

What went wrong? Transitions to democracy in the Palestinian Authority

By Aviad Rubin¹

¹ **Aviad Rubin** holds an LL.B degree from Tel-Aviv University Law School, Israel and a Masters in Political Science from McGill University, Canada, where he is currently undertaking doctoral research in the Department of Political in the field of comparative politics. His main area of interest is the Arab-Israeli conflict and contemporary shifts towards democratization in the Arab world.

Introduction

The Palestinian struggle for independence is one of the most celebrated cases of a nationalist movement in the 20th century. The Palestinian story is substantially intertwined with the Israeli-Arab conflict, and as widely agreed upon, has been the core issue of this conflict and the main obstacle for its resolution.² Indeed, in the last two decades, the Middle East has witnessed a significant decrease in the magnitude of the interstate aspect of the conflict, together with a considerable increase in the magnitude of its ethnic aspect.³ The turning point is considered to be The Yom-Kippur (or "October") War of 1973, that was followed by the first Camp-David talks in 1978. These talks established the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, but also brought, for the first time, the question of the Palestinians into the forefront of the negotiation table. Since then, the Palestinian demand for self recognition has been amplified through the first Intifada of 1988, the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, Cairo agreement of 1994 (Gaza and Jericho transformation to Palestinian responsibility), Hebron agreement of 1996, the second Camp David talks in the summer of 2000, and since then, the second - "El-Aqsa" – Intifada. Indeed, the last 17 years have been an epoch of hope and despair, compromise and hostility, with advancements and retreats between the parties (Israel and the Palestinians), like two talented tango dancers, with no long-last solution seen in the horizon.

Recently though, there has been a considerable change in the Palestinian side, with the passing away of Yasser Arafat. Arafat was the omnipotent leader of the Palestinian

² Miller A.D., *The Palestinian Dimension*, in Rubinstein E., ed. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Perspectives*, Praeger Publishers, NY, 1984. Ch. 5, p. 145. In addition see, Heller M., Nusseibeh S., *No Trumpets No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Hill and Wang, NY, 1991. p. 53.

³ Ben Yehuda H. & Sandler S., *Crisis Magnitude and Interstate Conflict: Changes in the Arab-Israel Dispute*, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 35, 1, 1998, pp. 83-109. This article is the abstract of a book

Liberation Organisation (PLO), since its establishment in 1964, and after the Oslo Accords, the chairman of the Palestinian Authority until his death in November 2004. Currently, the Palestinians are in a process of finding an alternative leadership to step into Arafat's position. As part of this process, general elections for presidency took place among the Palestinian population in January 2005. Arafat's predecessor in Fatah, Abu Mazen, was the leading candidate and he eventually won the presidential elections with more than 65% of support. In addition, while writing this essay, general elections for the Palestinian legislative council took place in January 25th 2006, after they have been postponed from July 17th 2005 due to the Israeli pullout from Gaza Strip which took place in August 2005. Initial results show considerable success for the Islamic " Hamas " movement, yet Al-Fatah will most likely build the next government as well.

With his passing away, Arafat left a huge vacuum in the Palestinian leadership, but also cleared somewhat the bad environment and disbelief between both the Palestinians and Israelis with regard to a possible progress in the peace process. In this era of transformation, the region's future and the Palestinian fate are uncertain and can lead to both peace and prosperity or chaos and violence. As one distinguished scholar of Palestinian politics argues:

Like real new widows, the Palestinians have reacted with a combination of denial and a reluctant acceptance of the need to think about how to face the future. And since they, like the rest of the world, cannot remember a Palestinian past without Arafat, the future cannot be projected by extrapolation from the past. Nor do Palestinian political institutions and constitutional arrangements provide much guidance. These exist, but they are fragile and have never been put to the test of political succession. Indeed, it is not even clear whether these institutions and arrangements will be of any relevance at all or whether – as many fear – matters will be decided in an extra-constitutional power

struggle among those with independent power bases or, perhaps even worse, not decided at all.⁴

The last twelve years, since the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) between Israel and the Palestinians (the first Oslo Accord of 1993), have been a decade of change, not only in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but rather in the internal affairs of the Palestinian society as well. Although the Palestinian Authority was meant to be a democracy according to the Oslo Accords and the Interim Agreement (Cairo 1994), its democratic institutions are very weak, and contaminated with patronage, corruption, coercion and until his death, de-facto dictatorship of Arafat over the Palestinian Authority, its institutions and population.

The purpose of this work, in this moment of dramatic change, is to highlight the reasons for the weakness of the Palestinian democracy, to explain the failures of the Palestinian state-building policy and democratic consolidation so far and hopefully contribute to a healthier and stronger Palestinian democracy in the future.

To meet this challenge, this paper will highlight some of the main characteristics of the Palestinian Authority, and especially its institutions and political culture that impede the establishment of a strong democratic system. Although the Palestinian Authority was not given full independence after the Oslo Accords, the level of independence granted in the DOP was sufficient to establish a democratic regime, albeit with limits. It is argued that the lack of complete independence is not the sole explanation for the Palestinian democratic failure and thus it is necessary to suggest alternative explanations for the phenomenon in order to understand the potential for a democratic state once full

⁴ Heller M., *With Him and Without Him: Israel and the Palestinians in the post-Arafat Era*, *Tel-Aviv Notes*, 114, 31.10.2004, Published by Tel Aviv University, The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies & The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. In addition see: Litvak M., *Palestinian Politics After*

independence is established.

In this paper I argue that four combined reasons influenced the Palestinian's relative democratic failure – 1) Type of elite formation; 2) Poor exposure of elite to democratic values 3) Strong diaspora; and 4) Wrong approach to coercive means.

First, the dominant leadership of the Palestinians has emerged and been formed in exile, absorbing and developing different ideas and representing different interests than those of the domestic population in the occupied territories. This leadership did not participate actively in domestic Palestinian politics until the signing of the Oslo Accords. Then, after that dramatic move, it assumed the leadership of the population in the territories. The contemporary Palestinian elite do not authentically represent the interests of the average Palestinian and thus suffers low levels of legitimacy.

