

*Civic vs. Ethno-cultural Nationalism and Majority vs. Minority*¹

The first talk of the Brandt-Kreisky symposium made the argument “We are entering a new paradigm, in which the way we view the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as moving to a rights based approach”. Five points were raised to support the claim. 1. Left and right are no longer the ideological polarities to map the political system 2. There is a shift in the discussion from statehood to rights 3. Territorial partition is being reconsidered 4. The focus includes a debate around minority/majority relationship 5. A new language is evolving in which the conflict is being viewed in terms of a system of Apartheid and settler colonialism.

In further strengthening this argument, this second session introduced the thesis that **Palestinian nationalism is undergoing a process of redefinition and rethinking, under which the question of “who is Palestinian” politically is being expanded.**

There are different ways to understand what connects the individual to the state. *Gellner and Smith* distinguish between **pre-mordial** nationalism (the group being identified in tribal terms, identity, antiquity, and ethnicity) and **modern** constructionist nationalism (realists and non-realists, arguing that nationalism is factual but constructed). Aside of these, there is a typology in political science that makes a conceptual distinction between **civic territorial nationalism** on the one hand, and **ethno culturalism**. “Civic” is a reference for a group of individuals who aggregate together to create a political community and by extension this community takes the form of a state as the embodiment of political values/rights. This concept of civic nationalism emphasises citizenship as a membership of a political community. It is a voluntary and legalistic. In contrast to this, in ethno nationalism it is the group that creates the state; the group being centred on religion, history, culture and not voluntary. The ethnos defines the community. Essentially, these two concepts of nationalism move along the dividing lines of *the demos* (political community of the citizenry) and *the ethnos* (ethnicity determines the political community-). Historically, the US, Britain and France are based on the concept of the civic nationalism; whereas mainly Eastern Europe and Central Europe are referred to as being based on ethnonational concepts (see for example Germany, with its historic emphasis on the “Volk”²).

Palestinian nationalism in the past 20 years has been at a crossroad between civic nationalism and ethno-nationalism. Palestinian nationalism can roughly be divided into **three phases** (post Nakba³), two most important features underling these phases are: (1) The denial of the Palestinian people on Palestinian land (Golda Meir) and (2) Exile.

First phase: In the early stage, the dominant language of Palestinian nationalism was the ideology of **Pan-Arabism**. In conditions of defeat and national ruin, students of the American University of Beirut like George Habash (one of the founding fathers of the PFLP) grouped together around a belief of Palestinian nationalism that emphasised that a) Pan-Arabism will save Palestine and defeat Zionism; and which b) understood Arab nationalism in some sense as civic nationalism.

¹ Four introductory talks by Dr Bashir Bashir will be followed by three conversations between Bashir Bashir and other invited guests, commencing with Amos Goldberg.

² When Germany got unified the German philosopher Habermas said they should move to the commitment to individual values and rights and move away from ethnic concept (constitutional patriotism: commitment is to the constitution and the values that it represents and not to ethnicity). The whole concept of the EU is also a post national enterprise in certain respects.

³ Note that this is NOT to say that Palestinian nationalism did develop in a response to Zionism, but would have developed in any case, particularly because of the collapse of the world order from empire to nation states.

When Nasser came to power in Egypt this movement received a further push, which lasted until the war of 1967. In 1964, Egypt helped creating the PLO as the representation of the Palestinians in the newly established Arab League. They created a charter of the PLO. After the defeat of 1967, we are shifting to a new phase of Palestinian nationalism where the champion is Fatah. Fatah is also a student cell, lower middle class, from University of Cairo (main figures included: Arafat; Abu Eyad; and Abu Jihad) who wanted to move partly away from Pan-Arabism and wanted to place Palestinians in the centre. Fatah introduced to that also armed resistance. In this phase Arab Unity is not the way to liberate Palestine; the liberation of Palestine is the way to Arab unity and the way to achieve that is through armed struggle. The approach of Fatah was to embed/ nest themselves in society, offering cinema, arts, medical centres in the refugee camps, beginning in Jordan, and later moving to Syria and eventually, to Lebanon.

Second phase: The turning point in this phase was the battle Al-Karama of 1968, when Arafat seized the moment, leading to many undergraduate and graduate students to leave their campuses to join the Palestinian revolution. Consequently, the Palestinians factions and parties took over the PLO and started insisting that it is the sole legitimate representative of Palestinians. To talk to the Palestinians you did no longer talk to the President of Egypt, not to the King of Jordan, not to Saddam Hussein, but to Yasser Arafat (**Palestinianism**), **the chairman of the PLO**. Fatah stood for a democratic non-sectarian state for Muslims, Christians and Jews. This maximalist concept was heavily flirting with civic territorial nationalism, defining also Jews as Palestinian. The Jew in this concept was defined as a citizen, as the “a Palestinian”.

During this second stage of Palestinian nationalism, 1974 is an important point of reference. It is the year of the adoption of the Ten Point Programme set into motion a shift towards potentially accepting a two state solution concept, moving away from a maximalist point of stance. The move is characterised by a move towards ethno nationalism which culminated in Oslo.

Third phase: During the 1980-ies, in the first intifada, the discourse of Palestinian ethno nationalism is starting to get an additional dimension – religion - introduced by Hamas. Hamas adopted the same techniques as Fatah (embedding in society Grassroots movement), but with their activity focused on the homeland (as opposed to the refugee camps). Twenty years after the intifada, Hamas is now accepting the two state solution under the condition that they are part of the game, but their focus remains ethno nationalist.

To summarise, Palestinian nationalism started as the antithesis of Zionism, and then moved due to international pressure to accepting the terms of international resolutions to Palestine being shrunk to the borders of 1967, with Jews no longer being part of the vision of a Palestinian state. Under the two state solution, *being Palestinian* is defined ethnically. With the realities on the ground, in particular the continuation of settler colonial expansion but also the clear positioning of Israel as a Jewish State, the consensus of Palestinian politics around a two state solution is today is undergoing a very serious process of rethinking, in which the Palestinians are shifting towards the discourse of rights. This naturally implies a shift from ethno nationalism to civic nationalism. The question *Who is the Palestinian politically?* is under revision. One dimension that enters the debate is the Palestinians in Israel, who now protest against being second class and inferior citizens of a Jewish State of Israel. In addition, there is a serious frustration by the Palestinians by the marginalisation of refugees/diaspora. To challenge this Palestinian trend, however, it needs to be noted that the (Jewish) nation that Zionism has created bears little possibility to move to civic nationalism, as its ethno-nationalism is defined according to ethnicity and tribalism. This failure to emancipate from the tribal form of ethno-nationalism can be viewed as one of the origins of Israel’s current political crisis. Zionist nationalism stands

in contrast somehow to Palestinian nationalism, which has this space, in principle, even though certain strata, such as Hamas, do have serious problems still with such a shift to civic nationalism.