

# Liberalism in the Palestinian Context

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## Introduction

As part of its mission, and for the sake of establishing freedom in the world in general and in Palestine in particular, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation FNF contributes to the building of democratic, modern and civil societies and helps strengthening the civil society. Moreover, the FNF has always been working on introducing to the public the concepts of freedom, human rights, equal opportunities, and thought and political pluralism. In this context, this booklet came into being as an attempt to raise community awareness and youth in particular with regard to the concepts of liberalism which is considered as an important political current worldwide. However, the importance of liberalism in the Arab world has increased by virtue of the political, intellectual and societal debate that is going on in the context of the “Arab Spring” that toppled totalitarian regimes some of which are still incumbent. Nowadays, a heated debate is going on pertaining the prospective political system and ideological identity. This booklet contains ten distinguished articles that were written by Palestinian young men and women and entitled “**What does liberalism mean to the Palestinian youth?**”. In those articles, the youth expressed their understanding of liberalism.

The jury has thoroughly and with full partiality reviewed those articles, and the consensus was that the ten articles contained in this booklet were the best under all circumstances. This article writing contest was a modest attempt to give the opportunity to the Palestinian youth to express their convictions vis-à-vis this ideological and political approach, given the polemic debate that is going on in intellectual and political circles in the Arab World.

The said contest was unique and the first of its nature to take place in Palestine, and was jointly carried out by the “FNF” and “Maan News Agency”.

The jury that included distinguished Palestinian referees received eighty

five relevant articles, set certain criteria that helped rate the quality of those articles based on rhetoric, content, argumentation, depth, coherence, quotation and bibliography. The jury included the following personalities:

1. Mrs. Nibal Thawabteh-Media Development Center – Bir Zeit University
2. Mr. Suleiman Abu Dayyeh- Head of Palestine Desk- FNF
3. Mr. Walid Salem – Director of the Palestine Center for Democracy and Community Development.
4. Mr. Raed Othman- General director of Maan News Agency.
5. Mrs. Itaf Yousef- Journalist.
6. Mr. Saleh Masharka – Journalist at Al- Ayyam daily newspaper.
7. Mr. Faisal Awartani – Alpha International for Research and Statistics.

We can brag that this booklet with its distinguished and authentic articles has provided Palestinian youth with the opportunity to express themselves with their own wording and style, and to participate in the current debate regarding their future and that of the entire Arab region. I personally was in charge of this local initiative and really amazed by the youth's enthusiasm and interest in participating in this contest. Yet, the biggest surprise was the quality of the articles themselves in that many of them were thorough, distinguished and characterized by a frank and sharp dimension of thought. I hereby would like to congratulate all authors especially the first ten ones who won the contest. Indeed, their articles will enormously contribute to the Palestinian liberal discourse that hopefully will come into being in the near future. In this regard, I would like to sustain the fact that those youth authors have set a contemporary, patriotic, and enlightened example. I also would like to place on record my thanks and gratitude to my colleagues in the jury who exerted utmost efforts to make the voice of those youth heard by the public.

We at the FNF hope that this booklet contributes to the ongoing and escalating debate regarding liberal principles and values and their relationship to the future of the entire region. We also call upon all people

to actively participate in those debates.

Finally, I would like to seize the opportunity to extend sincere thanks to the former FNF representative in Jerusalem Dr. Hans Georg Fleck and to the present representative Mr. Walter Klitz for their great and sincere efforts to make this contest a success.

For further information, please visit our website at:  
[www.fnst-jerusalem.org](http://www.fnst-jerusalem.org)

Suleiman Abu Dayyeh  
Head of Palestine Desk  
Friedrich Naumann Foundation – Jerusalem



## INTRODUCTION MAAN NEWS AGENCY

Media plays an important role in communicating several issues to the public, and without a broad margin of freedom this role cannot be played efficiently. It is essential for the media to be independent in order to remain objective, neutral, credible and with positive influence.

Upon the initiative of numerous colleagues in the media, Maan news agency was launched ten years ago. And since its inception, Maan sought independency, impartiality and objectivity and its slogan ever since was that “independent, impartial and competent media comprises an essential pillar of good governance, based on participation, accountability and transparency”.

Throughout the past ten years, Maan shouldered the responsibility of defending freedom and human rights regardless of race, religion, gender.....etc.

Maan has all along striven towards liberating both individuals and groups, from the three authoritarian restrictions (i.e. political, economic and cultural) and towards achieving liberation and equality. Maan also sought providing equal opportunities to all people via a set of media programs and activities, that sustain freedom and dignity for Palestinians. And with high degree of tolerance, it initiated the debate on several issues and subjected them to free and objective discussion that is based on mutual recognition and acceptance of the other within a humane and enlightened society that believes in coexistence.

Towards this end, Maan adopted a strategy based on enriching the citizen's knowledge while knowing that the broader the knowledge the less dogmatic a person is. As a media agency, Maan is well aware of its mission in playing an essential role in creating and guiding the conscience of Palestinian citizens towards claiming their rights on one hand, and respecting and preserving the others' rights on the other hand.

Maan was inspired to share with FNF the responsibility of holding a contest on liberal democracy entitled “ What does liberalism mean to Palestinian youth ? “ out of the conviction that its mission goes in line with that of the FNF in disseminating free thought in Palestine. Maan sought inspiring Palestinian youth to get acquainted with liberal thought, and to freely and objectively express their respective attitudes.



## Foreword of the Jury

When the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty came up with the idea of launching a competition in association with Maan News Agency for the best articles about liberalism, our interest was not in the literal meaning of liberalism. Neither were we concerned about the history of liberalism or what people said about it. Our main concern was to spotlight the Palestinian national experience in understanding, defining and practicing liberalism.

As the jury appointed to evaluate the submissions, we wondered what a Palestinian from Jenin refugee camp might say about liberalism. We wanted to know what a girl from Khan Younis would write about liberalism. We were curious to know whether the writers would be influenced by the ongoing political disagreement, and whether or not the competitors from Ramallah and Hebron would manage to refer positively to the Arab Spring revolutions.

We had in mind serious questions seeking a noble goal before we started evaluating 85 articles we received for the competition.

We started to read the articles and held meetings over several weeks to discuss our impressions about what had been written. Our main interest was to measure how liberalism affected Palestinian youth.

About half of the articles we received were written by Palestinian women, and half of the winners were women. This was thrilling.

Similarly impressive was the fact that the competitors and winners were from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, almost equally.

Seeking to make this competition as useful as possible, we decided to translate the winning articles into English, and publish them in a book in English and Arabic. The book will be distributed in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and some Arab countries under the supervision of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty.

Here are the 10 winning articles by young Palestinians talking about their own understanding and experience of liberalism.



## **Liberalism in the Arab Context**

### **Suliman Abu Dayyah**

Undoubtedly, the intellectual discussion on liberalism that is taking place in the context of the intellectual and political debate is somewhat astonishing and raises several questions pertaining to the nature of this political system and thought, and to what degree this kind of thought conforms to the cultural, intellectual and political priorities. However, tackling this topic was not transparent as it is these days.

Yet, the essential and urgent question in light of changes and heated conflicts in the region : “ What will be the political, social, economic system that is capable of providing the optimal margin of freedom, democracy, social justice and an accelerating economic growth after hundreds of years?”

Indeed, despotic, tyrant and totalitarian regimes ruled this region where reason, logic, freedom, dignity and justice were absent, and people were treated under best circumstances as subjects and not as citizens with rights and duties.

In light of the current circumstances, many people wonder why the gap between the Western civilization and the Orient has widened, where the latter is going through a phase of accelerating regression? And why crises, catastrophes and conflicts are frantic in this region whereas the West is capable of overcoming its own problems and conflicts in civilized ways. The best answer to these questions is the absence of real boundaries and criteria that comprise the common ground for most cultures in the Orient. In other words, the ambiguity of concepts like the rule of law, individual rights, independent judiciary and civil rights as well as absence of democracy, social market economy, freedom of women, and secularism (that regulate the relationship between mundane and religious spheres and between religious and political spheres) are all factors behind this gap. In brief, the Orient lacks the principles and values that comprise the main pillar on which liberal democracies are based.

Simply, “liberalism” means “freedom” where this thought and philosophy emphasize the most precious value for a human being and for all

civilizations. Freedom in this context constitutes the means and ends at the same time for individuals and peoples towards advancement and development in which freedom and dignity of a human being become essential elements of human activity in general.

Philosophers and thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought the liberal philosophy into being in the light of the renaissance and enlightenment eras in Europe and as a way to encounter tyranny and despotism imposed by the kings of Europe under the consent of the church while employing ethical and religious pretexts.