Second, while the Palestinians in the occupied territories lived beside Israel and absorbed its democratic values, the Palestinian Elite operated in Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia) and was rarely exposed to democratic culture and values.

Third, the majority of the Palestinian nation lives in diaspora. Nevertheless, this group enjoys significant influence on domestic Palestinian politics. Thus, Palestinians in the occupied territories do not have full autonomy and are constrained by the interests and demands of the Palestinian diaspora. In addition, the leadership that was formed in exile perceived itself as the sole representative of the entire Palestinian nation instead of representing exclusively its electorate. This is not to say that the Palestinian refugee problem should not be solved or taken into consideration, but rather to suggest that the representation of diaspora interests by territorially elected governments is an obstacle for the consolidation of strong and stable democracy.

Arafat: Prospects and Problems, *Tel-Aviv Notes*, 115, 16.11.2004, Published by Tel Aviv University, The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies & The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies.

Finally, the Palestinian population in the occupied territories established during the 70s and 80s a strong civil society, but the Palestinian leadership has not been exposed to it or taken part in it. Once the PA was established and was entitled to use coercive forces in the Oslo Accords, it often exploited them to undermine threats on its rule. Due to its coercive capabilities it was not forced to negotiate with, accommodate or tolerate opposition groups - basic prerequisites of any strong democracy.

There are, of course, many other variables that influenced the construction of the Palestinian political structure and culture, such as the Israeli demands from the Palestinian Authority to be held responsible for the Israeli population's security,⁵ the effects of long military governance and Israel's constant military actions in the PA, the traumatic effects of the first and second Intifada,⁶ the influence of Islamic groups on Palestinian society,⁷ the involvement of other Arab states in the conflict pursuing their own interests rather than those of the Palestinians⁸ and the involvement of the Superpowers in the region's feuds.⁹ In addition, no explanation of the Palestinian liberation movement is complete without an elaborated discussion on the role of Yasser Arafat and his ruling style on its creation, achievements and failures.¹⁰

⁵ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, Lynne Reiner Publishers, Boulder, 2003, p. 240.

⁶ El-Sarraj E., *Mental Health Challenges for the Palestinian Authority: The Psycho-Political Legacy of the Intifada*, in Sela A. and Maoz M. (Eds.), *The PLO and Israel – From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, St. Martin's Press, NY, 1997, pp. 163-170.

⁷ On the Islamic movements in the Palestinian society and their influence, see: Climent J., *Palestine/Israel – The Long Conflict*, Facts on File, Inc., NY, 1997, pp. 111-118.

⁸ Hudson M., *The Ineffectiveness of the Arab States' Diplomacy on the Palestine-Israel Issue: An Inventory of Explanations*, in Hudson M., ed., *Alternative Approaches to The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of the Principal Actors*, The Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1984. Ch. 6, pp. 107-109.

⁹ Brecher M., *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy*, 1974, p. 320. In addition see: Freedman R., *Moscow and Israel: the Ups and Downs of a Fifty-Year Relationship*, in Freedman R.O., ed. *Israel's First Fifty Years*, University Press of Florida, US, 2000, Ch. 1, p. 3. In addition see: Kleiman A., *Israel & The World After 40 Years*, Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, US, 1990. Ch. 8, pp. 185-208

¹⁰ For an elaborated discussion on Arafat's role in the conflict see: Karsh E., *Arafat's War – The Man and His Battle for Israeli Conquest*, Grove Press, NY, 2003. In addition see: Heller M., *With Him and Without*

All the above mentioned factors are of great importance and are essential to our understanding of the Palestinians' contemporary status, but they are far beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I believe that a focused in-depth case-study of the Palestinian democratisation process, based on the four above-mentioned conditions, can be helpful for our understanding of the Palestinian democratic failure and may increase the chances for better Palestinian democratic institutions in the future.

The paper will be divided into the following sections. In the first section we will present the essence of democratic regimes and the reason for choosing the variables upon which the comparison is constructed. In the following sections I will explore the Palestinian experience pre and post Oslo, based on the four suggested variables. In the last section my conclusions and some general implications of this research to our understanding of democratisation processes will be suggested.

The Palestinian Authority – disunity and coercion

Although the idea of Palestinian national identity is present in the Middle East for about 100 years, the representation of the Palestinian nation post Israel's independence started in 1964 with the establishment of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) by Yasser Arafat. Since then, the PLO gained political power and international recognition. The PLO has reached its peak popularity after signing the Declaration of Principles (DOP) in what was known as the first Oslo Accord, in 1993. In this agreement Israel acknowledged, for the first time, the national and territorial rights of the Palestinian

Him: Israel and the Palestinians in the post-Arafat Era, fn. 3. In addition see: Brynen R., *The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation*, *Journal of Palestinian Studies* XXIV, no. 3 (Spring 1995), pp. 31-43. P. 41.

nation in the land of Israel/Palestine.¹¹ The first Oslo Accord has been followed by a series of bilateral agreements between Israel and Palestinian representatives that meant to form and define a new Palestinian political entity. The second agreement, the Interim Agreement, was signed in Cairo in 1994, and transferred the responsibility over Gaza strip and Jericho from Israel to the new Palestinian Authority. In this agreement, there were also conditions for the establishment of the new Palestinian political system, among which, the creation of a Palestinian democratic system.¹² Following this agreement, and in accordance with it, the PLO exiled leadership and apparatus immigrated to the territories, and established the Palestinian Authority (PA). They settled first in Gaza Strip, but after the second Oslo Accord built their headquarters in Ramallah. Despite hopes of the Palestinian population in the territories after three decades of misery for a new era of independence, democracy and prosperity, the last decade of Palestinian history did not reflect these hopes at all. Facing this reality, one of the scholars of the Palestinians wrote recently that:

Indeed, the PA contributed to the suffering of the people it was supposed to represent. Through corruption, economic monopolies, authoritarianism, repression, disdain for democratic processes and judicial fairness, '*asha'iriyah*' (reviving the *hamayel*, or clan system), nepotism, and other practices, PA policies exacerbated the fragmentation of Palestinian society, increased class and *hamayel* divisions, contributed to the growing economic impoverishment, and were largely responsible for the social disintegration that occurred during this time.¹³

What is the reason for such a wide gap between the aspirations of the Palestinian population in the territories and the spirit of the bilateral agreements, and the actual

¹¹ These rights were mentioned in the Israel-Egypt peace agreement in 1978, but only vaguely. The agreement mentioned the right of the Palestinians for self recognition and autonomous self governance, but it did not mention sovereignty for the Palestinians.

