

Contemporary Trends in Israeli and Palestinian Politics

The Need to Rethink Israel/Palestine

For the past two decades Israeli and Palestinian politics have been undergoing profound structural changes. Some observers have argued that these changes considerably contributed to the development of a new paradigm or a new political grammar in Israel/Palestine. The Brandt Kreisky Symposium is based on the premise that the old paradigm based on the two-state solution is in question and we are in a process of shifting to a new paradigm that places at its centre the issue of rights. One might identify this shift in the following five points.

First, in the Israeli context the use of “right and “left” in terms of political ideological conversation is flawed and is no longer appropriately describing the political ideological developments and realities in Israel. Historically, Israeli politics has been categorised in terms of “right” and “left” with regard to their positions to 1-) ammeters of security and 2-) willingness to negotiate with the Palestinian leadership (Also in relation to welfare and economy but this is less relevant for our analysis here). In the current composition of the Knesset, this differentiation between “left” and “right” no longer holds. Instead, there is a concentration in the centre, where the majority agree that there needs to be a settlement with Palestinians and they agree to a “two-state minus” solution, with a Swiss cheese cantonised and fragmented political system on a limited space of the 1967 territory for the Palestinians.

Secondly, the frame of “majority” and “minority” in relation to Israel is no longer serving justice to the composition of the population of Israel. The nationality Law cements the idea that what defines Israel is Jewishness and Jewish supremacy. This has led Palestinians in Israel to point out that Israelis have no right to constitutionally and politically subjugate them as a minority without collective national rights and as second class citizens in a Jewish state. In other word, the Palestinian minority in Israel has entered the scene as new player in the political game over the future of Paestine/Israel.

Thirdly, there is a shift from statehood to rights as fourthly, it has become questionable to what extent does partition remain to be the dominant paradigm to deal with the conflict. Finally, the old paradigm relating to peace-making as the objective of the settlement of the conflict has turned out to be a failure, with the new paradigm shifting to “decolonialization”. The peace-making discourse is premised on the misleading assumption that we are talking about two equal parties that are in negotiation. The peace-making that guided the peace process and the Oslo Accords didn’t involve a serious process of historical reconciliation that seeks to decolonize Israel. The asymmetrical power relations between the parties are striking and the depiction of the Palestinians as equal to Israelis is misleading. This is where settler colonialism and apartheid comes into the equation. Since the recognition of Israel until to date, partition and peace-making have been the organising frame to understand Israel/Palestine. Today, this is frame is questioned and alternative frames like settler-colonialism and Apartheid enter the scene.

The Palestinians believed that under the Oslo Accords they would get an independent Palestinian state on 22% of their historical land of Palestine. The colonialist expansion has

further diminished this amount of land and has driven the idea of partitioning the land ad absurdum.

This is not to suggest that this lecture series shall argue that the way forward to solving Israel/Palestine is only to going to a one state solution. A two-state solution is still possible, but under different parameters than those currently discussed.

In other words: If Israel's de facto offer to the Palestinians is "a state" that is without any conventional characteristics of a state and its sovereignty, then the Palestinians will naturally be encouraged to remember that their struggle has always been about their rights regardless the political and institutional arrangements that realises and respect these rights, be it one state or two states. They will be ready to move away from an exclusive ethnic state and shift from statehood to rights.