The Palestinians inside Israel and the New Israeli Political Reality

Mtanes Shehadeh *

Introduction

The Era of Transformations

The Arab community inside Israel is currently facing what might be the beginning of a more hostile phase, in which the Israeli establishment is trying to decide, to close the case of the "question of the Palestinians in Israel." It is doing so by imposing Israelization through coercion and threats, and legitimizing the Jewishness of the State and its regime by law. I.e. they are unilaterally organizing the status of the Arab society, under the guise of the interests and objectives of the Zionist project. At the same time, Israel is working on imposing a de facto solution to the Palestinian issue, in accordance with its interests and ambitions by: annexing Area C; neutralizing the status of the Palestinian Authority as a Local Authority in charge of running the affairs of the residents in the densely populated Palestinian areas; preventing geographical contiguity between Palestinian areas; keeping Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty and as the capital of the State of Israel; dominating and controlling Palestinian economic and natural resources; controlling the border, which means depriving the right of the Palestinian people, wherever they may be, to self-determination, and appending them with Israeli interests.

This Israeli attempt follows enormous changes in the global, regional, Palestinian and Israeli political environment compared to the mid-1990s. The current political scene has shifted to a completely different situation. This is manifested in the return of international conflicts and global competition, and more recently the beginning of policies of seclusion and isolation. As well as the rise of extreme Right-wing parties in western countries, such as Britain and the United States. Furthermore, Israeli society and the State, are living a situation of constant shift toward the far right, moving toward a renewed, greedy and suppressive Right wing colonialist Zionist project. This is the stage of dominance of the Right-wing camp's ideology over the institutions in Israel, not only the executive and legislative branches, but also the Supreme Court, the police, the army and the media. We are also witnessing an Israeli engagement in the global economy. On the other hand, we are seeing the Arab region burn and the national project in crisis.

During all these transformations, the Palestinian national project is going through a period of stagnation and stalemate, and a situation of fatal division. All this contributes to the inertia of the Palestinian struggle, and allows the Zionist project to continue to expand and stabilize, without paying serious prices. In addition, the political scene of the Palestinians inside Israel is also suffering from a decline in the national project. There are political parties that are reverting to political platforms that were thought to have faded since the second intifada. The most prominent of these is betting on making change from inside Israeli society, promoting the "democratic" anti-occupation "peace camp," and focusing on the demand to end the occupation.

This approach believes that ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, is a sufficient condition to end the "abnormal" situation in which Israel is living. It will attain equality for the Palestinians inside Israel and achieve the expected democracy. This indicates that the Palestinians inside Israel have not yet collectively delineated the projections of the nature of the Zionist colonialist project on their political and legal status, nor have they observed the profound changes that have taken place in the past two decades. Indeed, some of us live in a situation of denial of reality, which we define according to our ideological commitments or desires, not the other way around. Therefore, misleading solutions and programs of action that were put forward the same way decades ago, may lead to the perpetuation of the status quo. At this particular stage, we must read the reality critically and boldly, and push to undermine and change the prevailing traditional concepts. We can do this, and it is our primary duty to do so.

What does Israel want, and what do we want?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of what Israel is seeking at this stage, and what is required of the political projects of the Palestinians inside Israel, I will try to present a brief analysis of the political situation in Israel. I will begin with a quick overview of the emergence of the Israeli parties and their boundaries, and the political and social rifts in Israeli society. Then, I will address the last two decades and the development of what is known as the modern extreme Right, identifying its most prominent characteristics. In my opinion, monitoring these changes is important in order to understand the current Zionist project, its nature and objectives. As well as to contribute to identifying the political struggles of the Palestinians inside Israel, which I will refer to in the conclusion of the article.