¹² Brynen R., *The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation*, P. 31.

¹³ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 240.

methods of governance in the Palestinian Authority?

I argue that the Palestinian establishment of sovereignty was lacking, regarding four main criteria – elite formation, absorption of democratic values, interests of external groups, and high coercive capabilities of the political elite without popular legitimacy. Poor performance on these variables, it is argued, play a key role in understanding the Palestinian democratic failure.

I acknowledge that the Palestinian entity is not yet wholly sovereign and that this might put some difficulties on the establishment of the regime. Nevertheless, I hold that the level of sovereignty granted to the PA in Oslo was sufficient for the creation of state institutions and democracy, and thus that other explanations for this democratic failure should be explored as well.

Let me now turn to an account of the Palestinian democratisation experience.

1. *Elite formation*

The Palestinian leadership was divided to two in the pre-independence era. There was a relatively weak domestic leadership that developed in the territories, from 1948-1967 under Jordan's governance, and from 1967-1980s under Israel's rule. This leadership led a pragmatic line of compromising with Israel and represented the domestic population interests. This elite was weak, scattered and ineffective. Shikaki even argues that "By the early 1980s, West Bankers were without dominant elite."¹⁴ In the 80s, however, a new domestic leadership of grass-roots activists has emerged, to fill the elite vacuum. This group of young leaders - such as Marwan Baraghuti, , Muhammad Dahlan, Gibril Ragoub

¹⁴ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 15.

and others - led the population to the first Intifada of 1987.¹⁵

The second elite, comprised by the PLO and other factions, has been established in exile and was recognised in 1974 in the Rabat conference by the Arab league, and afterward by the UN, as the sole representative of the Palestinian nation. The PLO perceived itself as the sole representative of the Palestinian nation as a whole, including the Palestinian refugees all over the world, and thus supported the accomplishment of national long term interests, including a total liberation of Palestine and the implementation of the right of return.¹⁶ This attitude naturally necessitated a more uncompromising and militant line against Israel.¹⁷ Since the PLO was considered a terrorist movement in Israel, it was prohibited from operating in the territories, and thus has been hosted by several Arab countries. After its establishment in 1964, the PLO headquarter was in Jordan, until it threatened the stability of the Hashemite kingdom, that reacted with a brutal massacre of thousands of Palestinian in September 1970, in what was known afterwards as “Black September.”¹⁸ The second phase was in Lebanon, since 1971 until the Lebanon war of 1982. The PLO operated in the refugee camps of southern Lebanon and harassed Israeli northern settlements with terror attacks.¹⁹ After Israel launched a land attack on Lebanon and forced the PLO to escape out of Lebanon, the PLO headquarter moved to Tunisia and ran the Palestinian struggle from there until the mid 90s, when the Oslo Accords were

¹⁵ Shikaki K., *Palestinians Divided*, *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2002).

¹⁶ Klein M., *From a Doctrine- Oriented to a Solution Oriented Policy: The PLO's “Right of Return,” 1964-2000*. in Ginat J., and Perkins E., (eds.) *The Palestinian Refugees, Old Problems – New Solutions*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2001, pp. 46-56, in pp. 47-48.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 8. In addition see: Sahliyah E., *The PLO and the Politics of Ethnonational Mobilization*, in Sela A. and Maoz M. (Eds.), *The PLO and Israel – From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, St. Martin's Press, NY, 1997, pp. 3-22. In addition see Sayigh Y., *The armed struggle and Palestinian Nationalism*, in Sela A. and Maoz M. (Eds.), *The PLO and Israel – From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, St. Martin's Press, NY, 1997, pp. 23-36.

¹⁸ McDowall D., *The Palestinians – The Road to Nationhood*, Minority Rights Publications, London, 1994, p. 71.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 74.

signed.²⁰ After the Oslo Accords were signed, the PLO leadership, as the representative body of the Palestinians, was permitted to immigrate to the territories, together with several thousands security forces, and became the platform for the self rule of the Palestinians over their lands and population in the occupied territories.

This dual leadership of the Palestinians, each of which growing up in different societies and cultures, and being supported by distinct populations within the Palestinian nation,²¹ created tensions between what many scholars term as “insiders” and “outsiders.”²² After the Oslo Accords, the Palestinians in the territories had to subordinate themselves to a new leadership that was not formed among them, and did not necessarily represent their interests in an authentic way. Moreover, since the “outside” leaders did not grow up in the territories, they had weak connections with, and weak commitment to the local population. Low levels of responsiveness together with corruption and an intentional weak enforcement of the rule of law became common among the new leadership under the command of Chairman Arafat who consolidated his rule with neo-patrimonial counter democratic methods.²³ With the presence of these phenomena, no trust between groups and individuals in society is possible, and the emergence of strong and vibrant civil society and democratic institutionalism is severely impeded.²⁴ Indeed, with regard to the Palestinian society after Oslo, Rubin argues that the lack of commitment, together with low levels of institutionalism and high levels of corruption in Palestinian politics, led to

²⁰ Karsh E., *Arafat's War – The Man and His Battle for Israeli Conquest*, Grove Press, NY, 2003. P. 3. In addition see: Sela, A., *Authority Without Sovereignty – The Way of the PLO From Armed Struggle to Peace Agreements*, in Maoz M., Kedar B.Z. (Eds.), *The Palestinian National Movement – From Confrontation to Accommodation*, Ministry of Defense Publications, Tel-Aviv, 1998 (In Hebrew). pp. 365-409.

