel, how they influence and are affected by the first level.

While we argue that there are ongoing attempts to resolve the conflict, this argument does not categorically deny that no attempts to resolve it have taken place in the past. However, the current analysis differs, as it analyzes this resolution within multiple levels, taking into account the changes in the above-mentioned levels. It also distinguishes between the various attempts at resolution in different periods according to the differences in the nature of the colonialist project and its interests. The Nakba, for example, can only be seen as part of a direct military colonialist resolution attempt. However, as we have mentioned, the Israeli colonialist project is a continuing project based on obliteration and construction, as Palestinian researcher Huneida Ghanem points out. The Nakba cannot be considered a decisive victory for the colonialist project, but rather another establishment of colonialist manifestations that moved from the Zionist movement's hands, into the hands of the State.

When talking about a resolution or closure of the internal Palestinian case, we can refer to understanding the resolution attempts at two central layers of the relationship: Identity (which includes self and cultural identity, and political practice of the Arabs within Israel), and the layer of analysis, which is related to land and space. In this perspective, these are the two central layers of conflict between Palestinian society and the Israeli regime, which seeks to subjugate these layers to what suits its limits.

Thus, since his second government, Netanyahu's policies and governments have been characterized by the attempt to establish a phase that imposes a "domesticated citizenship" or (as in the words of the Palestinian researchers, Nadim Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury), a "colonialist settlement citizenship." It is possible to point to the spread of this stage in Netanyahu's last government, i.e. in mid-2015. In this perspective, the Zionist project is reconciled with this type of citizenship, which is a resolution that does not entail obliterating the citizens from existence, rather emptying their citizenship of its real meaning. As colonialism is not just a process of expelling things, but of killing them by depleting them of their real content in order to coexist with them.

### **Manifestations of the Resolution at the Level of Identity, Awareness and Political Practice**

Since Netanyahu took office in 2009, the so-called process of legalizing racism began. A large wave of laws started. Laws that contribute to the establishment of Israel as a Jewish National State, concurrently with the tyranny or dominance of the debate on the Jewish identity of the State, and Zionist sovereignty over the country within what can be classified as a "return to history," i.e. a return to square one and the 1948 question. The "Nakba" Law, the "Boycott Law" and dozens of other laws were enacted, most recently the "Exclusion of Arab MKs" law, preceded by a bill proposed by Miri Regev, of "Cultural Loyalty." Furthermore, for the first time since 1965, a public political movement has been outlawed, the Islamic Movement headed by Sheikh Raed Salah. Moreover, harassment of the Palestinian political leadership and expelling the National Democratic Assembly's representatives from the Knesset for six months (the longest a parliamentary political bloc has been expelled in Knesset history), and the recent rampant pursuit of the National Democratic Assembly.

To return to the first level of analyzing the transformations (i.e. the level of the Israeli project/system and Israeli society), we note that this wave coincides with profound changes in the nature of the society. Hence, we can say that there is a layer of right-wing religious change that has stabilized over the past decade and is gradually expanding, besides the settlers' demographic expansion and the control of the right-wing settler movement over the Zionist

project. In addition to the increase in the influence of the religious Zionist sector in the State, such as the appointment of Roni Sheikh as commander-in-chief of the police. This elite now controls 20% of the officers at the commander level, and has recruited around 62% of young settlers and religious Zionists to the combat units, according to Madar's 2015 strategic report.

Furthermore, over time, it is possible to argue that the religious Jewish elites are closer to the Zionist project as a result of their full integration into the Israeli political game. The Zionist project draws closer to Judaism and religiosity. In addition to easternizing the right-wing, there is an "ashkenazing" of the settlements. In other words, the main settlement elites are not eastern. Moreover, the ruling Zionist junta appears to be more committed to the "Jabotinsky" corrective thinking of the "Iron Wall."

These changes in the nature of society and the ruling elites have led to redefining and building of the Zionist consensus and the positioning of the Zionist political map. The distances between the political differences have gradually faded away. Even the things that were previously the subject of disagreement have become a semi-Zionist consensus, such as the settlements, for example, and the need to preserve the large blocs and other issues, which classified the map between "extreme right," "right" and the "non-right."

