

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PALESTINIAN SOCIETY; SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND DEMOCRACY

### ABSTRACT

This article tackles the social and cultural structure of the Palestinian society, It aims to provide a conceptual and critical vision of the Palestinian culture in theoretical and practical level, at the fields of: social structure, civil society organizations, and the democratic experience, the research concludes: the control the collective mind on Palestinian society: politically and socially, and the Palestinians were inability to overcome different approaches in solving their political matters, on the basis of a democratic style.

**Key words:** Palestinian culture, The collective mind, civil Society, democracy

In the western discussions regarding the Arab societies in terms of their cultural and social structure and the political aspects regarding the formation of the political and economic structure and formation of a state, the classical Orientalism has become accustomed to associating the Islamic and Arab societies in general with backwardness, despotism, tyranny and submissiveness, etc..(Kedouri, 1994) People's of the Third World are the submissive people before the regimes and states. However, the Iranian Revolution has reinstated the stolen dignity and role of the people in the social and political action (Sadowski, 1993). The Western Sociology claims that the Arab society lacks the independent bourgeois social institutions which broke the grip of feudalism on the western societies. According to this attitude Turner considers that the oriental society lacks independent cities, independent Bourgeois class, rationale Bureaucracy, legal accountability and private ownership which represent and embody the Bourgeois culture. It is marked by the absence of a civil society that is the absence of network of intermediary institutions between the individual and the state (Turner, 1984).

These views and other similar ones look to the world from a centralized cultural perspective of the west considering that the cultural, political and economic patterns which do not match the western perspectives are not models. The Indian and Iranian cases, the democratic and parliamentary reforms in Jordan are striking examples of the western prejudice under the pretext that they have not yet made any significant advance towards building a democratic society especially India. On the other hand, an understanding and examination of the eastern society out of its colonial context which the region had experienced leads to a damage and confusion of both vision and analysis. We see, or view and evaluate or experience and system as in the way the colonizer wants us to see or view it. The purport of this research does not allow us to prolong our discussion and elaboration of this aspect in spite of its significance.

Back to our topic which is the cultural and social structure and pattern in the Palestinian society. What do we mean by the cultural structure and pattern? They are the projections, values, rules, and life styles which run lives in societies according to what is common and customary (Barakat, 2000). In order to apply this on the Palestinian society from a general outlook, we see that its cultural formation is a mixture of qualities of an open and conservative society at the same time (Abu Amro, 1995:48). i.e. it still holds fast to its valuable, ethical and traditional cultural heritage which preserves its existence. It is also open in a manner that it seeks to change, develop and shape a different model from those prevailing in the Arab countries at least from the discourse perspective. We can say that there is a social value commonly known in sociology as "Unanimity" or "conscience collective"; this mechanism constitutes the legitimacy which organizes the work of the Palestinian society and constitutes its references in evaluation and decision making, or even in case of any compromise with the Israeli occupation.

The Palestinian society is distinguished by its modern characteristics like: Pluralism, tolerance, civil and political participation, respect of the other, freedom of beliefs; the majority support of the democratic system (Abu Amro, 1995; Al-Azar,1996; Barakat, 2000; Miari, 2003; Abrash, 2006). Miari presupposes that there are factors which had lead to the development of democracy among the Palestinian public; they are (Miari, 2001:50-71):

- Palestinian political pluralism in the field and in the formation of PLO.
- Religious pluralism experience in Palestine which contributes to the renunciation of bigotry and supported respect of others.
- Experience of the First Intifada(Uprising) in terms of political and social elite and way of decentralized administration.
- Israeli political and parliamentary experience.
- Palestinian introduction to Arab democratic models as the case in Jordan.

The researcher here chooses to disagree with Miari in this respect concerning the fourth point which is the Israeli experience and its impact on the development of democracy in the Palestinian society. The Israeli political system is marked by corruption and bribery; therefore, we can also say that the corruption in the PNA is also influenced by the Israeli experience. I do believe that what Miari means here has to do with the psychology of persecuted humans and its relationship with the occupier/oppressor with regards to sentimental contradiction. The former views with admiration the qualities of the occupation and its life style, but at the same time it believes that the thing that made the occupation reach this stage of development was at the expense of the wealth of the occupied (Jaber & Salameh, 2003).

In return, the Palestinian society is distinguished by some peculiarities that make it a conservative one. Abu Amro (1995:49-53) provides the most important qualities which characterize the Palestinian society:

- **Affiliation Allegiance:** The affiliation allegiance plays a significant and determining role in identifying the social and political options faced by the individual in the society. In spite of the fact that the political affiliations broke through the affiliation allegiances, they are still significant in the individuals affiliation. What reinforces these narrow affiliations is the inability to achieve a national integration demographically, geographically, politically, culturally and psychologically.
- **Family Allegiances:** vertical relations (tribal, clan and curia allegiances) constitute a significant basis in the social, political and cultural life. It obstructs the development of the civil society and modernization of the Palestinian society. Although these relations had carried out a civil role in the absence of a national authority or its security establishments and apparatuses in post Oslo – in the First Intifada (1987) and Aqsa Intifada (2000)- , these allegiances preserved the level of civilization and constituted a deterring shield against serious and dangerous violations; they also played a role in solving disputes and preventing the disintegration and deterioration of the social system.
- **Factional Allegiances:** Party allegiances coincided with the rise and establishment of the Palestinian factions who are taking part in the resistance; this was reflected in the formation of the PLO. On several occasions, the interest of the faction was put before that of the society and at its own expense. In spite of the fact that the factional allegiance played a role in easing and reducing the intensity of family allegiances, it had several drawbacks. For example, a large sector of experts, professionals and activists in civil society in the Palestinian society were not allowed to take part or play an active role just because they did not belong to any political parties or factions. According to this trend, this sector lost its qualification to take part in the effective policy making. Due to the fact that these categories were not exploited properly, the process of development of the Palestinian civil society was impaired and obstructed.
- **Religious Allegiance:** The majority of the Palestinian society are Muslims. Although Christians are a minority, they enjoy large scale influences politically, economically, socially and culturally. In spite of the inherited religious allegiance, national allegiance remains prevalent to both Muslims and Christians. The presence of an intellectual secular and leftist trend to which several Muslims and Christians adhere to has helped to enhance the process of integration into the society. This has contributed to the strengthening of the culture, language, and common social, national and political values. Besides, the absence of Christians in all Palestinian cities, villages and camps did not help into having an interaction with them and integration into the society for example as the case in Hebron city.
- **Class Structure:** The political, social and cultural changes which the Palestinian society had historically gone through had influenced their natural growth as the case in other peoples of the world. Consequently, authentic and clear characteristics of

social classes have not prevailed in it as a result of the fragmentation of the Palestinian society following the Nakba in (1948) in addition to the absence of a national authority. Moreover, the prerequisites of resistance and struggle have prevailed over other forms of social and class struggle. Change has taken place regarding the class structure and relationships in the Palestinian society; the role and influence of the traditional higher class have been reduced in favor of a new middle class and labor class. In spite of the large expanse of the middle and labor classes, there is still a gap in terms of division of political and economic resources. However, the labor and peasants do not enjoy a political representation or influence inside the structures of the National Authority.

- Population Divisions (Distributions): Palestinian population growth was tied to three basic obstacles according to my point of view. First: it was linked with the existing social and cultural structure which was based on cultural and economic differences between city and village residents since there is a social and cultural gap with regard to different life styles. Second, it is linked with the deepening gap between city residents, village dwellers and later on Palestinian refugee camps by the Occupation authorities; this had obstructed the geographic and cultural interaction between them as a result of the imposed policy of siege on all residential clusters. Finally: it is linked with the emergence of the Palestinian Authority since most of the financial, administrative and political resources available for the Palestinian people were linked with the inhabitants of the central part of the West Bank especially Ramallah city at the expense of small cities, villages and camps especially in the southern parts of the West Bank.
- Women: The Palestinian woman has made long strides in the area of social liberation and national political action. The Palestinian woman preserves the family in harsh conditions that the Palestinian society is running through. However, there is still a large gap between man and woman since the current conditions and the group of values which are prevalent in the Palestinian society do not provide for equality between man and woman nor do the political organizations and national institutions attach any importance to the woman in order to enable her to reinforce her role in the society which is based on a comprehensive and chauvinist vision.

These abovementioned features are basic components for the Palestinian social and cultural identity. In order to analyze the traditional state which the Palestinian society is undergoing, we bring into attention the fourth model for cultural behavior in order to encounter cultural hazards like being exposed to occupation as the case is in Palestine. Tomas Meyer (as cited in Muller 2005:87) as saying, “The reaction is in the affirmation of the old; it will be used as a shield against the foreigner who completely and drastically barged into their lives. These challenges are transformed into objectives; they stress that during this heated defense of their cultural legacy and their collective stance, the cultural identity in this regard becomes questionable. This is what the researcher inclined to interpret in the area of qualities of the Palestinian traditional identity; we speak here about Hebron; it is well known that this city is the most conservative of all Palestinian cities and it is has Israelis’ settlement erected right into its central heart. We will elaborate more on this later.

Regarding the structure of the Arabic mentality, Tahir Labib (1992) points out that within the context of Arab and Islamic development, there was an implicit agreement shaping the laws and rules in the evaluation of the affairs, theories or even the religious and social positions which were called Paradigm; “it means : the matrix of concepts and principles that are linked in the mind or discourse with an implicit or explicit image.” Through it, “the work of the parts –humans- takes place through structural solidarity or functional compensation for one another.” Therefore, there is a state of legal unanimity on what life has to be or any violation to what is already agreed upon in the cultural, social and religious structure which is called dissent from the group which eventually had lead to outcast and rejection. In several cases, fighting the movement which calls for change or violation of what is already agreed upon is what is historically called, “Sedition” as in some statements, “*Sedition is fiercer than killing*” Thus, Labib explains that the history of the Arab World is only an accumulation of tyranny and submission- tyranny on part of rule and control of the rulers over the people and imposition of blind obedience on part of their people- or imperial interference in his recipes for building a state model that complies with the interests of the west within a mechanism of the world functional division.