²¹ Hilal J., *Palestinian Elite*, *La Rivista del Manifesto*, Number 28 (May 2002).

²² Several scholars use this terminology - Frisch H., *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*; Brynen R., *The Dynamics of Palestinian Elite Formation*, p. 37; Shikaki K., *Palestinian divided*, *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2002), and *The Future of Palestine*, *Foreign Affairs* (November-December 2004)

²³ Said E., *Are There No Limits to Corruption?* In: *The End of the Peace Process – Oslo and After*, Pantheon Books, NY, 2000, pp. 177-181; Brynen R., *Palestine*, conference paper, 2005, pp. 1, 6, 10.

individualism, familialism and protectionism, instead of authentic representation of group or class interests.²⁵ Practices of patronage and self profit, instead of concentrating solely on running the PA for the Palestinian population's welfare and prosperity became rather common among high ranked PA officials. They assumed control over the essential sectors of the economy through a system of monopolies that provided them large amounts of money. Without a transparent budget, these profits were often used for personal interests rather than benefiting the population.²⁶

The population started to feel, after the earlier euphoria, that "something is rotten in the Palestinian kingdom," and that the new leadership did not perform in accordance with their interests and aspirations. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the new regime eroded rapidly and was put into question.²⁷ As Rubenberg boldly put it:

It did not take long for the local Palestinians to come to detest the foreigners – for their exclusive proximity to Arafat, for the methods by which they governed, and for their increasingly obvious corruption.²⁸

In addition, there is no dispute in the literature with regards to the dominant power of Arafat within the PA and his centralistic methods of governing.²⁹ Arafat was willing to recruit anyone to his administration as he acknowledged the need for a wide consensus, but a prerequisite for such recruitment was an indubitable loyalty to Arafat himself, rather

²⁴ Fukuyama F., *Social Capital and Development: the Coming Agenda*, Sais Review vol. XXII no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2002). Pp. 23-37.

²⁵ Rubin B., *The Transformation of Palestinian Politics – From Revolution to State Building*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 47.

²⁶ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 257.

²⁷ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 9.

²⁸ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 247.

²⁹ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 242. In addition see Heller M., *With Him and Without Him: Israel and the Palestinians in the post-Arafat Era*; and Litvak M., *Palestinian Politics After Arafat: Prospects and Problems*.

than strong commitment to the interests of the Palestinian nation. Since Arafat came from Tunisia with his own loyal men, the inner circle of the Palestinian leadership was solely from Tunisia, with no significant representation for the domestic elite. For reasons of distrust, the internal leadership has been marginalised and has been subordinated to the “outsiders.”³⁰ Although some positions in the new authority were given to “insiders,” it was not more than a lip-service for the domestic population, rather than true intentions for “insiders” inclusion. Thus Litvak concludes that:

The Exterior leadership attained full control over the institutions of the autonomy, and Arafat avowed intention to give most senior positions in the autonomy’s power structure to cadres from the exterior signified the relegation of the interior to a subordinate position.³¹

Indeed, these methods of ruling and the exclusion of the insiders from the government created frustration among the young guard. Shikaki goes even further and argues that these were the primary reasons for the eruption of the second Intifada, and not, as many assumed, Arafat’s interest in low levels of violence during the bilateral talks with Israel.³² To sum this point, one of the reasons for the weakness of the Palestinian democracy, is the detachment between the domestic population and the external leadership that led to low levels of commitment and responsiveness, the fulfilment of individual interests at the expense of the common good, and the subordination and marginalisation of the internal leadership to the “returning” one.

³⁰ Frisch H., *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 135-138.

³¹ Litvak M., *Inside Versus Outside – The Challenge of the Local Leadership, 1967-1994* in Sela A. and Maoz M. (Eds.), *The PLO and Israel – From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, St. Martin’s Press, NY, 1997, pp. 171-195, p. 190.

³² Shikaki K., *Palestinian divided*, *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2002).

2. *Exposure to Democratic Culture and Values*

The Palestinian community in the Occupied Territories lived for the first two decades under Arab rule, but the three consecutive decades that followed were under Israeli rule. Israel established a military governance system over the territories and until the last decade of the 20th century no Palestinian national rights were given nor acknowledged by Israel, except municipal elections. Indeed, Israel thwarted the creation of a political system in the territories out of fear from Palestinian national claims and preferred to repress any kind of such initiation.³³ Yet, since the Palestinians have no strong economy and to large extent depend on Israel as their source of living, close economic relationship have been developed between the two nations. As a result, Palestinians in the territories encountered the Israeli democratic system, and perceived it as a role model for their future self rule.³⁴ Even before the Oslo Accords, the leadership of the interior criticised the non-democratic practices of the PLO, and demanded explicitly transitions to democracy within the organisation, drawing on the Israeli model.³⁵

As the CPRS survey from November 1993 shows, domestic Palestinians strongly support the core elements of democracy. 77% of the population supported general elections, and 66% supported the freedom of the press.³⁶ In a more extensive survey from 1995, the results were even more supportive of democratic values. The following components of democracy, both procedural (elections, opposition) and substantial (free press, equality, minority rights, etc.), were considered important or very important by an outstanding

³³ Frisch H., *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 151-152.

³⁴ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 12.

³⁵ Litvak M., *Inside Versus Outside – The Challenge of the Local Leadership, 1967-1994*, p. 188.