Despite the fact that those early philosophers and thinkers (i.e. Smith, Hume, Hyke, Hobbs, John Stewart Mill, Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Descartes) came from different backgrounds and schools of thought, they all agreed that the hallmark of this philosophy is human and individual freedoms. In addition to political freedoms that entail the right of voting and electing governments, this philosophy includes economic freedoms represented by the private property and independent economic activity as well as freedoms of thought, expression cultural and art creativity, religion and pertaining worship, life and right of education and therefore the right for differences among peoples and individuals. All this will naturally lead people to respect pluralism and differences among cultures and civilizations. Thus, liberal thought is the antithesis of oppression and restriction, and is based on what is called “social contract” or “social compatibility” that guarantees the sustainability of liberal and democratic laws and constitutions. Freedoms emanate from high responsibility towards the society and away from chaos. A person's freedom ends when his freedom starts affecting the freedom of the others and depriving them from exercising and enjoying equal rights.

However, what distinguishes liberal thought from other principles, ideologies and doctrines is that liberalism is not a dogmatic and rigid philosophy nor is it written in certain texts. It does not give neither solutions nor decisive or absolute answers to complicated problems. Therefore, liberalism does not constitute one and final model that fits all countries and societies at all times, but rather it differs in terms of priorities, solutions and answers according to differences in political, economic,

cultural, historic and even climatic contexts. Moreover, liberalism with its various dimensions is strongly associated to genuine democracy, for the latter does not guarantee progress and prosperity without incorporating the liberal dimension in laws and constitutions so that political regimes remain democratic. In the Arab region and in other countries worldwide including Europe, democracy is taken advantage of in order to have access to positions of power, then democracy fades away according to the principle “Elections for one time only”. Therefore liberalism will remain in a continuous conflict with other thoughts and doctrines, where socialists will remain at loggerheads with individual human rights and with the peculiarities and rights of ethnic and cultural minorities, whereas the conservative and Islamist powers will remain in contradiction with secularism. It is noteworthy to mention that liberal thoughts suffer from methodological defamation that prevented them from introducing their democratic and humane character. This can be ascribed to the following reasons: First, there were some despotic regimes claimed to be liberal and democratic and thus distorted the image of liberal concepts. Those regimes ruled their people in ways totally irrelevant to democracy or liberalism. Secondly, the undemocratic practices of the Western world in the Arab region in particular, and worldwide in general. In this regard, the Western countries were not hesitant to support occupying powers and despotic regimes. Thirdly, the differences and conflicts that are taking place among what are called modern liberal currents have also distorted the image of liberal thought.

Development of this thought in the Arab region emanated from a historic necessity. It started with Rafa'a Tahtawi of Egypt in the beginning of the nineteenth century followed by the reformist Islamists like Mohammad Abdo, Abdul Rahman Al-Kawakibi, Ali Abdel Razeq then Taha Hussein, Amin Qassim and Ahmad Lutfi Said. The liberal thought was then culminated by numerous secular liberals like Farah Anton, Shibly Shmeil and Suleiman Bustani. All these people became the idols of Arab liberalism and their intellectual input contributed to the process of modernization, enlightenment and development in the Arab world. Needless to mention other people from Egypt, North Africa, Lebanon and Palestine, who became renowned in this realm. Liberalism was

in contradiction to many currents and ideologies that prevailed after independence in the middle of last century and they were characterized by totalitarianism and Pan-Arabism. Those ideologies sustained the political dimension at the expense of the democratic, economic and social ones. For example, those currents promoted the concept of freedom in terms of getting “National Independence”, whereas the concepts of individual freedom, human rights, freedom of expression, political participation, and self determination were obliterated. Moreover, totalitarian ideologies introduced economic development in their discourse, as if such development was the responsibility of the bureaucrats or that of state officials or party members, and that people have to wait for salvation coming from a ruler, party or family. Rulers in this regard perceived the entire society as one family or tribe, with no differentiation among its members in terms of education, knowledge, property, doctrine, conduct, and way of thinking in addition to other social, cultural and economic differences. Consequently, those totalitarian currents and regimes dismally failed in introducing visions, strategies and work programs for the sake of modernization (that remained superficial), enlightenment, building and development. Some people are misled by the notion that those who support democracy and liberalism in Palestine and Arab countries are of little number. To the contrary, the dichotomy is clearer now than ever especially after the beginning of the Arab revolts. This dichotomy separates two distinct forces i.e. democrats, liberals and modernists on one hand versus conservative and religious forces on the other hand. The latter stands in the way of any change, modernization, enlightenment, and women emancipation from obsolete traditions that comprise an impediment to the new civilized inclination towards building active, civil and democratic powers in the Arab countries where change has already taken place. These liberal and democratic forces carry intrinsic dynamics and potentials and can enormously influence their communities if they developed visions, regulatory actions and practical programs.

## Liberalism in the eyes of a Palestinian man

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**Ra'ed Mohammad Dib'i**



**Nablus**

**Age: 29 years old**

**“Arabic will never be upright unless the Arabs exercise liberty as another letter in the alphabet” (Adonis)**

Liberalism is one of the most controversial concepts in Arab societies, and the most vulnerable to systematic attack and distortion by opponents of different doctrines and political affiliations who formed a broad front of adherents of different and conflicting ideologies, brought together due to their hostility to the concept or as their interests are adversely affected by the proliferation of liberal values and principles. Accordingly, they worked on marketing such principles either superficially, or as one-sided disconnected ideology without insight in its sublime humanitarian significance that aims at promoting human dignity, liberating the individual from the constraints of intellectual cultural and economic dominance, and opening horizons of unlimited creativity, particularly as the individual is the core of society building.

The liberal ideology that makes promotion of the individual stature its focus implies in essence the liberation of the individual for the purpose of obtaining his freedom and exercising his rights, particularly freedoms of belief, thought and expression. For liberals, liberalism is the road to freedom whereas submission to our desires turns our humanitarian characteristics into a deficient imperfect entity. Self-liberation is the means for the expression of our humanitarian feelings, acceptance of others, and respect for pluralism and differences in opinions as factors of strength rather than weakness, and tools of building rather than tools of demolition. Slaves cannot be free, and the highest degree of slavery is to be slaves to our selfishness and melancholy obscurant thought that refuse the other on the basis of religion, culture, thought, color or race.

Liberal thought, in essence, is never constrained by intellectual, cultural or geographical limits, nor does it contradict freedom of belief or cultural pluralism. The Ten Commandments in the Old Testament aimed at liberating human beings, and called for the respect of humanity through the preservation of individual rights and dignity. In his mission and commandments, Jesus Christ also endeavors to liberate man from slavery: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach

the gospel to the poor, He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised”<sup>(1)</sup>. Liberty, in accordance with Christian ideology is related to truth and equality, as seen from Christ’s sayings: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”<sup>(2)</sup>, and “ Verily, Verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him”<sup>(3)</sup> The emergence of Bishops, known most for their contributions to liberation theology, such as Paul Gauthier, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and HelderCamara in the second half of the past century is an assertion of the religious mission of the liberation of the individual and the preservation of human dignity.

The Islamic doctrine, known as the mission of Mohammed, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, enhances liberation of the individual through good words and advice, and confirms human freedom and dignity, as well as individual and collective rights without coercion or force, as seen in the Koranic verses:

“Say, the Truth is from your Lord, let him who will believe, and let him who, will reject (it) <sup>(4)</sup>, and

“Therefore do thou remind for thou art one to remind”<sup>(5)</sup>, or in the aphorism declared by Omar Ibn Al-Khattab: “ How do you enslave people who were born free?”, which is a reflection of the spirit of the Islamic doctrine that esteems the individual, sanctifies human rights and freedoms and considers man the core of modern liberal thought.

In addition, liberal thought forms part of non-monotheistic religions including Hinduism and Buddhism where the former is characterized by comprehensive tolerance and ideological openness, while the latter promotes the values of love, tolerance and liberty through absolute commitment to the principles put forward by Buddha who argues that: Freedoms are of various forms with “ liberation from archaic falsehood and lies” at the forefront, “ control over our destiny” in the middle, and “to be a god” as the last form.

(1) Luke 4: 18

(2) John 8:32

(3) John 13:16

(4) Surat Al-Kahf, verse 29

(5) Surat Al-Ghashiya, verse 21

The abovementioned quotations indicate that the fanatic expiatory self-secluded advisory opinions we hear in different places on the refusal of the other, regression to the ages of injustice, obscurantism and religious conflicts are a form of distortion of religious beliefs that are based on the principles of love, liberty and justice, in favor of political and economic authorities to fulfill their interests and covetousness that are adversely affected by the exaltedness of liberty, international cooperation, or the increase in the share of individuals and peoples of bread, literacy, and free expression of ideas and beliefs. For these authorities, wars, famines, digging graves, selling deadly weapons destructive of the surrounding environment are a fundamental source of revival that provide them with the constituents of persistence and continuity.