Rebellion against what is agreed upon means insurgence and rejection of the society, group, and the functional and implicit unanimity of the group. Within the same context, the structure of the Palestinian society is not far from this analysis since it sanctifies consensus, and it rejects dispute even if it were right? This is what we can realize in making a swift round of satellite channels to look and listen to the discourse of the different political forces in the Palestinian society which often reflects a state of implicit war that is aimed at supremacy and control through exploitation of concepts like “ Higher National Interest, Public Interest” Such concepts according to Herbert Marcuse in his book “One Dimensional Man, 1964” are only an effective tool to besiege the other and deter him. The other in this case is the opposing party through crippling and paralyzing it in order to frame them into the discourse of the authority or the authority of the ruling party. In this context we wish to ask who represents the higher national interest? What are they? Who decided them? The strongest!. Or it will be the majority which represents the public will of the people according to Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Based on this we can analytically understand but not logically the decision why the PNA wishes since the implementation of the Oslo agreement in September (1993) until late (2000) to put forward a strategy to develop the Palestinian society culturally and socially. This requires the contribution of several diverse, different and progressive parties and others within the frame of this process. This means giving up several powers and concessions by the PNA based on the fact that its strength was supplied from the existing traditional structure. It has come into harmony but it did not work on changing the society since it does not wish to face the traditional structure of the society along with its forces- religious, social and traditional forces. In this context, the Michel Foucault concept regarding the existing structure of the authority in the parts (individual, group, social and cultural discourse) which the regime and its symbols obtain its strength and legitimacy even its supremacy on top of the political or social hierarchy. Therefore, The PNA has worked on precipitating the traditional social and cultural structure in the daily practice of the citizen “ clan force and tribal laws, society laws like Civil Affairs, labor laws, control over laws of print and distribution.” Thus we can say briefly that the Palestinian society is controlled by the fever of unanimity and rejection of change.

This aspect is not only linked with internal social and cultural formation of the Palestinian society within the context of historical change but it has also developed as a result of facing the occupation since the traditional and conservative characteristic of the Palestinian society (cities, villages and camps) had desperately tried to regain stolen lands and authority on their own occupied land. This makes us understand that the clan formation and its laws came as a result of the absence of national forces and authority and the civil law ; the only option was to envelope themselves into the cultural and social self along with its drawbacks in order to preserve their identity. This condition presumes beforehand a state of unanimity rather than discord. Accordingly, the qualitative pluralism rather than shares was rejected although it existed as a result of shares division. For example, we have the formation of the PLO. This came at the expense of the value concept called “ **National Consensus**” or “ **Higher National Interest**” to convince or in fact intimidate any party that tries to depart from the paradigm of the Palestinian society. Therefore, all the Palestinian institutional formations are derived from the PLO and its establishments, civil organizations even the Authority and the political parties were implicitly in unanimous agreement on shares and understandings rather than on diversity which leads to a state of real democracy.

If we want to put forward historical plans for those attempts, we would find them deeply rooted in the experience of the first popular Intifada in (1987) since it was a new way and a new will in running the conflict with the occupier on one hand and organization of the society and its institutions and provision of services in an effective, positive, mobilized way based on even implicitly the right to have different, diverse and pluralism in political and social views and visions on the other hand. Based on the supposition that civil society Organizations and popular institutions are a direct reflection of the make up of parties from a functional and structural aspect, we see that several of the traditional values like ‘ obedience and submission to the elderly regardless of the fact whether they are right or wrong in their decision, holding fast to customs and traditions, woman status, solidarity and surety, popular participation etc.. had all experienced a revolutionary state and change at the social and cultural level of the Palestinian society. Change was in favor of the crushed sectors by the value of liberation on all aspects. The Palestinian society was able to develop the basis of the civil society and activate them in a creative and innovative manner. This stage contradicts the previous analysis at the beginning of this aspect since there is a mixture of models in the Palestinian case; it tests submission and at the same time it has rebellion; it is conservative and

liberal. Abrash (2006) indicates that the political, social and cultural institutions in the Palestinian society were built prior to the establishment and development of the state and this is a rare instance in history; therefore, this state constitutes a stimulating and encouraging factor towards the development and growth of the civil society in order to guarantee the existence of interactions in the cultural and social values that would necessarily lead to democratic transformation if properly used and exploited.

Unfortunately, neither the civil condition nor the PNA had invested into this legacy following its arrival as an outcome of the agreements signed between the PLO and Israel. Following September (1993) Oslo Agreement, a historical turning point in the life of the Palestinian society took place not only on the political level but also on the level of cultural and social values and on the leading sector with all what it represents of interests that harmonize with the state of political reconciliation (Bishara, 2007); therefore, there was a break in the promises made to the field leaderships which have long dreamt of being represented in decision making. Within this framework which is the outcome of the political agreements, the nongovernmental organizations or civil organizations did not find the role that they were supposed to play which is to defend the crushed and persecuted sectors. They instead isolated themselves from the main political stream and were content with running of its sessions and workshops in ivory towers which are only open to the elite. Thus it had experienced a state of marginalization and containment in several occasions; this is the reason behind the retreat on part of women movements, students' movements, political parties, youth sector and civil society Organizations. If we go on with our analysis to the Second Intifada (2000) in terms of the change features in the structure of the society – away from the political analysis in spite of its significance - we realize that the nature and quality of the social sector and its cultural, social and mobilization backgrounds were not the same ones which constituted a social incubator in the first Intifada. In the first Intifada all the sectors( women, men, children, youth and the elderly) had roles in the national and social activities; these roles were the behavioral rules, cultural, ethical and moral task as a result of the daily network and interaction; it was a healthy and progressive climate that guaranteed sustainability as for the second Intifada, “Independence”, it was limited to an armed sector and group ; this meant a marginalization of all those who are not able to resist or does not want armed resistance. The only way open to them was to take part in funeral processions and watch news in a revolutionary manner surveying satellite channels in search for breaking news!!!