³⁶ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 12.

majority:³⁷

Free Press –	82.6%	Equality –	97.9%
Multiparty System –	71.4%	Civilian Control –	79.6%
Right to Criticise –	88.2%	Minority Rights –	79.4%
Fair Elections –	91.7%	Elected Parliament –	89.2%

Even more impressive, were the results on women rights. In a survey that took place in April 1994, about 80% supported the right of women to vote in general elections and 63% said they are willing to vote for a competent woman candidate.³⁸ Indeed, these results reflect the deeply rooted democratic values among the Palestinians in the territories, and they raised many expectations for the first true democracy among Arab countries. Unfortunately, the present institutions of the PA do not reflect the will of the people for democracy. Although general elections took place in 1996, in which both the Parliament and the president were elected and another presidential elections took place after the passing away of Arafat, there are many abuses of democracy in the PA, violations of human rights, constrains on the press, corruption and imposed limits on civil society organisations.³⁹ Writing as early as 1995, less than a year after the arrival of the exiled leadership to the territories, Brynen warned that:

Practically, many of the accoutrements of neo-patrimonial politics - personalism, cronyism, rent seeking, corruption and weak political institutionalisation – are already evident in aspects of the current transition to interim Palestinian self-government.⁴⁰

³⁷ The data is taken from the CPRS project, in Shikaki, *ibid*, p. 13.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 240.

⁴⁰ Litvak M., *Inside Versus Outside – The Challenge of the Local Leadership, 1967-1994*, p. 190.

The reason for the wide gap between the domestic population's aspirations and the reality is, again, rooted in the cultural differences between the multitude and its "imported" government. As mentioned above, the Palestinians leadership and the apparatus of the PLO have been hosted by Arab states and encountered no democratic practices and values until their arrival to the territories in the mid 90s. On the contrary, Arafat and his cadre have been hosted for three decades in Arab countries that do not practice democracy, with the partial exception of Lebanon, but rather tend to rely on strong authoritarianism to maintain their rule.⁴¹ Moreover, clear traces of these non-democratic methods of ruling can be found in the PLO institutions which have been imported to the territories and became the platform of the PA. See, for instance, the account of Azmi Shu'aybi, a former member of the legislative council, who was forced to resign by Arafat due to his overt protest against budgetary corruption:

The authority was supposed to build the institutions of the state...unfortunately, it is now clear that none of this occurred, and that President [Yasir] Arafat is conducting himself on the basis "I am the state and the state is me." This state of affairs has been accepted without the least protest. Of course, the tendency to accept without question was well established in the PLO institutions and was simply imported ready-made into the territories with the PA.⁴²

The practices of the new authority reflected the elite non-democratic values rather than those of the population. Like in other Arab states, Arafat and his closest advisors relied on trust and loyalty rather than on organised institutions. It is worthwhile to bring another reference from the striking account of Shu'aybi on the working methods of Arafat:

⁴¹ For further discussion on the reasons for the sustainability of authoritarian regimes in Arab countries see: Bellin E., *The Robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective*, *Comparative Politics*, 36:2 (January 2004), pp. 139-157.

⁴² IPS Forum, *A Window on the Workings of the PA: An Inside View*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXX no. 1 (Autumn 2000), pp. 88-97, on p. 88.

Another deliberate policy seems to be to downplay institutions. The president deals only with individuals, never institutions. He would never write a letter to the president of the Legislative Council, for example, but to Abu Ala.⁴³

In addition, as I will elaborate below, the PA leadership relied on the coercive capabilities of the police and security services that supported the rule of the PA and thwarted the development of free democratic society. While strengthening his position, Arafat weakened the other authorities of the Palestinian democratic system, namely – the legislative (PLC – Palestinian Legislative Council) and judicial branches – and subordinated them to the executive branch. Arafat used its presidential prerogative to ratify any new legislature, and to hinder legislature that threatened his position or curtailed the powers of the PA. The most striking example is the Palestinian Constitutional legislature. Arafat was not willing to sign a draft of Palestinian Basic Laws (constitutional laws), and after a few years demanded, as a condition for his ratification, a wide reform in the version of the Laws. When finally in 2002 the public pressure forced him to sign the document, it has been revealed that he made some revisions in the document without consulting or merely notifying the legislative branch beforehand. As a result:

The PA was left without a constitution and the Palestinian people without the means to ensure democratic processes, to protect citizens' rights, to enforce the rule of law, or to secure Constitutional accountability.⁴⁴

This case is only one example among many of the relationship between the parliament and Arafat. In a healthy democratic regime, the executive branch is subordinated to the

⁴³ Ibid, p. 90. In addition see Frisch's study on the deliberate deinstitutionalization of the territories, the enforcement of neopatrimonial rule and the undermining of the rule of law in the PA, in: *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 132-146.

⁴⁴ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 249.

legislative one, but as in many other Arab societies, in the PA the opposite took place. Although the Parliament tried to reflect the will of the population and more than once opposed the practices of the PA, it has been marginalised and suffered defeat after defeat from the president. As Brown Concludes:

The result was that nearly every time the PLC found itself in a contest with the executive it has lost. Even more striking, it grew more gracious in accepting defeat...In such an atmosphere the PLC had far less to contribute.⁴⁵

The second branch that supposed to constrain the powers of the executive – the judicial branch - has been also subordinated to the will and interests of Arafat. Instead of creating an active and independent judiciary, Arafat did not hesitate to use his power to resign judges that criticised the PA and assign under them loyal ones, even if they were unqualified for the task.⁴⁶ Moreover, Arafat overruled the judiciary by establishing a State Security Court in 1995. This court was accountable to no one but Arafat, and was granted wide powers that severely violated human rights, such as arbitrary arrests, secret trials in the middle of the night and no right of appeal.⁴⁷ In the seldom cases that the courts ruled against the Palestinian Authority, the PA continuously failed, or did not bother, to execute the courts' decisions. If Arafat did not like a judicial decision he simply ignored or reversed it and in general did not take these decisions seriously.⁴⁸ Finally, the PA undermined the financial support and independence of NGOs and has been involved in numerous violations of human rights, such as assaults on Universities, political prisoning and censorships, all of which stand in obvious contradiction to normal democratic practices.⁴⁹ With such despotic measures and with no real check on the power

⁴⁵ Brown N. J., *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords – Resuming Arab Palestine*, University of California Press, California, 2003, p. 136.

⁴⁶ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, p. 250.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 265-275.

of the executive, democracy had no chance to prevail in the Palestinian Authority under Arafat.