Religion is compatible with liberalism as long as it adheres to the freedom of the individual, his conscience and human rights, but turns into an enemy when it deviates from its role in the liberation of individuals to become a coercive power that subjugates mind and creativity to the visions of religious men who assume control of truth and rightness, as was the case in Europe in the Middle Ages, or as it is evident in the racist advisory opinions of the rabbis who provoke violence and elimination of the other, or in the strict model of the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as other exclusionary models in Sudan, Somalia and Iran.

Liberalism is not confined to a particular culture. Compared to liberal Europeans who inspired the ideas of social contract between the ruler and the ruled, and the right to elect their representatives through democratic means from the ideas put forward by liberal theorists such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1712-1778), John Stuart Mill (1723-1790), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), the Arab liberals in the East have inspired liberal visions calling for the arbitration of reason, openness to other cultures and civilizations and respect for human will from innovators and reformers led by the Isolationists, IbnKhalidun (1332-1406), Rafa'a el-Tahtawi (1801-1873), Jamal-ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Abdurrahman al-Kawakbi (1849-1902), Mohammed Abdu (1849-1905), Mohammed HassaneinHeikal (1888-1956), Ahmed Lutfi al-Saied (1872-1963), Mahmud Abbas el-

Akkad (1889-1964), Taha Hussein ( 1889-1973), FarajFuda (1945-1992), Edward Said (1935- 2003), Mahmud Darwish ( 1941-2008), and Abdulla al-U'rwi (1933-.....) .

Regardless of the varied cultures of the abovementioned intellectuals, or the ages in which they lived, what brings them together is their support of boundless freedom, their visions on the respect of human freedom and of dignity, conscience and the right of the individual to express his opinions and practice his beliefs freely.

Compared to the global revolutions, of which the most prominent are the British revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1773) and the French Revolution (1798), adopted principles based on the ideas of liberal theorists led by John Locke, and inspired the values of “Freedom, equality, and fraternity” from their writings, the Arab Spring, a reaction of neoliberalism that occurs in the Arab world at present, to achieve social justice through fair socioeconomic government policies, aspires to more freedoms, the preservation of human dignity and liberation from authoritarian regimes that repressed freedoms and assumed control of truth and rightness throughout the last four decades.

Rather than being a synonym for chaos and indifference that turn life into a jungle where the strong imposes his control over the weak, and a culture of degradation and oppression penetrates all aspects of life, Individualism, as advocated by liberal theorists is a tool for the exaltation of the stature of man, consolidation of individual and collective rights and assertion of human dignity declared in the religious missions and in universal laws including “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of 1948, where Article 1 stipulates: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” <sup>(6)</sup>

Liberal values of any society are closely associated with the notions of identity, citizenship, freedom and political participation, equality, modernity and development, in addition to consolidation of equality of rights between men and women. Passivism and intellectual subordination

are antitheses of liberty which advocates liberation of the mind, writing and creativity and deep awareness of the self and social-cultural national realities. However, due to the fact that every nation has its own distinguished culture and values that are suited to a specific country in a specific era may be inappropriate for other nations or in other eras, liberalism never advocates the consolidation of Western values in our society, nor does it mean turning inward and the non-acceptance of the other.

The liberal ideology is pragmatic thought that surpasses the limits of philosophical theorization to the horizons of continuous achievement and evaluation, as well as concise assessment of levels to which the basic principles of liberalisms, particularly liberty, justice and pluralism are promoted, in addition to rejection of illusory manifestations of liberty that are still predominant in most authoritarian regimes of the third world. These principles may also be derived from the ideas put forward by the humanitarian intellectual, Ibn-Khaldun in his “Introduction” where he argues: “In speaking about marine life, it is insufficient to depict the waves of the sea or the decks, but you have to find out the multiple unfamiliar things, currents and beasts at the seabed, and to understand what is happening in the lowest cabin of the ship where slaves and seamen sit beside their oars for days pushing forward- with their arms- ships full of commodities, fortunes and passengers while heavily sweating and whips tear their bodies.”

Classical liberalism, concerned with free markets and the non-interference of the state- is not the sole form of liberalism since Neoliberalism- also known as Social Liberalism- was developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the ideas put forward by Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945), and advocated the establishment of the welfare state where the state is obliged to carry out certain obligations including creation of job opportunities, the delivery of social services such as health care and education, and the guarantee of civil rights for all citizens.

In accordance with the opinion polls conducted on liberal tendencies in

the Palestinian society, it was revealed that:

- Numerous social problems that have great impact on the attitudes of individuals and the adoption liberal values are still predominant
- 52% of the Palestinian families still live below poverty line.
- 62% of the Palestinian youth have lost confidence in political parties and believe in the absence of personal freedom, freedom of press and freedom to establish associations.

The restriction of creativity and public liberties, the Israeli occupation that has lasted for more than forty-five years, in addition to the political divide between the two parts of the country that has contributed to the aggravation of the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions form a frustrating environment in which the margins of freedom and creativity constrict, thus paving the way for the establishment of an environment that promotes frustration, radicalism as well as striving for sustenance.

On the other hand, tolerance and acceptance of different cultures and beliefs are two main characteristics of the Palestinian youth. It is difficult, for instance, to differentiate between Muslims, Christians and Samaritans in Palestinian institutions of higher education and public associations. Furthermore, mutual visits to reciprocate congratulations during religious feast days represent a social obligation and a deeply-rooted cultural tradition prevalent among Palestinians of various religious affiliations, and not restricted to political cultural elites or notables.

The aspiration of the Palestinian youth to promote democracy and freedom of expression, or to terminate political divide was evident in the popular field activities organized by the youth in which the motto "People want to terminate occupation and political divide" was raised. Such activities are conclusive evidence of the liberal values engraved in the hearts of the youth who were able to exercise freedom of speech as soon as an appropriate political environment was established.

Non-violent resistance against the occupation and its illegitimate policies, particularly the construction of the apartheid separation wall and settlements, in addition to the policy of daily systematic obliteration

of Arab landmarks in Jerusalem, and the erection of military checkpoints that restrict the movement of people and goods, falls within the framework of liberal thought, whether it be by non-violent resistance compliant with the international law and the right of people to resist the occupier, or through the exercise of the philosophy of resistance, which is one of the more sublime values of liberalism. Albeit liberalism advocates tolerance, pluralism and acceptance of the other, it never implies passivism, defeatism or submission to oppression where occupation and denial of basic rights constitute two of its most stringent and offensive forms, nor does it imply enhancement of the instincts of hatred, violence and antagonism.

In conclusion, the notion of liberalism remains truncate, deficient, and void of content unless accompanied by the right of peoples to self-determination and to obtain their rights, as well as the right of every citizen to secure sustenance and clean water, a confident protected pen that never deviates due to censorship, a book that promotes critical thinking and affiliation, culture of citizenship, in addition to awareness of belonging to the homeland and to the international community through solidarity. Freedom is the sun that must gleam in every soul; those deprived of its rays live in darkness of the dark.

## **Breaking from tradition: why Palestinians should embrace liberalism**

**Jamal Saad**



**From Bethlehem**

**holds a BA in politics and society from the University of London**

**he is currently studying an MSc in Middle East in global politics: Islam, conflict and development, also at the University of London.**

**He a co-founding trustee of Ahdaf, a British-registered charity supporting Palestinian students in the West Bank and Gaza.**

My very earliest memory is that I had a pair of second-hand shoes, but one had a big hole at the front. I was very embarrassed wearing them as I knew that my identity as someone who is poor will be obvious to everyone. This was my first encounter with my identity living in Deheishe refugee camp. At that point I didn't understand that I'm a refugee. And not just any refugee, but a Palestinian refugee living under the constant threat of dispossession. As a youth I experienced a conflict of identities: poor, refugee, Muslim, socialist, activist, and so on. These labels defined me to others and were imposed on me, just like the Israeli military occupation.

For me, true liberalism is my "rational desires".<sup>1</sup> It's not imposed on me, nor can it be imposed on anyone. Liberalism is not tyranny, but rather only liberty can truly ward off tyranny.<sup>2</sup> Liberalism is the identity that I have chosen to live my life by. Therefore, I always say proudly that I am a liberal human being. But what do I mean by liberalism? This is what I intend to demonstrate in this paper. I will offer a definition of such a broad and changeable (time and place)<sup>3</sup> concept, focusing on political and social liberalism, and briefly touching on economic liberalism. My context is the political development of the Palestinian conflict and the wider Arab uprisings across the Middle East.