This culture reinforces fatalist and metaphysical cultures; they are necessarily the outcome of the marginalization of large sectors of the Palestinian people in addition to security chaos which was created by some armed groups and flagrant violations of human rights due to the absence of a national framework and progressive culture making the depoliticized gun like an outlawed phenomenon in numerous instances (Jaber & Salameh, 2003).

### **Elements of the Civil Society**

Abrash (2006) indicates that the spaces in the political sphere in the Arab World in terms of conceptual uses of some expression have increased. For example, Democracy, Civil Society, NGOs ...etc) this was not limited to this; we find that several thinkers and scholars subject these vocabularies and model them in the lingual dictionary along with its different derivations like “*Democratization*” to the extent that the word “ proposal” became an Arab lexicon for the word “*Mashru*” (project). This is all as a result of the close association with the international and regional influences within the frame work of imposing a well defined Paradigm. To be fair with the terms, Abrash indicates that the wrong and fault are not in the terms themselves but in those who import them as if they were a political and social tool that had grown in an environment close to the Arab reality. This is not true because the conditions and requirements of the structure of the European Bourgeois society and its historical development were catalysts in preparing a rich environment for the rise of this society as an independent political and economic entity away from the state?

This objective of this aspect is not to present a theoretical frame regarding the civil society concept as much as it is essential to find qualitative and quantitative scales. The civil society is a mysterious theoretical concept that differs and is explained according to the reader's background, researcher or school he/she belongs to.

Some literature (Diamond, 1996) stress the association between the process of democratic transformation and the free market considering that the western liberalism had won; consequently, Diamond declares the association between pluralism and towards heading in the direction market in the civil society. This is what pushes the German philosopher Hegel to consider that the civil society had developed as a means to protect individual rights, and it is used as a means to guarantee the freedom of those with privileges in the economic, social and cultural areas. It is the same reason that pushed Marx to consider the civil society as a Society of Bourgeois since the former does not develop by itself without the Bourgeois (Shoiedler, 1997:10).

Along this thought, the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of civil society as tool of ideological and cultural domination, and it is the field in which the conflict between the laborers and the capitalists takes place. In return, Habermas adds in his argument regarding the social sphere that in spite of the fact that the civil society emerges with the rise of capitalism, it soon develops into a popular entity rather than an economic one. It is described as an area for exchange of goods and social action. (Shoiedler, 1997:11) Within the same context, we cannot introduce the term into social and economic environments that grew and developed as opposed to the western world.

Before embarking on the diagnosis of the third aspect and comparing it with the Palestinian condition, we ask some questions that raised a state of argument in the milieu of intellectuals and Arab scholars of politics and sociology: What is the civil society? What form are we talking about? What are its components? In order to stress this point, we bring in Azmi Bishara's intervention regarding Abu Amro's book (1995) about the existence of a partitioned Palestinian society( West Bank, Gaza Strip, 1948 Palestinians) or in neighboring states (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon) considering that the historical tracks for it are also partitioned and different. Therefore, about what model of a society are talking about? By the same token which civil society are talking about and what are its institutions? And which theory or ideology are we examining?

Away from this state of debate, we can suppose that there is a Palestinian society at least in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; thus, there are civil society Organizations and non governmental institutions we are not going in this context to give a judgment on this trend or its opposite? .

Abbrash and Bishara are talking about two core issues:

**First:** What is the appropriate formula or definition for the civil society and its components?

**Second:** What is the theoretical or ideological framework for the diagnosis?

In order to tackle the two aspects, we narrate a definition of the civil society using a different formula based on a group of Arab scholars of politics and sociology in order to be able to know about what we are talking about and what we want to reach ? According to Sa'ad Din Ibrahim (1995) the civil society is made up of “ nongovernmental elements or organizations like political parties, labor unions, and syndicates” . Those elements do not include the membership inherited by the individual, “ considering him a member of a family, religion or class.” As for the sociologist Burhan Ghalion (1992: 109), he includes those inherited organizations which Ibrahim excludes from his definition. We say for the sake of more clarification “family, clan and religious societies.” As for Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri (1993:5), he sees the civil society as a “society in which the relations between its members are based on democracy,” He defines “Democracy as the relationship between the governor, governed, people and state as the case in Europe and North America. The relationship is based on exchange of authority based on party competition within the frame of respecting political citizenship rights in particular.