3. Interests of External Groups – The Palestinian Diaspora

Although officially there is only one Palestinian nation, there are in fact several distinct groups within it. After the Palestinian “Nakba” (disaster) of 1948 – Israel’s independence and their mass escape from Palestine in the midst of the war - the Palestinian nation was divided to several distinct populations with different characteristics and interests. The first group is that of the refugees that escaped from Israel and settled in refugee camps in neighbouring Arab States. Although their status in each state is significantly different, they comprise one group that live generally in poor conditions in the Diaspora and dream of returning to Palestine as part of any future agreement with Israel.⁵⁰ The second group is that of the domestic population that stayed in the occupied territories after the “Nakba” and lived under Israeli rule since the Six day war of 1967. As of 2000, there were about 2.7 million Palestinians in the occupied territories and about 4.5 million in the Diaspora, 2.6 million of which whom are in Jordan.⁵¹ Still, there is a third group of about 1.2 million Palestinians that stayed in the territory of the new-born Israel and are citizens of Israel, but this discussion requires its own volume. This section will deal only with the first two groups.

Although the Palestinian diaspora is poor and scattered, its interests were strongly represented by the PLO, who had operated in exile as well. In fact, the PLO was formed among the refugees outside the territories, and encouraged the liberation of the land and

⁵⁰ Sayigh R., *Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh Present, Uncertain Future*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXV, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 37-53, on pp. 41, 52.

⁵¹ McDowall D., *The Palestinians – The Road to Nationhood*, p. 126.

the right of return as inseparable and ultimate goals.⁵² In 1993, the PLO signed the DOP with Israel with the primary motivation to territorialise the national struggle of the Palestinian people into a specified territory.⁵³ After signing the Oslo Accords, the PLO leadership was permitted to immigrate and establish its rule over the territories, but three decades of representing the external group interests had their impact. The Palestinian Authority currently rules exclusively over the domestic group, but perceives itself as representing both groups, sometimes at the expense of the domestic group. A good example of that duality is the method of electing the Palestinian President. While in every democratic state the citizens have an exclusive right to elect their ultimate leader, in the Palestinian election system, the president is selected by both the population in the West Bank and Gaza, and by the Palestinian National Council. The reason for exercising this method is to grant some representation to the Palestinian diaspora as well.

The PA leadership tries to manage the tension between the inside and the outside and thus sometimes compromises democracy which, in its pure model, gives the power only to its constituencies. But in Palestine, so far, the subordinated population is not the sole sovereign. Shikaki's words reflect well the PA's fear that the interests of the diaspora will be marginalised as a result of elections in the Territories:

The legitimacy conferred on the emerging Palestinian political system by democratic elections will give a powerful boost to the creation of strong political institutions and help institutionalise a new consensus based on modern political practices. ...On the other hand, elections in the "inside" may lead to the marginalisation of the concerns and institutions of the Palestinian Diaspora, a process exacerbated by Oslo.⁵⁴

⁵² Klein M., *From a Doctrine- Oriented to a Solution Oriented Policy: The PLO's "Right of Return," 1964-2000*, p. 47.

⁵³ Frisch H., *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 1-2.

Indeed, many Palestinians from the diaspora harshly criticise the PLO for having deserted them while compromising with Israel on the right of return in exchange for the Oslo accords and the benefits they carry. The Palestinian leadership is being accused by the diaspora for becoming pragmatic at the expense of the refugees.⁵⁵ Among the leading critics are the late Edward Said and Nasser Aruri, but many others question the actual obligation of the PA to the diaspora.⁵⁶ While acknowledging the compromise that the Palestinian leadership took so far on the right of return for other gains, I argue that the leadership takes this acute issue into constant consideration and that it greatly influences its policies regarding the peace process. Even Edward Said acknowledges the consideration for the right of return by PA officials:

For the first time, the right of return has been put squarely on the political agenda. As'ad Abdul Rahman, the PLO's minister in charge of the refugee question for the peace process, has recently made some excellent statements about the absolute right of return for Palestinians evicted by Israel.⁵⁷

Others, like Manual Hassassian, a Palestinian scholar, go further to say that:

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian Authority cannot succumb to Israeli and American pressure to yield on this principle because the "right of return" is simply at the core of preserving the Palestinian national identity.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Sayigh R., *Dis/Solving the "Refugee Problem"*, *Middle East Report*, Summer 1998, pp. 19-23.

⁵⁶ Edward Said has written extensively on the subject matter. See for example: *Peace and its Discontents*, Vintage Books – Random House, US, 1995; and: *The End of the Peace Process – Oslo and After*, Pantheon Books – Random House, US, 2000. In addition See an edited volume by Nasser Aruri: *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return*, Pluto Press, Virginia, 2001.

⁵⁷ Said E., *Introduction: The Right of Return at Last*, in Aruri N. (ed.), *Palestinian Refugees – The right of Return*, Pluto Books, Virginia, 2001, pp. 1-6, p. 4.

⁵⁸ Hassassian M., *The Political Refugee Problem in the Light of the Peace Process*, . in Ginat J., and Perkins E., (eds.) *The Palestinian Refugees, Old Problems – New Solutions*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2001, pp. 57-76, in p. 67.

Maybe the most striking illustration of this point was Arafat's refusal to accept Barak's (Israeli prime minister between 1999-2001) offer in the second Camp David negotiations. Barak's offer was generous for the domestic population,⁵⁹ with a commitment to withdraw from most of the territories, to divide Jerusalem, and to acknowledge the Palestinian right for a nation-state. The two main reasons for Arafat's refusal of this offer was Barak's demand that there will be a mutual declaration on the end of the conflict and a failure to address the refugees issue seriously.⁶⁰ The insistence on both these reasons carries no real benefit for the domestic population but rather was, at least in part, the outcome of taking the refugees interests into consideration. Discussing this point Bowker assesses that:

Nor could Arafat ignore the political opinion of his wider Palestinian audience, for whom political mythologies provided comfort and a degree of reassurance.⁶¹

While these talks could have been the most radical change for the Palestinians in Palestine ever, the offer has been rejected out of external reasons. The Palestinians in the territories, on their part, were willing to accept compromise and to end the conflict, but their wishes have not been given first priority.⁶² Obviously, the results of the negotiations led to frustration among the domestic population and criticism against the leadership. This threat on the power and stability of the PA probably led Arafat to initiate the second – "El-Aqsa" – Intifada.