The Extreme Right in Israel

The roots of the party system in Israel dates back to the "Hebrew Yishuv" period in Palestine at the beginning of the last century. The political and party system was accompanied by a large part of the major political upheavals that emerged at the time. The system was also affected by local, regional and global social and political developments. This rise defined the basic parameters of the boundaries between the Left and the Right in Hebrew society. In this context, the most prominent focal points were politics and security, as well as the most effective method for the establishment of the State of Israel. I.e. the type of political and military tools to achieve this project, particularly the differences in approach of the Mapai and Herut. Mapai sought gradual progress and slow pace to control Palestine (in parallel to an understanding with the superpowers). While the corrective movement (Jabotinsky-Herut), called for rapid resolution and control over Palestine by using as much force and violence as possible, and imposing a fait accompli without waiting for understandings with the superpowers. This was accompanied by a constant debate about accepting the partition of Palestine or demanding the land of "Greater Israel." Besides the political and security focal points, the economic perspective, and the adoption of the national Zionist socialist economic system versus the free market system, constituted a fundamental division between the two parties. Later, following the establishment of Israel, and based on the Yishuv period, the split or rift between the Left and Right centered on each of the following: the flexibility level with regard to the land and borders to achieve the Zionist project; the status of religion in the State; how to deal with the class issue; the problem of democracy and pluralism; and the question of modernity.

These definitions encapsulated the boundaries between the Right and the Left of the party system Israel until 1967, and the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The

occupation is considered a definitive and institutionalized event. An event that led to focusing the definition of the Left and Right in Israel on the future of the occupied territories, the stance on the Israeli-Arab conflict, and the meanings and character of Zionism and the State of Israel. After the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the division between the Left and the Right was essentially positioned between the camp of the doves (moderates) and the hawks (hardliners) in the political-security axis of Israeli politics.

In addition to redefining the boundaries between the Left and the Right, the occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967 contributed to the emergence of the so-called extreme Right wing in Israel - the Gush Emunim and the Kach party.

It can be argued that discussions on the future of the occupied territories, security policies, and to a lesser extent the economic proposal, summed up the components of the rift between the Left and the Right in Israel until the 1990s. These focal points defined the political rift at that stage, and were the most prominent within Israeli society, even overshadowing the other points, without canceling them, of course. The party system was organized according to these focal points. These divisions and rifts prevailed until the end of the last millennium.

Since the beginning of the third millennium, a transformation has been taking place in the political and partisan system in Israel and in the nature of political rifts. The intensity of the impact of the traditional rifts began to decline (i.e., occupation, security and economy), particularly its impact on the party system and voting patterns. They transformed from being the core of the rift to accompanying it. Since the 2009 elections, there has been a great deal of consensus among the main major parties on the nature of administration of the occupation, the essence and identity of the State of Israel and the status of Arab society in the State of Israel. On the whole, the main parties put forward a position opposed to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. This position held no answers to the historical and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, thereby eliminating any possibility of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians. Most of these parties seek, in varying degrees, to maintain the status quo, while trying to change the geographic and demographic reality, without paying a political or security price. While the majority of the parties emphasize the Jewish identity of the State.

In contrast, new rifts have emerged that define the nature of the party system. The new rifts are derived from the modern European far-right terminology dictionary, adapted to the Israeli situation. The current rifts are the ones that engineer and organize the party system in Israel and place the parties on the axis of the extreme Right (including the Likud), the center-Right (Yesh Atid, Kulanu), the Center (the Labor Party) and the remnants of the Zionist Left (Meretz). Thus, we begin to speak of the development of a new extreme Right in Israel. This extreme Right is different from the traditional far Right, which focused on the Palestinian cause, rejecting any peaceful solutions and demanding full control of the Palestinian territories and considering it part of the State of Israel. One of the most prominent features of the current extreme Right in Israel is that it carries a strong nationalism, and presents political programs or policies that seek to create internal homogeneity on the one hand, and emphasize external differentiation on the other. This Right carries a racist ideology, summarized by the belief that there are natural and genetic differences between races, and that one of these races is superior to the others. This trend is characterized by its antagonism to democracy, including anti-pluralism, rejection of fundamental equality among the citizens of the State and opposition to the democratic system. It should be noted that restricting democracy is not an end in itself for the Israeli extreme Right. Rather, democracy, by definition, is on the sidelines and has no importance when it infringes

upon the Jewish-Zionist definition of the State and its symbols. Therefore, when there is a conflict between democracy and Jewish-Zionism, the choice of the Right is clear.