Within the context of our discussion of the previous definitions, we see that the civil society is by far larger than equating it with nongovernmental organizations as viewed by Sa'ad Din Ibrahim; they constitute all the organizations that are outside the framework of the state. The organizations, religious and family clubs, market forces, engineers unions, business men, and students movements

etc..” might come under it. They work as pressure groups and intermediary groups between the individuals on one hand and the state on the other hand. It is like a functional condition that is carried out within a society structure. We cannot leave out or eliminate the traditional parties of the NGOs from the components of the civil society not in their defense but the aim is see the Arab reality through Arab eyes.

Therefore, we diagnose the reality according to its needs and components and we match the definition based on this view which is away from putting a readymade western model. This is what Abrash means by saying, (Adaptation “*Tabi’ah*” ) of the term i.e. not to empty it from its cultural and social content along its several significances and giving it dimensions that are close and appropriate to the Arabic environment. We see that many have taken the term as a ready model from a different environment and tried to draw it closer to the Arabic reality and that of the Palestinians’ and this is where the researcher disagrees with them.

What goes on our diagnosis of the civil society also applies on the democracy. Which democracy do we mean? Is it elections? It focuses on it from a formality aspect as the case in America and it neglects the economic and social rights or neglects its social content and the fairness of distribution of wealth and neglects political liberties as well. We are not here to argue as much as the track of analysis dictates on us. Otherwise, there is no need for writing from the first place. Therefore: Can we say that there is democracy in Sweden, and Switzerland but there is not in France? Can we make a comparison by saying that Denmark’s democracy is better than Italy’s. what I want to reach and convey is that the refusal of the disrespect of the historical and cultural privacy as what is happening now by Compradors of Globalization Intellectuals. They seek to provide us with a previously tailor made model. The outcome of Globalization has touched the structure of the Palestinian society, its political and social elites, even the civil society organizations and their outcomes in the large scale war which it wages in order to impose its democracy; however, it does not respect both the Arab person and his experience; why then the readymade models??.

Now we go back to the civil society and its organizations from the elitist to the most traditional. We will discuss them in our Palestinian reality from the dimension of its independence from the cultural aspect and more importantly the financial one. We notice that the organizations, religious and family clubs are components of the ingredients of the civil society and their cultural and ideological reference is entirely local with the exception of some.

This is not what I aspire to discuss – they depend in their culture and work on the following cultural diagnostic aspects: authoritarian, central, pyramid, narrow religious and family allegiances, lacks the element of women) From the financial aspect, it is self financed. It can receive funds without preconditions; thus, the nature of their work and programs are their reference and not another party. The more important aspect is that it has a popular incubator backing it and it is capable of mobilizing its elements at a high speed.

Administratively, there are representative elections of the representatives of the traditional organizations in several occasion or by recommendations due to the absence of any competing nominees.

In the Palestinian society, these traditional organizations are historically present, but they have retreated on several occasions; in fact, they were exploited and remodeled within the framework of party action of the Palestinian national action factions which had reduced their effect and this lead to the drawback of its authority in return for the authority of the political organizations. This analysis applies to the First Intifada (1987). In spite of the fact that the Occupation had repeatedly tried to reinforce some of these traditional organizations, we can say that the Palestinian political organizations were able to absorb those traditional organizations in favor of national action; we can also say that they succeeded in this in one way or another.

This situation did not last for a long time; soon these organizations restarted their activities and nurtured themselves following the implementation of the agreements between the PLO and Tel Aviv government. As we mentioned earlier, the National Authority did not contain these organizations nor did they employ them in favor of the limitations of the manifestations of the civil society. In fact, on several occasions, they encouraged customary and tribal norms in solving disputes to civil law- This is a positive manifestation if it

was carried out under the supervision of law?- Consequently, it kept all what was traditional within the society and within the traditional elements of those organizations. In return, this is considered a withdrawal in national action factions especially the Palestinian Left as it is considered the one that had called most for democracy at least from the theoretical aspect. Another aspect is the reinforcement of these organizations and dissemination of its culture on the popular level. It did not have the ability to create a political or social alternative. This has led to its total isolation from the Palestinian street and the engines of the social and political action in the society. Another part escaped towards work in NGOs. In return, religious movements have strengthened especially Hamas movement. We will discuss the political factions and their relationship with democracy later.

On the other hand, we find the NGOs or the Elite organizations which are active and efficient in humanitarian, rights, development, and civil culture fields. They are run by figures affiliated to the Palestinian left; they have increased greatly and in a controversial manner following the political reconciliation. This phenomenon was called “Cultural Shops” because of high demand on them; even the policy of funds and support has increased. Main funders are like World Bank, European Commission, American Institutions; all of these have directed policies towards funding these organizations to the level that several critics including the researcher said, “ It is true that these organization are nongovernmental in light of their relationship with the PNA. However, they are governmental in their relationship with the donors”. We do see that some NGOs submit and remodel their agenda, programs and activities to match these programs which the donor states prepare or approve. To be fair, there are many of these NGOs who are still committed to a national agenda; however, the extent of spread of these “respectable” organizations is still limited and lacks popular support.