⁵⁹ Indeed, some scholars from both sides criticized Barak for his style of negotiation that was arrogant and commanding. This style led Avi Shleim to describe Barak as being "Arrogant and authoritarian and he approaches diplomacy as the extension of war by other means" (in: Barari H., *Israeli Politics and the Middle East Peace Process, 1988-2002*, Routledge Curzon, NY, 2004, p. 130.) Yet, even those who criticize Barak for the Style acknowledge the substance of the offer to be fair for the domestic population.

⁶⁰ Barari H., *Israeli Politics and the Middle East Peace Process, 1988-2002*, p. 130.

⁶¹ Bowker R., *Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity and the Search for Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2003, p. 167.

⁶² Bowker R., *Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity and the Search for Peace*, p. 162.

In sum, the constant compromise between the needs and desires of two distinct groups, when only one is subordinated directly to the leadership, leads to constant tension, decreases legitimacy among the subordinates, and requires the disabling of democracy in favour of efficacy and authority. The above account suggests that where the electorate is not the sole sovereign, it is likely to expect difficulties with the consolidation of democracy overtime.

4. Coercive Capabilities and Undemocratic Ruling Techniques.

The Palestinian process of democratisation had two phases - before and after the Oslo Accords. Before the Oslo Accords, there were signs of civil-society creation in the Territories. Many NGOs were established and served the population in wide areas of civil services, such as health, education, welfare etc. Associational activity has been fostered in the territories since the occupation of 1967 and until the mid 90s.⁶³ Like the Jewish community in Palestine before Israel's independence:

The Palestinians during the 1980s succeeded in creating social, political, professional and popular civil institutions and NGOs that fulfilled many functions including those performed in normal circumstances by the state.⁶⁴

Langohr shows that the Palestinians developed in the occupied territories an expanded political centre that enjoys high levels of participation and legitimacy in the absence of coercive capabilities. This political activity fostered vibrant civil society that founded the beginning of the Palestinian political system:

⁶³ Langohr V., *Too Much Civil Society Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes*, *Comparative Politics*, 36:2 (January), 2004, pp. 181-204. P. 184. In Addition see: Saad Eddin I., *Populism, Islam and Civil Society in the in the Arab World*, in Burbidge J. (Ed.), *Beyond Prince and Merchant: Citizen Participation and the Rise of Civil Society*, Pact Publications, NY, 1998, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 9. In addition see: Brynen R., *Palestine*, p. 29.

The close link between voluntary associations and PLO factions led to a semi-corporatist form of associational organisation in which almost every West Bank and Gaza grass roots organisation was affiliated with a PLO faction and each faction had its own Women's, labour and other federations. This dense network of associations gained great domestic legitimacy... Given the distinct ideological platforms of each of the factions, the high degrees of factional identification among Palestinians, and the ease with which faction-identified voluntary associations could be used to mobilise voters, each of the main factions was in an ideal position to transform itself into a political party and contest legislative elections in 1996.⁶⁵

In the decade that followed Oslo, though, the Palestinians experienced a severe regression in civic and political performance.⁶⁶ Given that the track of the Palestinians toward strong civic society was so promising it is important to understand what went wrong.

I assume the decline in the levels of both civil society and democracy in the PA is rooted in the coercive capabilities that were given to Arafat and his regime in Oslo, both violent and financial resources, without sufficient proven democratic practices. These coercive capabilities hindered real efforts for accommodation and compromise with opposing groups in the Palestinian society, and especially with forces from the inside.

First, attempts to prevent potential political opposition from establishing and maintaining institutions in the territories have started even before the PA leadership has emigrated from Tunis. The period between signing the DOP and the actual arrival of Arafat and his apparatus to Gaza was aimed at undermining and depoliticising the existing institutions in Palestine, to weaken any potential opposition to the new regime.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Langohr V., *Too Much Civil Society. Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes*, p. 184-185.

⁶⁶ Frisch H., *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 125-130.

⁶⁷ *ibid*

After the signing of the Oslo Accords, Arafat brought his own people from exile and established a strong police force that essentially acted as a military:

Convoy after convoy of “policeman” (1500 in number) dressed in the military uniform of the Palestinian Liberation Army, crossed the bridges that link Jordan with the West Bank... They are an army in all but name, so called only because the Oslo Accords, and later the Cairo Agreement, forbade the establishment of an army.⁶⁸

The first task of the PA was to build a state and strengthen the regime’s stability and efficacy, intentionally at the expense of democracy. NGOs were marginalised and “dried” out of money, civil liberties were restricted, and the PA took repressive measures against the press.⁶⁹ Arafat relied mainly on security forces and established no less than eleven different security services.⁷⁰ The costs of public sector salaries, more than half of which are for security services, are between 60 and 70 percent of public expenditures.⁷¹ The extensive recruitment has been mainly used to co-opt opposition forces through providing them income.⁷² With such powers, it was easier for the PA to establish a state on authoritarian and coercive rule rather than on pluralism, legitimacy, civil society, and quest for consensus, that might have weakened the national enterprise. Even if the first task was to achieve a minimum level of public security and stability, the coercive nature of authoritative regimes is hard to break.

Indeed, the PA is less authoritarian compared with other authoritarian regimes in the

⁶⁸ Frisch H., *From Palestine Liberation Organization to Palestine Authority: The Territorialization of “Neopatriarchy”* in Sela A. and Maoz M. (Eds.), *The PLO and Israel – From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, St. Martin’s Press, NY, 1997, pp. 55-71. pp. 56-57.