Furthermore, the extreme Right also seeks to undermine the powers of the Supreme Court, to limit its influence and interference in public life, and in the process of enacting laws. It is characterized by its hatred of outsiders. This is a collective term to describe the fear, hatred and hostility toward ethnically alien people, and that hostility sometimes transcends strangers to socially vulnerable groups. In the Israeli case, the extreme Right is characterized by hatred and being anti-Arab first, then anti-refugees and foreign workers. The extreme Right also works on implementing political, social and economic exclusion policies against the Arabs.

Collectively, these components characterize the ideology of the far Right in Israel. This, of course, does not mean that the so-called center-Right or Center parties do not carry segments of these ideas, but rather that their intensity, clarity and influence are stronger among the far-Right parties.

What differentiates the extreme Right and the political and partisan system in general in Israel from what is in Europe, is that Israel carries and translates on the ground a national colonialist settlement project. Therefore, what distinguishes the minority within it, is that it is a minority who are owners of the homeland, or a majority that became a minority following the Nakba of Palestine and the establishment of Israel on its ruins. Here it is important to clarify what we mean when we use the term "settlement colonialism" and how to translate it in the case of Israel in general and the Right-wing hegemony in particular.

The State of Colonialism in Israel

Settlement Colonialism is a complete, integrated and structural system, not an event which ends at a certain point. It is an ongoing effort to achieve the objectives of the project. Traditional colonialism is established on economic, political, and military domination and the improvement of the geopolitical situation of the colonizer through subjugation, controlling from afar, or through its local agents. However, settlement colonialism aims to create a political entity for it, and settle in the homeland as its new home, maintaining a standard of living as it had in the motherland. While the logic of colonialism depends on subjugation, settlement colonialism relies on substitution, that is, replacing the indigenous people, not to rule over them, but to take their place, without recognizing that the land is their homeland as indigenous people.

The Zionist project has a number of features of settlement colonialism, according to Nadim Rouhana, it has, in particular, worked and continues to work to control, acquire land and space. Building a new geography and history to change the reality and features of the country. It worked to get rid of the indigenous population through murder, intimidation and expulsion. It seeks to remove the Palestinians, as a human, historical and moral existence, from their homeland. This is known as the process of symbolic and actual obliteration and replacement, as Hunaida Ghanem explains. It also constantly seeks to implant the place with new life that is subservient to it. To achieve all this, colonialism uses structural violence profusely. Violence is a constant condition (political, legal and cultural violence), but colonialism does not see itself as violent, but rather justifies its use with the need to defend itself and the land. While the slogan of traditional colonialism was "work for me," the slogan of settlement colonialism is "get out." Unlike other settlement colonialist projects that have defeated the indigenous peoples by eliminating them or the majority of them, such as Canada and New Zealand, the Zionist project

has not "completely" won yet, but it has not been defeated either, like the return to the motherland as in the case of French colonialism in Algeria or reconciliation, as in the case of South Africa. Therefore, the Zionist project is currently seeking to resolve the project and achieve victory. Victory is not necessarily through the extermination of the indigenous population; it may be achieved by: wresting legitimacy from the colonized (and in the case of Israel: wresting recognition of the Jewishness of the State, superiority of Israeli society and its natural historical right in this country); closing the case of Palestinian national demands through autonomy over a part of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the recognition of Israel as a Jewish State; ensuring international legitimacy for the State of Israel as a "Jewish and democratic" State; fortifying internal legitimacy within Israeli society, by increasing the doses of nationalism and fanaticism, and suppressing criticism and democracy. This is what the Right and the extreme Right have been clearly and openly seeking in recent years, because they feel the power and the opportunity is available for them to do so.