The democratic state and elections are not up to the required form as a result of absence of self monitoring and monitoring from the specialized authorities. Its culture is that of a progressive elite, but not in a manner that complies with the popular culture and its general perception according to the Italian thinker Gramsci. It also refrained from carrying a political agenda and it understood its role from the social aspect only. This has also increased their isolation and withdrawal.

Out of the two pictures, we find that the Palestinian society is still carrying within its folds its cultural and social structure and values like “tolerance, respect of the other, pluralism, individual and groups rights” even in the traditional organizations which are carrying out a functional role for the civil society organizations. Moreover, NGOs work on the development and awareness of the society.

Thus we can say that the civil society organizations contribute to the civilization of the Palestinian life, but this effort as we mentioned above is not up to what is needed and expected. The following is what is required to suit the civil life of the Palestinians that we aspire to achieve:

- All civil society organizations including the political factions and the PNA realize that we are still under occupation; therefore, the conditions and requirements for the civil, political, cultural mobilizing action have to be suited to the stage and its requirements.
- Reinforcement of the national factions and renewal of their vision and quality of their programs or even establishment of new factions and movements. Experience has shown that the stronger the factions were the more active and efficient became the civil society organizations and the more expanded becomes the size of popular participation in it and vice versa.
- A reconciliation and a vision is reached in order to be in harmony with the determiners of the civil society between the traditional civil society organizations or the elitist and the situational, civil and tribal law. All their functions have to pour into the rule of respect of the law and the achievement of social peace under a legally well defined surveillance and monitor.



- Deepening of democratic values and understanding them within their larger scope and not reducing and underestimating them by elections in spite of their significance ,but this should not be at the expense of social justice.
- Civil society organizations have to realize their political and social role together without the control of one over the other. The mission of the organizations of the civil society is also to have a progressive cultural supremacy in order to reach the top of the leadership scale; then it has to present a progressive vision of the reality; otherwise, it might be understood as being within the framework of functional adaptation in the support of the authority or the state. It will not achieve the change it aspires to have nor will its programs have the representational form of the citizens' interests behind the desks.

### **Democratic Experience**

When dealing with the fourth aspect, we face a huge difficulty not in dealing with it as much as what other impacts and variables might impose on the analysis especially in light of the external variables that influence it on one hand and the relatively recent experience at least from the political and legal aspect and what is associated with it on the other hand. We can presume that the Palestinian society is a pluralistic one with a general culture and a popularity whose bases are in the participation of all elements of the society and what applies on the general also applies on the private.

This is what has drawn up the nature of the Palestinian life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for long periods in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. However, how can we evaluate the democratic experience in Palestine at least in the last quarter of the previous century until this present moment away from the structural changes that had shaped and formed the Palestinian society until this present moment. What follows are a group of the features that marked the previous period:

#### **First:**

We would like to point out in this respect that the PLO and its social, political and cultural institutions were administratively and organizationally run on the basis of pluralism and shares rather than on the basis of a democratic electoral representation (Shbib, 1997).The PLO terms of reference and basic organizer are basically different from the reference of the authority and the parliament. Accordingly, the problem of understanding of roles has emerged. Also the inability to hold elections for the PLO has marginalized its role relatively.

#### **Second:**

The PLO was frozen and a substitute under occupation was created which is the Palestinian Parliament; this body has come to represent the people in the Palestinian territories which are under the powers of the PNA; in return, the PLO was frozen and marginalized and even the Palestinian entities that were not under the control and influence of the authority or in the neighboring states end up had the same fate. It was a step and an attempt to make the Palestinian Parliament the Palestinian reference rather than the PLO.

#### **Third:**

We previously said that the political and social agreements between the PLO and Occupation authorities constituted a turning point not only politically but also socially, culturally and economically; it even touched the fine details of the Palestinian life and lead to the emergence of an elite that meets the requirements of the political stage. (Bishara, 2007)

**Fourth:**

What concerns us here is that the preamble of the agreement (Oslo1993, Gaza Jericho Autonomy Agreement 1994, Agreement on Gaza and West Bank in 1995) and their political and economic protocols and addendums represented a basic reference and an administrative, economic and political organizer not only in the relationship of the Palestinian society with the State of Tel Aviv but also at the level of the individual Palestinian management of his social, political, economic, cultural and ecological life...(Khaldi, 1997) i.e. the Palestinian Parliament cannot issue any laws or projects that may contradict with the occupation and its interests or might contradict with those agreements; this in one way or another has remodeled the Palestinian life, its democracy and movement to harmonize with the interest of the occupation rather than with that of the Palestinian society. This lead to the emergence of new, influential and rejectionist sectors and forces in the Palestinian society; it lead to the emergence of political Islam phenomenon in the Palestinian society represented by Hamas Movement, this was clear in the Palestinian election that conducted in 25th of January 2006, which constituted the overwhelming majority of the seats of the Palestinian parliament.

**Fifth:**

PLO factions which were not linked to the agreements especially the leftist ones lost the ability to manage the conflict in the new way and form imposed on it as a result of the political settlement; it also stood helpless before the questions and needs raised by the society; this also lead to a drop in its supporters especially in the last elections.

**Sixth:**

The Civil Society Organizations were politically isolated and are focusing on a new agenda completely detached from the reality and requirement for development since the funders determined the nature of the activities and programs so their programs were not based on the priorities and needs of the local society.