I will argue in this paper that the political doctrine of liberalism provides a solid foundation for a free civil society, an accountable state through the separation of power and restrictions of the use and abuse of power, developed and modern institutions, liberty for individuals and groups, property rights, free speech and, most importantly, justice and equality for all citizens with no discrimination against colour, gender, faith, sexual orientation or ethnicity. Social, political and economic relations between individuals and the state are managed by the rule of law: equality for all before the law, as it is no longer appropriate for the state to enforce a particular lifestyle upon the population as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Sami Zubaida argues that Western support to Arab regimes drives the use

1 Outhwaite 2003 p. 347

2 Paul 2011 p. xi

3 Outhwaite 2003 p. 346

4 Smith, Miers 2011 p. 14

of oppression to maintain their power.<sup>5</sup> But Brian Whitaker argues that government is the product of the society it governs.<sup>6</sup> Both arguments demonstrate that political autocracy dominates in Arab countries and a complete lack of liberalism. However, Arab countries today are witnessing unprecedented political transformation; the collapse of old (traditional) states and the hopes of founding new (modern) regimes. However, a common feature—or phenomenon—dominates the political and social transformation across the region: the people’s demand for democracy and political representation as the route to a better future. The realisation of people-power as a counter-force to state despotism is a positive sign that should be encouraged and supported. At the same time, the limited call for liberalisation, in my view, is negative and dangerous, and clearly shows the lack of understanding of liberalism and its power to transform state and society into the modern era. In other words, what we’re witnessing in the Arab world primarily focuses on transformation of political power (regimes to democracy) and the lack of social and political development (liberalisation of state and society). The former is a top-down approach, whereas the later is bottom-up: big society and small state.

Why is liberalism so important? Craig and Tom argue that liberalism and not democracy lies behind the progress of Western society: “The point of stressing this is that most of what is valuable in the political order achieved by the West is actually a result of liberalism rather than democracy.”<sup>7</sup> This shouldn’t be a surprise. Aristotle and John Stuart Mills, among other great philosophers, argued that democracy is the rule of the majority and hence the route to tyranny. Therefore we should focus our work (individuals and organisations) towards establishing a liberal family, community, society and state through the adaptation of liberal values and ideas. The call for democracy (rule by the people) is mainly deciding who should rule through electing representatives in parliament. But this will never guarantee individual liberty, development and progress.

Let’s take the experience of the Palestinians parliamentary elections in

5 Zubaida 1989 p. 126

6 Whitaker 2009 p. 11

7 Smith, Miers 2011 p. 5

2006 as an example. Hamas won the majority of seats but it led to division among the Palestinian political establishment. It's important to remember that Arab countries have a consistent record of failure<sup>8</sup> as although they hold elections, the results only consolidate undemocratic regimes.

Therefore, through a liberal political system with minimal state interference, a pluralist independent society and a free market is guaranteed. This is the foundation for human development and progress towards modernity. "Only this path leads to the unleashing of human energies that build civilisation."<sup>9</sup> Moving away from the constraints of traditional order,<sup>10</sup> a classical liberal believes that minimal state interference guarantees freedom, which leads to development. From this perspective, the lack of freedom and sovereign independence in Palestine, attributable to the Israeli military occupation, lies behind our lack of development. Military checkpoints, political assassinations, imprisonment, home demolitions, and so on--these tools are used systematically to prevent social, economic and political development in Palestine<sup>11</sup> As a result, religious radical groups established themselves as an alternative for the uncertainty and fear created in people due to the occupation. At this juncture Edward Said called for the liberation of our consciousness and our minds before we take our battle to the street.<sup>12</sup>

Liberalism is primarily concerned about individual rights: a right to do something that no other individual, group or an organisation has a right to interfere with as long as that action doesn't violate others' rights. This was summed up by Jean-Jacques Rousseau who said that liberty is to not be subject to another.<sup>13</sup> It is also the struggle against oppression, primarily from the authorities. For John Locke, individuals form governments to protect and govern through the rule of law. Individuals also have the right to overthrow and change government if it violates the rule of law. So home demolitions and imprisonment, two examples of the occupier's policy, are a direct violation of individual liberty. Therefore, resisting the

8 The Economist 2009 p. 11

9 Paul 2011 p. xi

10 Outhwaite 2003 p. 346

11 Russell Tribunal on Palestine 2011

12 Said 2000 p. xviii

13 Rousseau 1973

occupation is an individual's natural right. For Locke, to be free is our natural condition, a demand of reason and intrinsic value.<sup>14</sup>

In liberalism, laws are the agreement between legislator and citizen, so law should rule, not the individual.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, liberalism and laws go hand-in-hand as laws make social life possible without intervention.<sup>16</sup> Individuals have responsibility for their actions and a duty to not violate the rights of others. What's important here is the universal development of the language of individual and human rights, culminating in the creation of a universal legal order, known as human rights laws, which bind us all equally. The advancement of rational liberal thinking at the expense of inherited ideas of religion is seen mainly in Western society and underpins its progress. The development of international human rights organisations and laws are fed by liberal thoughts of universalism, equality, justice and freedom. Even a realist like Hobbes argued that where there's no law, there's no injustice.<sup>17</sup>

Sadly, not all states of the world are liberal, or even recognise or apply international law. Let's take Israel as an example. Israel has two sets of laws: one concerns Jewish citizens (civil legal system) and the other, Palestinians under occupation (military legal system). "The entire criminal legal system—its legislation, policies and tribunals—depends on the nationality of the perpetrator and of the victim."<sup>18</sup> Israel rejects United Nation's resolution 194 which calls for the full right of Palestinian refugees (of which I am one) to return to their land and property. Ongoing settlement expansion and construction of the wall have had a devastating impact on Palestinian social and economic life. The wall was condemned by the International Court of Justice which called for its immediate removal. Again, Israel has refused.<sup>19</sup>

At this point some might argue that international organisations and institutions, and therefore liberalism, are weak and pointless. But I say it's important to remember that liberalism is a dialogue, an adaptation

14 Outhwaite 2003 p. 351

15 Smith, Miers 2011 p. 7

16 Ibid p. 8

17 Hobbes 1996

18 Baker, Matar 2011 p. 136

19 White 2009

and a transformation. It's certainly not about war, imposition or exploitation. International organisations mediate between states within the international system, representing the type of values that should inspire the transformation of individuals and states from ethnic to civic, and from tradition to modern values. These actions should be taken by everyone, state and individual, locally, nationally and internationally. Then, and only then, can respect of human rights become universal, empowering international organisations. Then, and only then, can I return to my stolen property. It's not through violence, as history teaches us that violence doesn't resolve disagreements but always leads to more violence.<sup>20</sup> Only by adopting liberal values of justice, equality and freedom, can peace and dialogue then occur between equals.

Critics of liberalism differ but at the heart of it is that liberalism is based on self-interest which leads to selfishness, greed and, as Karl Marx argued, to class conflict. But Fraser argued that Smith's concept of self-interest is the 'engine' of society and lies at the heart of market relations and interaction. Individuals equally have the right to generate wealth, which in turn will benefit the whole nation and support its progress.<sup>21</sup> Even so, the welfare state was founded in liberal societies so that the less fortunate are better off than under other social political systems or theocratic governments. So far studies show that people's living standards are higher in liberal states and poverty is mainly caused by state intervention in the individual's liberty to follow their interest.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, being liberal is to be a rational human being and to do what's right because it's the correct thing to do; to be a responsible member of the greater community; and to interact and build relations based on the exchange of knowledge, information and ideas. To be liberal is to be tolerant and accept differences and disagreements. Liberalism for me as a Palestinian is the hope for a better future without occupation and military rule, but this requires critical thinking and change in consciousness. Edward Said understood the power of people as the ultimate force for

20 Kurlansky 2006 p. 85

21 Fraser 1973

22 Collin 1979 p. 18

change: “To begin the changes is to change the battlefield from the street to the mind, to refuse to accept clichés and ideological constructions, to speak out and tell the truth. The struggle not only against Israeli and Arab tyranny and injustice. It is for our rights as people to move into modern world, a way from fear, ignorance and superstition of backward-looking religion, and the basic injustice of dispossession... Our fundamental issue is the right to free expression.”<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, an education system based on critical thinking, liberal and human values is fundamental in building a functioning liberal society and professional associations that aren’t controlled by either powerful families or political parties.

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<sup>23</sup> Said 2000 p. 56

**The Need for liberalism in the Palestinian society**  
**A perspective of the youth**  
**Freedom is the nucleus of liberalism**

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Being the goal that each individual aspires to and needs to exercise, the word “freedom” has undoubtedly become the talk of the town all over the world. Albeit it is an authentic humane revolutionary and emotional term that has no limits, it should not be exercised without restriction. Each individual has the right to do what he wants to so long as his actions neither infringe upon the freedoms of others, nor violate the law.

There is no consensus among various philosophers, intellectuals, theorists and writers on a single comprehensive inclusive definition of the term since each of them defined it differently. Poets write beautiful poems and painters paint artistic portraits as methods of giving free rein to the mind, to express their opinions, inner feelings, humanitarianism and aesthetics. However, compared to a liberal society that due to its rational approach permits the exercise of freedoms of art and literary, an authoritarian society governed by societal or religious traditions or beliefs deprives the individuals of exercising such liberties.