Moreover, these changes are occurring concurrently with a total collapse of opportunities for settlement (which are essentially unjust), and are a resolution for the opposite side. Since 2011, Jerusalem has undergone a strategic transformation at several levels. It has become clear that the latest Israeli plans for the city, are aimed at controlling the "Holy Basin," breaking the Arab-Palestinian majority in East Jerusalem, and supporting the settlement associations to move from isolated settlement blocs to the heart of the "Holy Basin" and the Old City, in an apparent attempt to prevent any future division of the city. At the level of the entire West Bank, we are seeing "soft" annexation, as opposed to the "coarse" annexation that Bennett calls for the settlement blocs and Area C. As well as the Israeli control and sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, as an indication of the kind of settlement that is based on what Netanyahu calls the "Minus State," which means an incomplete State that is similar to the autonomy in areas A and B and the actual annexation of Area C and Jerusalem.

All these attempts are taking place amidst an Arab and regional reality in crisis, Palestinian division, and a stalemate in the Palestinian national project, which Netanyahu sees as fertile ground for resolving the conflict.

Land has always been the central focus of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict. According to Patrick Wolff, land is the central focus of every colonialist project and without it, (i.e., without control of the land) the settlement colonialist project cannot be fulfilled. In the case of the Palestinians inside Israel, the State sought to resolve the issue of the land after the Nakba. Following the Nakba, the State possessed 93% of the Palestinian territories within the 1948 borders and the Arabs were left with only 2.5%. The projects did not stop after the Nakba, as the Israeli colonialist project is a continuous project as mentioned above. Wolff says, "Colonialist settlement is not an event, it is an inevitable structure that seeks to obliterate the indigenous people." Therefore, the conflict continued not only over land ownership, but also on the space and spatial identity, which is the conflict that has taken on serious proportions in recent years.

It is possible to point out that the conflict on the ground, in the narrow sense of the term, has become limited or concentrated in the Naqab, after the expropriation of land and its ownership in the other areas, has been resolved by the authorities. The recent attempts to

impose an unjust settlement on the people of the Naqab, through plans of uprooting and displacement, are only an expression of seeking this resolution.

However, as settlement colonialism is an ongoing effort to obliterate the indigenous people, and a continuous process of progress in this area. We can only consider the relationship with the spatial space and control, as part of the colonialist's relationship with the indigenous people, and their besiegement (in addition to the dispossession of their land). The colonialist views this relationship as a form of colonialist domination and hegemony by creating an alienation between the indigenous people and their spatial space. The recent governmental five-year plan can only be analyzed from this perspective. By this, it emphasizes the Israeli policy based on circumscribing the ceiling of citizenship (as mentioned in the first level of the analysis) by linking the privileges (not rights) of the plan with intensifying demolition orders and demolitions of dozens of homes (which has already begun). As well as the acceptance and establishment of loyalty to the Zionism of the State. In addition, most of the planning reports indicate that the endeavor, following the control of the land, is to determine the spatial identity and control of the space in the Arab towns. This is done through imposing housing agreements that transform the Arab towns into ghettos, imposing an architectural and housing pattern, and preventing Arabs from migrating to the Jewish city adjacent to the Arab village. Thus, concentrating their presence to the smallest area of land and comprehensively resolving the issue of planning.

### **The Infrastructure of Colonialism toward an In-depth Understanding of Modern Israelization**

The Algerian philosopher, Malik Ben Nabi, stresses in his book, "Conditions of Renaissance" on the role of the colonized, their structure and internal immunity in their conflict with the colonialist. This is the emphasis that Frantz Fanon asserts in his analysis of the colonialist-colonized relationship. This led him to rebel against the classic Hegelian interpretation of the slave-master dialectic, since, according to Fanon, the master continuously creates various forms of control that are not limited to conventional control.