**Seventh:**

It is the most important failure on all political settlements between the PLO and Tel Aviv Government; it proved that the Occupation imposed a de facto condition on the Palestinians; therefore, there were not any negotiations as much as Israel was employing the factor of time in serving its own projects and plans.

**Eighth:**

Besiege of the Palestinian people and its entire political forces economically, geographically, politically, and financially.

**Ninth:**

The financial, administrative and political corruption in the National Authority and its formal and non-formal institutions.

**Tenth:**

Violations of freedom of the press and human rights (Jamal, 1999) and spread of a state of security chaos, absence of law and besiege of its presumed sovereignty.

**Eleventh:**

Abject poverty and desperate social, residential, and economic conditions for the Palestinian individual. Unemployment has devoured the Palestinian society.

**Twelfth:**

Seclusion of Palestinian cities making them small nonviable and fragmented cantons as a result of the besiege policy imposed on the cities, villages and camps. This has led to the obstruction of growth and development of the cultural and social life in the cities. Consequently, the occupation has disfigured the features of modernization which started to appear before the Second Intifada in (2000) like theaters, cinemas, public spaces, cultural clubs and cafes which started to spread in the Palestinian cities.

**Thirteenth:**

Isolation and shrinking of the middle class due to what this class means in the society in order to build a pluralistic, open and democratic society (Hilal, 2006A).

Before all these influences and diagnosis, we find that the Palestinian society is crippled and besieged and influenced by the internal policies which resulted from the occupation. It also faced international and Middle Eastern dictations and orders which a group from the Palestinian society and the National Authority harmonized with. In light of this, the Palestinian society found itself before an astounding state of divisions as a result of influences in the region reflected by the state of polarization by Fatah and Hamas movements. As for the Leftist movement and the Independents, their existence had not any influence anymore.

In an attempt to redistribute the relationships of the political forces, Fatah movement represented the ruling party of the state while Hamas represented the Palestinian opposition. The internal and external conditions were prepared for a quick division of the Palestinian society into two strong trends on the Palestinian arena. This meant two different and contradictory programs for political and social action that would make them wind up in a state of rivalry as to what had happened in Gaza.

The results of the legislative elections in (2006) constituted a striking turning point in the general public will of the Palestinian society. Hamas became the representative of the general public will of the people and not Fatah. This was like a blow to Fatah, Israel and the United States of America. Its manifestations appeared in Fatah's refusal to handover the new government to security apparatus and ministries which were believed to be dominant. Israel was quick in justifying the policy of siege and hunger of the Palestinian people. When Hamas movement won the elections it was met by an American, European and International boycott; thus, the option of the Palestinian people and its democracy were not respected.

Before all these implications, Hamas found itself in a political predicament since it now represents the Palestinians and leads them; it does not have a political program for the current stage nor was it prepared for such work and position. It cannot have the security powers through which it can impose its sovereignty. As a result of the refusal of the former government represented by Fatah movement to interact with it or to have a unified national government in the beginning and refusal to lift its control over the security apparatus, tension heightened in the Gaza Strip as a result of the rivaling and contradictory Palestinian positions. This was expressed in internal fighting between the two movements. With the interference of the Arab countries mainly Saudi Arabia, there was a call for the two parties to come to Mecca in order to hold a national dialogue the outcome of which was a national government for all the factions of the national and Islamic action with the exception of Islamic Jihad. This agreement did not have clear distinct grounds nor did it discourse the basic issues and crucial points upon which differences happened; it did not take long for the agreement to hit a stumbling block during the recent incidents.

We do infer that the Palestinian formal democracy (elections) was confined by political restrictions dictated by Israel and imposed on the political forces of the society; therefore, we cannot evaluate the practices of the factions whether those of Fatah or Hamas or their violations of the democratic process away from their relationships and contradictions with the Occupation. Consequently, what had happened in Gaza is:

- A main outcome of the occupation and its policies, the different views of the two rivaling movements regarding the political programs suitable to face the occupation policy, management of struggle, organization of the daily life of citizens and spread of law and order.
- The huge over crowdedness of the population in Gaza is the result of the Occupation policies. When we talk about Gaza Strip we have to speak about an overcrowded huge refugee camp (Bishara, 2007). According to experimental psychologists and socio-psychologists this state constitutes a small specific laboratory for the means of living and the understanding of options in a manner that leads to the emergence of a state of violence and aggressiveness; this is an international phenomenon.

As for the factional projects, they were clearly expressed by Fatah Palestine Television and Hamas Al-Aqsa Television; the media were used for factional projects forgetting the greater national project. In addition, both made accusations of one another; they accused one another of treason and were very offensive. This led the Palestinian citizen to feel bored of all of this since it negatively touched the Palestinian dream. In return the information that the citizen received from both parties proved that there was a drastic failure on both sides and a factional disposition on both parties to take the authority and organize the society. The only solution is not in fighting and management of military disputes. Democracy is not a way to manage differences but it is also the citizens' social, civil and economic rights. Therefore, the Palestinian question is not the property of one faction without the other; both have to realize that the general will is represented by the people and the people alone make decisions.