The British philosopher John Stuart Mill argues: “ In the life of each individual there is a prohibited area that the state has no right to step on; it is “ the home of freedom”, which reflects the individual’s actions that may have impact on the lives or activities of others in accordance with their own will. These actions include the freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of opinion and publication, freedom of choice—particularly the right to choose the lifestyle – and freedom of assembly in case such meetings do not hurt others.

Man was born free, and freedom for him is like air and water, an element that he cannot live without, as BaltizarGartisian argues: “Liberty is more precious than any grace that tempts us to abandon.”

In considering the prosperity predominating in Western society, we realize that such progress in all aspects of life would not have been reached if those societies had not adopted the doctrine of liberal enlightenment as a method to create their own world, or permitted community members to exercise their freedoms widely, regarding liberty as the basis for modernity, and personal and community development.

To permit the exercise of liberties in a society, the following fundamental principles should be taken into account

1. As tyranny is the opposite of freedom, the exercise of liberties requires the termination of tyranny. For when tyranny predominates, there would be neither liberty nor progress, nor would the seeds of goodness germinate.
2. Since liberalism makes the individual its focus, liberty dictates a move towards rationalism and knowledge, as well as liberation from domineering restrictive thought, whether it be of religious, social or political nature.
3. To be liberal means that you have to believe in the fundamental liberal values, of which the most prominent are: tolerance and pluralism, acceptance of the other and freedom of opinion, equality between men and women and justice. In addition, consolidation of human rights in the Arab and Palestinian societies should turn into a prevalent culture that constitutes the basis for democratic transformation, development, and establishment of democratic societies.

I would like to indicate here the intellectuals whose ideas on enlightenment and modernity had an evidential impact on community life in the Arab world in various historical periods, notably the Arab philosopher IbnRushd, the social reformer Abdul Rahman al-Kawakbi who called for liberty and the elimination of injustice, as well as Muhammad Abdu and al-Afghani, ShibliShmeil and Anton Farah, to name only few. These intellectuals have also called for the review of traditional ancestral religious thought. In Palestine, similarly, numerous liberal-minded intellectuals are credited for the development of intellectual social life and the unprecedented liberal cultural literary renaissance, of whom the most notable are HishamSharabi and Edward Said preceded by NajibNassar and Bandali al-Jawzi who put forward an early model of modernity that contributed to the development of intellectual social life in Palestine, in addition to Khalil al-Skakini who advocated renewal and the abandonment of old traditions in arguing that: “ It is time for humanity to abandon the ancient traditions of aggression, unlawful usurpation (of rights and land) as well as destruction, and adopt the new liberal approaches of peacefulness and reconciliation, haughtiness and construction.”

The establishment of a civil democratic state, in which rationalism, equality and justice predominate, requires the separation between religion and the state, which constitute the essence of liberal thought that should be adopted by all Arab countries. Accordingly, to create a civil democratic regime, a state concerned with the interests of community members, has to prevent the interference of religion in politics, or vice versa, in all state agencies and systems so as to ensure human rights and civil liberties at all political, social and economic levels. This democratic notion should be realized by any Arab regime calling for the exercise of liberties or for development and progress. By contrast, Islamic movements that govern in the name of religion would intrude religious rulings in the management of the affairs of life and the rule of society, which means that such movements would be a key barrier that hinders the development of the lives of individuals and their identities. In this respect, Anton Farah argues: “The interference of religion in politics would corrupt religion by pushing it towards the field of daily settlements and political myths and conflicts, thus making it lose its purity and innocence.”

Citizens in the Arab society in general, and the Palestinian society in particular, are in need of a revolutionary system of thought with secularism, democracy and liberalism as its core, for the acquisition of knowledge required for the building of a civil state, liberation of the individuals from political, religious and social despotism, and promotion of the values of human dignity and rationalism, liberties and equality, as well as respect and acceptance of the other. In his article entitled “For a secular humanitarianism”, BurhanGhaliun argues: “Unless the values of freedom, equality and justice are protected, secularism in the Arab countries can turn today into a doctrine of subjugation and coercion, or one that legitimize collective subdual. (BurhanGhaliun, For a secular humanitarianism, September 15, 2007)

### **The Palestinian society in the light of the Arab revolutions and the newly born freedom**

Undoubtedly, the Arab Spring revolutions have surprised the whole world like an unexpected natural disaster that has heavily shaken the

entity of the Arab authoritarian regimes, announcing the birth of freedom in these countries.

As we all know, the Arab Spring by which all Arab countries were affected at varying degrees started in Tunisia, the country of Jasmine in September, 2011, and then moved to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria .

Mohammad AlbuAzizi, the symbol for revolutions and the Arab Spring sacrificed himself for the defense of human rights and the preservation of human dignity. By burning himself, he revenged himself and millions of the Arab youth living under omnipotent authoritarian regimes where socioeconomic conditions deteriorated and human dignity as well as liberties were crushed. This young man expressed the inner feelings of millions of the Arab youth who either remained silent or just mumbled some of their opinions due to the terrorism by the tyrannical Sultan. His death generated revolutions and agitated the anger of millions of youths who are calling for the obtainment of rights and the preservation of dignity.

These revolutions, which have really affected the Palestinians, were just a light breeze that led the Palestinian youth to form social movements to protest against the critical situation Palestinian territories experience due to the continuous violation of human rights by the Israeli occupation authorities, and the political divide between the two largest political factions. The political divide and the deteriorated political, social, economic and cultural conditions made the Palestinians lose confidence in the Palestinian political parties and system, thus unwilling to participate in political activities due to factionalism, partisanship, authoritarianism and the decline in the exercise of freedoms and preservation of human rights and democracy.

## **A Future Outlook**

Here I will try to depict the situation I hope to see in the Arab world and the Palestinian society in the near future. First of all I think that all community members are responsible for changing the frustrating bitter

situation to a situation advocating rationalism and modernity, as well as the

preservation of human dignity. However, in doing so the following points should be taken into account:

- We are in urgent need for intensive review of curricula for being traditional and lack of materials that encourage creative thinking and rational enlightenment. Education is an essential mechanism for socialization and change; it is a tool that enables families to teach their children rational liberal values including freedoms, tolerance, equality between men and women, and acceptance of others away from deadly racism, sectarianism and intolerance.
- As the majority of the Palestinian youth believes in the need for individuals to exercise their freedoms including political liberty, freedom of the press, as well as other cultural and social freedoms, they will reject any system based on a particular ideology regardless of its form, for most of the ideologies restrict freedoms, direct individuals to a specific destination, open the door to racism and sectarianism, and create a self-secluded obscurantist society, just like the ghetto.
- The political regimes in the Arab countries in general and in Palestine in particular should realize that all nations yearn for the preservation of human dignity and the exercise of all forms of liberties without suppression or repression by the security agencies. Why is our society still subject to oppression in the era of democracy and preservation of human rights? Do I not have the right to exercise my freedoms as a human being? And announce to the Arab regimes that it is time to terminate all forms of suppression and the violation of freedoms and privacy while flooding community members with the darkness of ignorance.

In his poem entitled “Suppression” (forbidden to be published in the Arab countries), the Arab poet NizarQabbani says:

I am a citizen, afraid to sit in a café  
 Since the security agencies may come out  
 From the darkness of the cup

I am a citizen afraid to approach my wife  
 Since the detective may watch the place

I am a citizen  
 From a country called "Suppression"

- Educated elites should be concerned with the youth and involve them in issues advocated by rational liberal thought including citizenship and the development of a liberal democratic society among other issues that are closely related to their lives, for if participation in conferences is restricted to the educated elites, it would be difficult to disseminate knowledge and raise public awareness of rational liberal thought.
- The Palestinian youth has to dispose of the patriarchal structure rooted in our culture, for such a structure controls the mind, underestimates and restricts its capabilities, but simultaneously is afraid of the awakening of the mind. I really wonder why the Arab community is still unable to overcome the ordeal of the abandonment of ancestral traditions that keep its members enveloped with backwardness and reactionary, incapable of adopting modern rational tendencies. Certainly, the Arab mentality still needs a long time to leave its crisis behind.

To avoid the error committed by previous generations in focusing on the political dimension while neglecting the social and cultural aspects of life, liberation should be inclusive, where every individual starts by evaluating himself though raising the following questions:

- To what degree does he believe in the values that make him free and rational?
- To what degree is he tolerant, whether with himself or with others?
- What kind of societies does he want to live in? And
- Is the existing regime in his society a secular-liberal, or an ancestral-traditional one?

In conclusion, I would like to indicate to the aphorism announced by Gibran Khalil Gibran: "You will not be free unless longing for freedom turns into a burden that disturbs you, or when you stop praising freedom as if it were a target or a complementary need."

## **Liberalism**

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Even though man was born free, the concept of liberalism, which implies freedom of choice, freedom of speech, and freedom of action, has come into existence in consequence of restrictions imposed on such liberties.