Therefore, in this regard, it is not enough to present a reading of the transformations in Israeli politics and this level alone, without addressing what is happening in the internal Palestinian arena and at the level of its elites. How they influence the changes in the first level (Israeli system and society), and how they are affected by these changes. If we tried to make a comparison to the internal Palestinian situation, it would be possible to point out that the resolution in this respect, in confirmation of what we have mentioned above, is centered on the re-positioning of the internal Palestinian political map. While the regime ejects anyone who doesn't approve of the political practice, in accordance with what the regime can co-exist with. In this context, many analytical attempts are being made to analyze the patterns of political practice of the Arabs inside Israel. It can be argued that a new manifestation of political leadership emerged two years ago following the formation of the Joint List. We can consider that a particular leadership triangle may have settled in the political map: The Joint List, the Follow-up Committee and the Committee of Heads of Local Authorities, added to them the national civil movement, even if it is not institutionalized. Several analyses by the Israeli Center for the Study of National Security indicate that there is an Israeli opportunity to invest in forming a clear picture for the Arab political leadership in order to "reach out, reduce the gaps and make historic initiatives for the Arab society." However, as the analyses also indicate, the Zionist establishment has not supported anyone, even those who claim to have a

new practice and a new “nonprovocative” discourse. The political field that the institution is trying to draw, is narrowing for anyone who opposes the Zionist consensus.

In Samouha’s analysis of the Arab-Jewish Relations Index for 2015, he claims that the Index shows that the Arabs are coexisting more and more with the Israeli regime. He goes further, claiming that there is an indication of coexistence with the Jewishness of the Israeli regime in return for receiving concessions. He also stresses that this does not negate the fact that the Palestinian identity remains the central identity of the majority. This poll and others, although they are subject to interpretation and debate, provoke our minds to re-think the concept of “Israelization” and “Palestinization.” A concept that transcends the discourse of classic identity associated with the choice of identity among a basket of identities. As well as voting for the Zionist parties or rejecting the Hatikvah (the Israeli national anthem) and other indicators, which I believe, the institution has decided upon and learned to coexist with. What the government is seeking, in this regard, is to position the Arab political practice inside Israel in accordance with its new ceiling. In addition to the community’s coexistence with the consolidation of Jewish Zionist domination, even if they are “given” more “concessions and privileges.” This ultimately led to Netanyahu’s approval of the proposed plan – with the most stringent ministers in the cabinet - the government plan 922 for the “socio-economic development of Arab society.” Subsequently, the question of not provoking the Right becomes the driving force behind the Arab-Palestinian political practice inside Israel and its ceiling.

In this sense, we can observe that there are two parallel simultaneous tracks working in the Palestinian consciousness and activity inside Israel, the way of “Palestinization” and the way of “Israelization.” Palestinization in the sense of adherence to the Palestinian identity, emphasizing belonging to it as a national and political identity, versus coexistence with the Israeli regime and adapting to ongoing changes and linking the rhythm of political action with it.

However, when we speak of “Israelization” versus “Palestinization,” we must be aware of the need to link the analysis of these identities or their political manifestations with what has been said about the changes in the patterns of relationship, and the main key to understanding the relationship in the different periods. If there is a change in the relationship model or the understanding of the relationship between one era and another, it must be accompanied by a change in this understanding as well (i.e., understanding Israelization and Palestinization ways). However, if, for example, the “fear and survival” by the Palestinian side and the “obsession with dominance” and its regulation by the Israeli side, were the keys to understanding the relationship between the colonialist and the indigenous people during the period of military rule. It would be understood that Palestinization would be confined to rejecting this relationship, clinging to the land and asserting identity. When the discourse of citizenship, for many reasons I will not enter into here, becomes the key to understanding this relationship, Israelization will be manifested in trying to assimilate it, not marginalize it. In trying to organize and placate it to the Israeli ceiling at the above-mentioned levels. Thus, it is as if the rhythm of our practice and political discourse is reduced to the prevention of the evil of the Israeli Right. In view of this understanding, it is impossible to overlook the need to emphasize the opposing understanding of Palestinization. An understanding that subjugates the discourse of citizenship and equality and its appreciation of it, by giving it a national dimension that links it to the nature of the colonialist settlement project, within a framework of “citizenship and equality.” That is, by emphasizing the deep understanding of the civil-

national dialectic and linking it with the overall Palestinian national project as a project contradicting the Zionist colonialist project.

The Palestinian political movement inside Israel cannot get out of the state of political deficiency and the ebb that encircles it, or even try to do so, without understanding the new political reality and the strategic changes that have occurred on the Zionist colonialist project and the nature of Israeli society and elites. Any such attempt will remain deficient and pathetic if this new reality is not explored in order to counter the resolution attempts and repel them.

\* **Khaled Anabtawi** is a political science student at Haifa University and a political and social activist.