As for the rest of the civil and economic rights, we notice that the marginal spaces of free expression and economic and social rights of the citizen, have decreased noticeably following Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000). This is what we can infer from the huge size of unemployment among citizens and new graduates; the spread of the abject poverty phenomenon especially in Gaza Strip, financial and administrative corruption, absolute dependence on the Israeli market, violations of citizens without a fair trial; all of this represents the greatest concern of the Palestinian citizen and urgent rights that need to be seriously and effectively addressed. This can only happen with a Palestinian to Palestinian reconciliation.

It is an absolute truth that there would not be any improvement of conditions as long as there is Occupation; Israel will not give the Palestinian people their rights at least at the present stage. Therefore, reliance on Israel and on pits and pieces does not go under the interest of the Palestinian people.

What is required from Palestinians is to preserve themselves, the citizens and his rights. Inability to attain the right at the present stage does not mean that we have to submit and make concessions to the scales of international and regional states. What is needed is a comprehensive dialogue that works toward the interest of the citizen first and foremost.

## REFERENCES

1. Abrash, I. "Almujtama Almadani Al Filistinin: Min Al Thawara Ila Ta'sis Aldawlah". [Palestinian Civil Society: From Revolution to Establishment of State];2006. www.sis.gov.ps .
2. Abu Amro, Z. "Almujtama Almadani Wa Altahawl Aldimocrati Fi Filistin" [Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Palestine]. Ramallah: Palestinian Organization for the Study of Democracy [Muwatin];1995.
3. Al-Azar, M. K. "Alnizam Alsiasi Wa Altahwol Aldimocrati Fi Filistin" . [Democratic Transformation And the Political System in Palestine ]. Ramallah: [Muwatin];1996.
4. Al-Jabiri, M. A. "Moskilat Aldimoktaria Wa Almujtama Almadani". [Problems of Democracy and Civil Society in the Arab World] Almustaqbal Al Arabi 1993; 197.
5. Barakat, H. "Al Mujtama Alarbi Fi Alqarn Alishrin: Bahth Fi Taghyir Alahwal Wa Al'laqat". [Arab Society in the Twentieth Century: Research into the change of Conditions and Relationships]. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies; 2000.
6. Bishara, A. lecture titled, "Palestinian situation: Between Agreement and Disagreement" Aljazeera New Satellite, Qatar, in 4/7/2007.
7. Diamond, L. The resource of Democracy. Translated by Sumia Aboud. Amman: Dar Alsaki; 1994.
8. Ghaliou, B. "Bina'a Almuhtama' Alarrabi: Daor Alawamil Aldakhilia Wa Alkharijia". [Construction of the Arabic Society: Role of Internal and External Elements], Al mustaqbal Alarabi 1992; 158.
9. Ibrahim, S. "Civil Society and Prospects in the Middle East". in Norton (Ed). Civil Society in the Middle East. Leiden, New York: Koeln; 1995.
10. Jaber, F. & Bilal Awad Salameh.. Culture of the Persecuted Person and Its relationship with the Political Practice. Ramallah: Panorama Center;2003.
11. Jamal , A. . "Tashkil Aldawla Wa Imkaniat Aldimokratia Fi Filistin" [Formation of State and Prospects of Democracy in Palestine], Palestinian Center for Research and Studies 1999; 40, 112-135.
12. Kedouri, E. Democracy and Arab political Culture. London: Frank Cass & Co; 1994.
13. Khaldi, A. M. "Alakit Minatham Althahir Bi Alsolta Alwatania: Ishkaliat Tadaraj Soltat Am Tadawol Wa Ihlah". [Relationship of the Palestine Liberation Organization with the National Authority: Problem of Development of authorities or exchange and allowance]. Palestinian Center for Research and Studies 1997; 47-53.
14. Labib, T.. "Alakit Almasru' Aldimokrati Bi Almujtama Almadani". [Relationship of the Democratic Project with the Arab Civil Society] Beirut: Majalat Almustaqbal Alarabi 1992;158.
15. Miari, M. "Itijahat Aljumhur Alfilistini Tijah Aldomokaria". [Attitudes of the Palestinian Public Towards Political Democracy], Majalat Alulum Al insaniya wa Alijtima'ya 2001; 28(1), 50-71.
16. Miari, M. "Aldimokratiyah Alfilistinia ila Ain?". [Palestinian Democracy... To Where?] Beirut: Majalat Almustaqbal Alarabi Journal 2000; 207,198-219.
17. Muller ,E. N. & M. Seligson . "Civic Culture and Democracy: The Question of Causal Relationships". The American Political Science Review 1994; 88(3),635-652. www.jstor.org.
18. Shoiedler, G. Civil Society and A Study of Middle East Policy .Translated by Sadeq Odeh. Jordan: Dar Sindibad For Publication;1994.
19. Turner, B. "Orientalism and the Problem of Civil Society in Islam", in Hussein, Olson, Qureshi [Eds], Orientalism, Islam an Islamists. Brattelboro; 1984.



**Bilal Awad Salameh\***  
Bethlehem University, Palestine  
Emailid:-[bsalameh@bethlehem.edu](mailto:bsalameh@bethlehem.edu)