In the search for underlying causes of differences between peoples in different countries, away from debates, visions or elaborate analysis, it would become evident that the basis of differences between individuals in particular and people in general are attributed to restrictions imposed on political, economic, social and religious activities, in addition to the denial of plurality of opinions and attitudes in contrary to the natural or universal principles of diversity and integration as the basis for development, innovation and progress.

Respect for differences among human beings, protection from coercion, control or dominance, in addition to preservation of rights and autonomy, are some of the principles advocated by liberals. However, as liberalism is concerned with human behavior rather than spiritual concerns, it is regarded as different from radicalism in that it is neither a religion or a doctrine, or even a substitute of any of them, nor does it contradict religious beliefs. This philosophical theory, namely its principles of justice, respect for others, freedom of expression, free elections, and preservation of the individual's personality without prejudice to the freedoms of others, is an intellectual trend accumulated in the human mind since the primitive ages up to the Renaissance and modern ages as a solution to humanitarian dilemmas.

Liberalism came into existence in Europe in the fourteenth century as a reaction to ecclesiastic persecution against scientists, and political economical despotism practiced by the nobility and feudal lords. However, regardless of motives, places or time, the new intellectual trend originated as a reaction to all forms of preponderant governing, repression and authority.

In both its forms: classical liberalism and Neo-Liberalism (also known as Socialist Liberalism), the term is regarded as more inclusive than

democracy. A liberal state is based on pluralism, freedom of nomination and free elections, as well as protection of all citizens regardless of their affiliations. Separation of powers, as implied in liberalism, ensures the non-dominance of any power over the other, and provides protection against the fulfillment of one's personal interests at the expense of others', until justice and equality prevail. Economically, on the other hand, the term implies free markets and free trade, not through anarchy, but through ensuring selling, purchase and investment opportunities without the interference of the state except in terms of delivering social services or facilitating free trade for those in need.

The appeal for absolute freedom never endangers others' freedoms, as some argue, for liberalism comprises principles of humanism, rationalism and relativism. Liberals argue that mind and soul represent decisive criteria for man's choices. They believe that unless man resorts to mind, soul, conscience and morals as sources of judgment, he would neither attain his own freedom, nor respect the rights of others.

Along with political and religious liberties, free trade and freedoms of movement and ownership, liberalism emphasizes personal liberty and security, freedoms of education and labor, in addition to freedom of press and equality before law.

Liberalism is neither a monopolized commodity nor is it controlled by specific conditions. Due to its power to adapt to the standards adopted by various individuals, or the traditions and practices of societies, as well as the benefits it brings about for its supporters, it is regarded as a flexible mechanism, convenient for all citizens, societies, classes and religions.

In addition to the most prominent liberal theorists including Frédéric Bastiat, Friedrich Von Hayek, Friedrich Nauman, John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith among others, many of the pioneers of the Islamic orientation, such as Faraj Fudeh, Jamal Al-Banna, Mohammad Al-Qabanji, Iyad Jamal Al-Din, Sayed Al-Qummi, Ahmad Subhi Mansour, Taha Hussein and Mohammad Abdo gained reputation for their liberal thoughts.

Locke, widely known as the Father of Classical Liberalism, argued that

everyone has a natural right to defend his “life, liberty, or possessions”. Unlike other liberal theorists as Jeremy Bentham who regarded law as a violation that restricts liberalism, Locke advocated legislation, but assured that government regulations shall receive approval of the citizens. However, regardless differences in perspectives, liberalism in general considers legislation the means to protect the activities of individuals, and to ensure their rights, rather than restricting their liberties, activities or attitudes, behaviors and choices. Such regulations, accordingly, can be developed in accordance with previous experiences and shall be vulnerable to development or modification so as to serve the community and its members, and be commensurate with time, place, circumstances and individual’s needs, and above all bring justice when applied.

Mill, with his famous predicament: “Free competition is restricted by absolute evil, and released by abundant sweeping welfare”, which depicts the historical era in which he lived, also argues that: “If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.”

Even though “liberty” is the cornerstone and static mission of liberalism under all circumstances, Arab and Western liberal theorists, supporters or even opponents, entertained contradictory views. Therefore, the term remains a philosophical theory whose terminology has changed over time, and come to mean different things to different groups in different places. Such discrepancy provoked confusion about its goals, and created so many opponents. In his book “Significance of Liberty”, Al-U’rwi argues that “For liberals, liberty is the starting point and extreme limit, the incentive and ultimate goal, as it is the origin and outcome of human life. It is the sole intellectual system that exclusively seeks to depict free human activity, explicate its aspects and provide comments.”

Liberalism cannot be fully understood if the term neoliberalism is left out. The term, first used in 1939 in a meeting held by German-speaking liberal economists, of whom the most prominent were: Alexander Rüstow, Friedrich Hayek, and Wilhelm Röpke, included economic, political and social issues as free markets, representative democracy and

freedom of individuals. Contrary to the goals nominated by classical liberals, neoliberals aspired to empower the state, protect the market from distortion exerted by speculations and monopoly as means to avoid chaos which prevailed in the 1920s and 1930s.

Liberal feminism, a significant concept in liberalism, primarily focuses on women's ability to make wise decisions, and their right to attain their liberty. Liberal feminists, of whom Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the most popular, argue that our society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men. They call for enhancement of women's role in the academy, the forum and the marketplace among other spheres. So, they work hard to emphasize the equality of men and women through political and legal reform, so as to ensure women's rights to administer their own affairs without outer control, despotism or coercion.

Many intellectuals and writers who advocate liberal thought, the principle of liberty, pluralism and intercultural dialogue, have emerged in Palestine, the country that embraces a mixture of religious, intellectual and political currents. These intellectuals have liberated themselves from the circle of intellectual stagnation towards an enlightened mind in an attempt to raise awareness to transfer the community from subordination into creativity, while maintaining the essence, civilization, and deep-rooted history of the Palestinian Arab land.

Liberal contributions along with societal change towards a more sophisticated modern style while maintaining the identity of the individual as abovementioned shall include all aspects of life to ensure advancement. However, fulfillment of such goals requires too many efforts:

- Awareness of the value of liberties specifically freedom of speech and opinion, and respect for free expression should be highlighted as a first step.
- Community activities that ensure the right of each individual to develop his own personality, self and objectives have to be promoted.
- Justice, equality and tolerance have to prevail.

- Racism based on place of residence, tribalism or religious affiliations shall be fought vigorously, in addition to coercion and exertion of pressure.
- Individual rights have to be protected without being prejudiced for the majority, or the most influential party.
- Human dignity and sense of self should be given priority
- Multiplicity and differences of views have to become part of our values.
- Cultural interaction with other societies and cultures should be encouraged to enhance cultural awareness and enlightenment, and to promote constructive dialogues so as to benefit from the experience of democratic societies through mutual influence, on the basis of unity of hopes and aspirations. However, such goals are not expected to be reached unless we find out the real significance of liberty and ways of practicing it, which never contradicts the principles of any doctrine or creed, but simply represents a way of life that ensures optimum life for individuals.

In the light of the political and economic dilemmas, as well as the pluralism that Palestinian territories witness, a better future can never be reached except through respecting pluralism. Accordingly, we have to consolidate the concept of acceptance and integration with the other in order to achieve common goals, namely, liberty, security and world peace.

## **What does liberalism mean to Palestinian Youth?**

**Ghadeer Ghaleb Ghuneim**



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Liberalism, which is neither an Arab nor a modern term, is a synonym for freedom. The term originated in Europe and USA founded on ideas of individualism, liberty, acceptance of others, as well as ideological, intellectual, organizational and factional pluralism. The multiple notions approached by liberal theorists suggest that liberalism and democracy are interdependent, particularly as democracy means “rule by people” or “governance for the benefit of the public”, in which good and poor performance are determined in accordance with the “political culture” of society, a term which refers to the attitudes, beliefs and feelings that regulate political activities and specify the obligations and rules that direct behaviors.

Consistency in the political cultures of the various segments of society including the elite, youth and adults, countrymen and townsmen creates homogeneity between liberalism and democracy where liberalism, in most cases, supports weaknesses of the democratic process. Liberalism, for instance, is concerned with the rights of minorities that may be neglected in a democratic system due to its focus on the interests of the majority. The notion of civil state supported by liberalism has also enabled democratic systems to integrate different cultures under the umbrella of citizenship.

However, some countries face a crisis in applying certain liberal concepts such as the case of the application of the notion of “civil state” in Israeli, or other certain democratic principles in Algeria and Tunisia in the era of the previous government. The situation becomes more complicated when some communities, such as the Palestinian society endeavor to give precedence to liberal values over democratic principles as a means to occupy individuals with personal freedom, thus leaving them with no time to think about political concerns or the social systems that oppress their liberties.

Serious endeavors are made within the Palestinian society for the realization of an intellectual ideology developed to liberate the individual from political and socio-economic constraints, and to protect him/her “from dying while s/he is still alive”. The establishment of a liberal society promotes a new different situation in which the individual becomes an

effective participant, intellectual, reader, as well as a speaker of free vision and insight.