⁶⁹ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Rubenberg C.A., *The Palestinians in Search of a Just Peace*, pp. 247-248. The security services that were established by Arafat are the following - National Security Force, Preventive Security Force, Presidential Guard, Military Intelligence, Police Force, General Intelligence Service, Special Security Force, Civil Defense Force for Emergencies, Maritime Police, Airborne Force, and the County Guard.

⁷¹ IPS Forum, *A Window on the Workings of the PA: An Inside View*, p. 90.

Arab world. Yet, while the press is relatively open and criticism is allowed to some degree against the regime, newspapers that were too critical of the regime have been closed.⁷³ In addition, though coercive forces have not been used extensively against political opponents, Arafat did not hesitate using them to signal the opposition once they crossed what he perceived a borderline. In an Islamic Jihad member funeral in 1994, for example, the police restricted the gathering of the people and even shot into the crowd, killing thirteen people. Bowker stresses that:

Whether the killings were intentional or not, the message they conveyed was that Arafat's regime was determined to draw unequivocal limits to opposition and eliminate anyone posing a serious threat to his authority.⁷⁴

To conclude this point, the Oslo Accords gave the PA coercive capabilities that allowed it to rule with power rather than through negotiation and legitimacy. By generating these powers, the Oslo Accords cut the process of building civil society in the Territories that might have led to a competitive political system and smooth transition to democracy.

Conclusions

This paper investigated transitions to democracy in Palestine in pre-independent conditions. The outcome of the Palestinian democratic experience is not yet known, but is, at the least, in serious doubt. This paper observed some important malfunctions in the Palestinian experience and provides, so I believe, some general lessons about democratisation processes.

⁷² Brynen R., *Palestine*, p. 17.

⁷³ ⁷³ Frisch H., *Countdown to Statehood, Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 128-129.

⁷⁴ Bowker R., *Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity and the Search for Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2003, p. 168.

The first lesson is that of the leadership. No society can achieve high levels of democracy that require responsiveness and accountability without a leadership being committed to the population and reflecting, to a minimum extent, its interests. It follows, that the Palestinian leadership has to go through personal reforms and share power with domestic activists that were politically “grown up” in society, committed to it and thus enjoys its legitimacy. Additionally, it might suggest that no parachuting from above can overcome the necessity for a gradual process of elite formation, and thus that legitimacy and stability will prevail in the PA only when domestic elite will come into power. The only strong enough leader from “inside” that has won the people’s support is Marwan Baraghuti, but he is currently imprisoned in Israel after leading some lethal terror attacks against the latter during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The Palestinians have, if they wish to prosper and democratise, to re-build and enhance grass roots leaders to key points in the leadership.

The second lesson is the clash of interests between the domestic population and the diaspora. The Palestinian diaspora has a “say” in Palestinian politics albeit not always an explicit one. The Palestinian leadership was formed and has been operating in exile for most of its years. Thus, it perceives itself, at least partially, as the representative of the entire Palestinian people. The leadership has to manoeuvre between interests of the domestic and the diaspora, although there is no direct political obligation between the latter group and the PA or any kind of subordination or commitment, except maybe moral one, from both sides. Indeed, the question of the refugees is at the core of the conflict, but until the electorate will become the sole sovereign of its political system, the chances for Palestinian democracy in the territories are at stake. The more general lesson from this experience is that democratisation projects are more likely to succeed when there is a complete overlap between the governed territory and population. Interference of external groups in domestic political preferences might create constant tensions that destabilise the system and make the resort to undemocratic methods more likely.

The third lesson is that exposure to democratic values and culture is important for the creation of democracy in new born states. Yet, the exposure of the populace alone is insufficient. It is essential that the leadership and the populace will be exposed to the same experience. Even if the population is well exposed to democracy, it is still mandatory that the elite will be exposed to it as well. Otherwise, instead of corresponding to the populace's democratic expectations, the new regime is likely to exercise the methods he is familiar with, at the expense of democracy.

Finally, coercive capabilities should be given only to regimes that acquired some democratic experience in the past. In the case of the PA's leadership, which had no experience with democracy, excessive coercive capabilities severely impeded transitions to democracy. It seems obvious that Arafat chose to adopt Huntington's view of order and stability as ultimate goods,⁷⁵ even at the price of dismissing human rights, inclusion and democracy. With the coercive powers that were granted to him in the Oslo Accords, he was able to exercise this ideology and established an autocratic neo-patrimonial regime in the territories. To improve the prospects for democracy, the Palestinian authority has to step back, give up some of its authoritarian practices, and instead adopt more tolerant and plural ones. The general implication of the latter point is that Dahl's assumption in his classic *Poliarchy* on the negative correlation between coercive capabilities and the emergence of effective opposition should be revised to take into consideration the democratic background of the regime. The more embedded democratic values in the new regime are, it is less probable that these capabilities, regardless their relative size, will be used unlawfully to undermine the creation or existence of opposition, and vice versa.

The Palestinian process of democratisation started as a process of forming political and

⁷⁵ Huntington S., *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New-Haven, 1968.

civic practices from “below”, but it was interrupted with the Oslo Accords and the return of the exiled leadership, which turned this process up-side-down. It seems like there is no easy way or shortcuts to democratisation and if the Palestinians really desire democracy, they should start the same process of building a strong civil society and institutions from the floor, in order to establish, at the end, a solid democratic system.

In this moment of change, several months after electing Abu-Mazin and in the midst of the second Palestinian elections, it is appropriate to conclude with the question of democracy in Palestine that still remains open. Shikaki wrote the following paragraph on the eve of the 1996’s Elections:

The resolution of the conflict between national and democratic agendas will depend on how decision makers order the hierarchy of their priorities. Will the security-related agenda, political independence, and economic well-being continue to take precedence over political participation, accountability, and freedom of expression? Will the elected council play a prominent role in Palestinians politics? Or will it become subordinate to the executive authority? The preceding discussion may have already provided some answers to these questions, but the next few months will provide more needed and critical clues.⁷⁶

Although it has been written 10 years ago, it seems like these words are more than relevant today. ■

⁷⁶ Shikaki K., *The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the Transition to Democracy in Palestine*, p. 19.

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