The political currents and parties in Israel do not appeal in general to the nature of the colonialist system, but rather compete over the boundaries of this project and its nature. In the extreme Zionist Left, you find that Meretz is satisfied with a colonialist project within the 1948 borders and believes that the colonialist project succeeded and prevailed within these borders and this must suffice. Therefore, the party seeks a kind of coexistence with the colonized within the 1948 borders to stabilize the colonialist project, not to change or dismantle it. It believes that ending the occupation of the 1967 areas is a declaration of the project's victory and its completion. The Labor Party believes that it can be satisfied with the victory of the project within the 1948 borders, while retaining the settlement blocs in the 1967 areas, i.e., maintaining and being satisfied with what has been achieved so far, in order to wrest international and Palestinian legitimacy. The "Yesh Atid" (There is a Future) party is not very different from the Labor Party (except in its more pronounced adoption of capitalist economic thought in absolute terms). It believes that it is the most appropriate and best suited to achieve the goals of the Zionist colonialist project. The Likud and the other far-right parties want to ensure colonization and control of the 1948 areas, and the annexation of a large part of the 1967 territories, without giving the Palestinians the right to self-determination, even without recognizing them as a people. Thus, they expand the colonialist project for doctrinal and religious reasons, and because they believe that the Arabs will not forget or forgive the theft of Palestine (as a reminder: The Iron Wall theory continues to affect the Likud's thinking). They seek to resolve the case and wrest legitimization of the Zionist colonialist settlement project by force and ratification. The "Jewish Home" Party may be the clearest in this regard; it seeks to translate the process of control and prevent any possibility of appeal on the Zionist project, and works to impose obliteration and complete replacement.

In our reality today, with the attempt to resolve the cases, we find that the extreme Right does not want any intervention by the Supreme Court during the stage or process of resolution, but view it a barrier to the possibility of achieving it. They do not want new partners in the colony such as foreign workers and refugees. They want to impose the legitimacy of the colonialist project by means of the law, force and repression. They work to marginalize democracy, because it may impede the resolution of the project. They also work on imposing replacement, obliteration and the fortification of the nationality of colonialism by law.

What Should Be Done?

There has been a lot of talk recently about the theoretical solutions to the Palestinian issue and an end to the State of occupation and Israeli hegemony. There are those who insist on the solution of the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel, while others propose a one-State solution. However, we find that there are only a few political approaches that deal with the future and status of the Palestinians inside Israel if the two-State solution is achieved, such as turning Israel into a State of its citizens. It should be noted that any proposed solution must guarantee the natural and historical rights of the Palestinian people in all their places of residence, including the status of the Palestinians inside Israel. Thereby not leaving this group alone to face Zionist colonialism, nor marginalizing any Israeli or those who have accepted the Palestinian national project. From the experience of the Palestinian struggle over the course of the century, it can be concluded that a necessary condition for changing the status quo, is the need to dismantle the colonialist situation. As a one-State solution can be achieved with the continuation of the Israeli colonialist situation, similar to the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Or even the permanence of the current situation in Israel, as there is now one sovereign State with several systems vis-a-vis the Palestinians: a prison in Gaza; military control in the West Bank; an in-between situation in Jerusalem (half citizenship); and a colonial citizenship for the Palestinians inside Israel. Of course, refugees are out of the consciousness or solutions. The solution could also be in the form of two States, while keeping the colonialist settlement situation inside Israel and colonialism through political control over the territories occupied in 1967.

This reading theoretically challenges and clashes with the prevailing belief among some that ending the occupation, is a sufficient condition for turning Israel into a normal democratic State, and that the occupation is what distorts the society in Israel. What they mean is that the unnatural situation is the occupation of the 1967 areas. Therefore, the termination of the occupation will transform the situation in the 1948 area into a normal situation. According to this distorted belief, all we need is Israel to agree to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian State and all our problems will be resolved. In order to do so, it is sufficient to establish a democratic camp that will overthrow the rule of the Right. Although I do not underestimate the importance of overthrowing the Right, particularly in the current circumstances, I believe that this may be an interim tactical objective rather than the strategic objective. The strategic objective is to establish a camp opposing Zionism and colonialism. As well as propose an alternative democratic system, as a precondition to any agreement between the two peoples on the nature of the solution. In South Africa, the fundamental requirement was to dismantle apartheid, not to change the ruling party or to push for the rule of the Left. This objective was shared by the indigenous black population and a segment of white immigrants in order to ensure a better future for all the population. The Palestinian issue will not be resolved, the occupation will not end and collective rights will not be taken without ending the colonialist settlement situation, and without dismantling the colonial system of control. First attain a democratic system, and then the solutions will come. To achieve this, the Palestinians inside Israel have a large role to play.

* **Mtanes Shehadeh** holds a doctorate in political science from the Hebrew University. He is the General Secretary of the National Democratic Assembly Party, and was the director of academic projects in Mada al-Carmel between the years 2014 – 2016.