As liberalism, in its thought and practice is a human product, we, as Palestinian youths are capable of developing a liberal formula appropriate for our society and its privacy without being compelled to apply Western liberalism. Such a formula may take the form of a democratic system with liberal trends to protect individual freedoms within the framework of common national interests, taking into account the need to avoid the theoretical and practical crises created by liberalism. However, in practice, no individual has the right to apply the principles of liberalism in accordance with his desires regarding such an action part of his personal freedom since common national interests include recognition of others' thoughts and political tendencies as well as respect for all political frameworks in accordance with a complementary formula that realizes public utility.

The political divide which we slipped to in the previous period has a negative impact on the application of liberal thought in the future, and has contributed to the demolition of the Palestinian deeply-rooted revolutionary legacy of the acceptance of the other. This stage of division is among the most crucial factors that contribute to a decline in the level of application of liberal thought in real life, for internal divide may have an impact equivalent to the impact of occupation, or even more profound in some cases, particularly as it creates a state of lack of confidence in political participation and factional activities, albeit such practices were for a long period an outlet to a large segment of youth. As a result, the Palestinian arena experienced deficiency in freedom of opinion and expression due to the state of terror and confusion created by the political divide.

The intellectual structure of the Palestinian youth aspires to create a new reality based on positive approximation among various political currents, along with rejection of division or rushing behind intolerant factional thought. For this purpose, it continuously endeavors to look for a systematic relationship, albeit partial or incomplete, between the individual and

the state. Palestinian decision-makers, therefore, have to realize the subjective psychological incentives that motivate the Palestinian youth to participate in political and societal activities, particularly their exigent desires to take part in drawing up future plans.

The term “youth” here refers to all young people, whether they are craftsmen, laborers or university graduates. For how can we pass on principles and values of liberal thought to Palestinian young peddlers exhibiting their wares on pavements, eligible for political participation and electoral voting? Indeed, each individual should realize that s/he is a responsible decision maker in his field regardless of the social position s/he occupies. Such participation may be promoted through informative enlightenment and the development of mechanisms including the media and government institutions that have to play a crucial vital role as channels through which youth are capable of expressing their opinions.

In addressing various segments of population including craftsmen and laborers, the notion of “self”, concerns and a degree of privacy have to be taken into account, particularly as members of each segment have their own social conditions, economic concerns, hopes and aspirations to exceed the socio-economic situation dominated by poverty and unemployment, for such issues occupy the lion’s share in the minds of the Palestinian youth, especially as securing daily sustenance is more urgent than thinking about liberal principles. In addition, the economic sanctions imposed by the Israeli occupation, namely restrictions on movement and labor resulted in the confinement of economic activities to limited areas, which in turn contributed to an increase in unemployment rates within the Palestinian work force. Even the agricultural sector that supplies the Palestinian market with basic commodities is not excluded from the Israeli violent practices of land confiscation, uprooting of trees, and the prohibition of farmers from accessing their lands. Such deliberate restrictions have contributed to a decrease in opportunities for economic success at both the individual and collective levels, which in itself contradicts the respect for human freedoms in general and freedom of movement and labor in particular.

The struggle of Palestinians and their government to secure economic protection, services and commodities, in addition to institution building and investment promotion requires first and foremost the establishment of security and safety, taking into account the limited capacities of the Palestinian National Authority and the incapability of Palestinian institutions to develop solutions for the economic problems predominant in their society, particularly as Palestinian economy is still to a great extent linked to the agenda of donor states and agencies. Noteworthy here is that the new phenomenon of economic oligarchy, i.e. the growth of an economic elite, that the Palestinian society witnesses nowadays, has contributed to prevalence of poverty and a widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Decision makers should legislate antitrust laws and the law of minimum wages to restrict monopoly of business which is regarded a violation of economic liberty, and protect a large segment of population including laborers from injustice and persecution. Up till now, many university graduates working in private companies for more than eight hours per day, albeit they hold scientific degrees, are paid an amount of not more than 1800 NIS or approximately \$500 per month. Noteworthy here is that the economic factor is among the most crucial factors that either promote or hinder the predominance of liberal principles, particularly as securing human basic needs is an incentive for further thinking about other affairs of life.

As the individual is the focus of liberal principles, particularly freedom of opinion, rejection of all forms of social, religious and racial discrimination, as well as the establishment of justice and equality, the application of such principles is expected to establish justice and equality, promote harmony among dispersed affiliations, and contribute to rejection of discrimination based on place of residence and political affiliation.

In accordance with such principles, discrimination dominated in Palestinian territories between city dwellers, villagers and refugees, residents of northern, southern and middle districts, or between inhabitants of the West Bank, Gazans and Jerusalemites, refugees and non-refugees,

and returnees and non-returnees, holders of blue identity cards and green identity cards should terminate, and Palestinians would be able to realize that they are citizens of one nation. Palestinians affiliating with various political parties including Hamas and Fateh among others would also have equal rights and obligations. Albeit differences in opinions are a healthy constructive phenomenon, as evident in the Koranic verse: “O, mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other ( Surat Al-Hujurât, verse 13), such differences should not result in disputes, for we are unable to endure the burden of new conflicts. Indeed, we are still in need for great efforts to fuse the various segments of society in the crucible of citizenship.

Albeit Palestinian political parties frequently praise liberal principles and values, theoretical allegations contradict realities. The failure of the rising political currents in the acquisition of public confidence has contributed to evident growth in the popularity of Islamic movements, and created competition that often resulted in conflicts. The escalation of popularity of Islamic movements is ascribed to the failure of other political parties to ensure freedoms for citizens. Compared to the promotion of personal freedom, particularly with regard to daily usual affairs, political liberty is still strictly restricted, particularly as individuals are still prohibited from interfering in methods of governance adopted by various political parties who absolutely reject criticism in this respect.

The public confidence and support the Islamic movements have lately gained is attributed to their methods of governance regardless of the deficiencies in their platforms. However, the issue that provokes skepticism and distrust in the policies of Islamic parties is their practices of imposing restriction on personal freedom particularly with regard to the prohibition of women from holding leading positions and forcing them to wear veils, in addition to the indistinct Islamic vision of the civil state as evident from the disturbing governance model in the Gaza Strip which reflects lack of experience. Therefore, regardless of their success or failure, which is determined through the democratic process of elections, Islamic movements are demanded to illustrate their policies

and procedures on how to establish a civil state, as they also have to remember that the abandonment of the democratic values they called for in their election campaign hinders their access to power.

For the abovementioned reasons, Palestinians today are looking for a third choice through which personal freedom for all citizens is ensured, and a real democratic liberal system is adopted to protect and preserve public liberties and supremacy of law, enhance respect for other religions and doctrines, suppress corruption and restrict sterile religious controversy that does not feed hungry mouths. Albeit religion is required as a means for the strengthening of determination and the enrichment of spirit, the denial of other religions should be absolutely rejected, for liberties would become meaningless in case the freedom of belief is denied. Every citizen, regardless of his religious beliefs and symbols should have the freedom to perform his rituals as long as such practices neither restrict the freedom of others nor harm their feelings.

State-building requires immediate abolition of all forms of discrimination, particularly as we endure various forms of discriminatory practices by the Israelis.

**The Spring of Liberalism has blossomed out  
To announce the victory of Liberties**

**Amal Awadallah Abdallah al-A'raj**



**Place of Birth: Gaza**

**Studied: Public Relations at Al Azhar University**

It is the term itself- and its significance at this particular time- and not the announced financial reward- that pushed me to participate in the competition declared in the announcement entitled” What does liberalism mean to the Youth?” However, I was unable to start writing for days, wondering If I –an Arab who has experienced authoritarian regimes for long years- is eligible to write about this inapplicable sophisticated interrelated notion and the ambiguity that envelops its contents. Would I start with the ideas that came to my mind, or with what our poet, Ahmed Matar said in his poem:

When my teacher told us about something called freedom  
 I asked him gently to make his speech clear  
 From where did he get the word?  
 What does it mean?  
 What is its nature?  
 Is it a Greek term related to past periods of time?

Liberalism, a synonym of “freedom” and an opposite to “subjugation or enslavement”, is based on certain fundamental notions, particularly the development of a democratic regime. Contrary to the belief that the term implies a conflict between the past and the present, or between knowledge and ignorance, it is an intellectual ideology developed even prior to the invention of electricity or the invasion of space. It first originated in Europe as a violent reaction to the explicit outrageous infringement of human dignity in the name of religion, feudalism and ownership that crushed the community members and left them no space to exercise their liberties

As each doctor has his own way in holding his scalper to perform surgical operations, and each artist has her own way to perform various roles, so each of us has his own vision in addressing problems and managing the affairs of his life.

I leave the house in the morning headed for the town where cars are moving in both directions. Both the driver and I have the right to choose the path we want to pass through without outer interference so long as our actions do not violate the freedoms of others.

Contrary to the prevalent belief that arouse the concerns of Islamists, secularism would never create a state of moral or religious degradation, or terminate traditions of ancestors, nor does it include the absence of principles, but it would rather contribute to the establishment and consolidation of humanitarian tendencies as well as the sublime values and principles of liberty guaranteed by monotheistic religions.

However, we should not be slaves to our ancient customs and traditions, to which we occasionally offer up women as sacrifices of loyalty.

I attended a lecture delivered by a doctor of law who held several judicial positions, in which he told us about a lawsuit that he inquired into its attendant considerations. For me as an eastern Arab female, it was not the most drastic story I have ever heard, but the most influential. The story says: “A Young man from the Gaza Strip sent his sister- a teenage female at the age of flowers- with her mother to a doctor of his friends for a physical check up. When he heard from the doctor that his sister was pregnant he accompanied her to a far farmland where he stabbed her with a knife for several times until she died. There he buried her body believing that she was buried with her shame. However, when her corpse was discovered it was turned over to Forensic medicine at the request of the Judiciary, where it was found that she was still virgin. Upon questioning the doctor, he justified his disgraceful deed as an error in diagnosis;he claimed that by telling her brother he had delivered a social service.

Suppose that she made a mistake and was pregnant, does she deserve killing and torture? A child at the age of flowers, and dozens of the others like her, were offerings to the ancient underdeveloped traditions and customs that contradict all religions and laws.

If God the Merciful, Forgiving accept repentance from his servants, and forgives them whenever they ask His pardon, why don't we forgive others? Why do we worship our customs and traditions even if they contradict religion?

Why does the word “shame” precede the word “prohibited” when we

discuss various issues in our daily life?

Even though “love” is “permissible” while “hatred” and “repugnance” are abhorrent feelings, it is usual in our society to hear the phrase “What a shame!” when somebody says “ she loves him” , while no comments are heard when he says “ he hates her”.

Perhaps the most surprising here is that regardless of the scientific degree that many intellectuals hold, they usually put their knowledge and degrees aside when dealing with certain issues in their lives, and usually forget that the human being is a mass of feelings, thinking and perception; he is respectable rather than a trifle thing, and he has to make decisions of his own rather than following orders dictated by others; He can do whatever he likes, not what the others want. For instance a male doctor may refuse to permit his wife to receive treatment at the hands of a male doctor, but prefers to wait until a female doctor arrives even in case his wife is dying. Another intellectual may deprive his wife who hold a high degree from having a job, saying: “Fasten your degree in the kitchen” . In such cases, our role as intellectuals is to liberate our society from slavery? How? Through the sovereignty of the individual.

What draws my attention is that one of my female neighbors used to watch me from her window whenever I open the door of my house to leave as if asking: “Where are you going?” Or whenever somebody knocks on my door, she stood there as usual to see who is coming. Oh! Arab societies! How long do we have to wait until we realize that “those who monitor others may die of worry.’

During a training session for the media, I was provoked by a literal debate between two of my colleagues, when one of them said: “When the youth in my neighborhood agreed to monitor one of our female neighbors who used to leave her house from morning to evening, they found out that her deteriorated economic conditions pushed her to frequently go to the associations and organizations that offer financial aids to the poor.” He added: “We oppressed her since we thought that she was going to other suspected places!” Sorry ladies and gentlemen! These words were issued by an educated man specified in one of the most sublime specifications,

the media. It seems that he is unable to understand that personal freedom is a private property not permitted to be restricted or violated by others. It is a right guaranteed for all individuals by monotheistic religions as well as positive laws, particularly the Palestinian Basic Law in which articles 11, 18, 19 and 20 ensure the exercise of personal freedom, freedom of religion and worship, freedom of opinion in addition to freedom of residence and movement respectively.

A Palestinian jurist whom I asked about the relationship between the Palestinian Basic Law and liberalism argued: “Regardless of the violations occurred chronologically in pursuant to the status quo, the articles and provisions of the Palestinian Basic Law in general adhere to the freedoms and rights advocated by liberals. However, like other Palestinian jurists, he hopes the law would be in conformity with the tendencies and attitudes of individuals and the community in all aspects of life.

Liberty in all its theoretical content and manifestations in real life advocates the exercise of all liberties in a way that preserve the human dignity of others. However, if the Israelis regard killing Palestinians as a form of liberty to ensure security, what can we call the right of Palestinians for peaceful popular resistance?!

The allegation of the Arab authoritarian regimes that the use of weapons against unarmed citizens is a form of liberty is totally different from the demand of people to bring down a regime that controlled over power from the time of my ancestors, up till now, and perhaps to the time of our grandchildren. What a great difference between freedom of speech and dictatorship or suppression!

Liberals are credited for science, enlightenment and awareness-raising that emerged in the Arab world in 2011. The Arab Spring led by young people who realized the notion of liberalism, was indeed an autumn in which dictatorships fell down. Such authoritarian regimes alleged to be democratic but never succeeded in this role, particularly as they never had a system of thought based on a specific doctrine, but rather a totalitarian, authoritative system that adopted pseudo democratic methods including

pretend presidential and legislative elections, wooden ballot boxes with pre-determined results, and a hammer to authorize the opening of a parliamentary session to make us feel at first glance that we are in a liberal free world. The reign of the president may extend to an unlimited period in accordance with the provisions of the newly amended law, and if not extended, there is always a heir accustomed to presidency since childhood, waiting there in the corners of the palace to replace his father when necessary, while statistics indicate that thousands of young people, who have accumulated piles of degrees and certificates are still wandering in the alleys of the roads unemployed. Thus, the Arab spring started with fires caught in the body of a Tunisian young man followed by a woman's cry:” What Shame!” The Arab Spring is really blooming, so raise your head up – You have become a free liberal Arab.

## What does “Liberalism mean to the Palestinian Youth?

**Hussein el-Deek**



**Palestine - Jerusalem- Al-Ram**

**30 years old**

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When the term “liberalism” is approached, numerous values come to the mind of Palestinian citizens including liberty in all its forms and individualism at the forefront, as well as respect for human rights, citizenship, political participation, democratic regimes, freedom of women, and freedom of thought and creativity, in addition to free economy and unprejudiced civilized communities.

Liberalism along with the ideas brought forward have been re-formulated in various forms to establish a culture of resistance and opposition against all forms of violence and repression. These ideas were the driving force of all popular struggles that contributed to the expansion of the base of rights, liberties and justice (Chomsky, 2002:15)

The Arab Spring is said to be the fourth phase of the waves of democratization, and is expected to bring forward liberal democratic regimes in the Arab World, as historical experiences indicate. Such experiences denote the predominance of democratic systems as the most appropriate form of organizing the affairs of life, at the time when authoritarian regimes prove to be inefficient, and then collapse. The collapse of regimes in Eastern Europe at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, or the tyrannical authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece brought forward democratic systems. Similarly, the British, American and French revolutions overthrew repressive regimes and paved the way for the establishment of a new historical era, thus declaring the commencement of the waves of democratization.

The discrepancy and confusion in the derivation of a concise definition of the term “liberalism” ascribed to the multiple areas in which the term is employed made the terminology change over time and come to mean different things to different intellectuals in different countries. However, regardless of such disparity and divergence, a definition that receives consensus among liberal intellectuals depicts liberalism as a political economic social ideology in which political liberalism makes personal freedom and disposal of political autocracy exerted by the state or religious leaders as its focus, compared to certain principles emphasized by both economic and social liberalism including free markets, disposal

of despotism executed by feudal lords or the nobility and their control over land and means of production, as well as liberation from social despotism resulting from restrictions imposed by influential groups.

Liberalism is founded on values of political and economic liberties, equality as the focal point in democratic principles, and justice. Individual property, as coined by liberal theorists, indicates that each individual has his own self and is never indebted to the community for the energies he owns. Such a concept has originated too much controversy, and created problems in its application. (Qanswa, 2008: 155-156)

In its four stages, liberalism constitutes an intellectual ideology concerned with explicating and providing comments on various aspects of human activity. The constitution phase, made individualism and the concept of self its focus. During the maturity phase, liberals were occupied with theoretical politics and economics. The independence stage was known as the phase of creative initiatives and economic prosperity, whereas the confinement stage-prevalent nowadays- is depicted as a phase of objection and protest, in which imitation or compliance with predominant practices is rejected, and arguments and controversy are expected to prompt creativity, innovation and further development ( AL-Ur'wi, 1982: 39).

For me as a Palestinian, liberalism means respect for the individual's privacy, release of liberties, making way for reflection and creativity, innovation and progress, as well as the exercise of all forms of freedom. Indeed the liberal ideology is the incentive for critical thinking away from ready-made prefabricated opinions based on inherited social, political or ideological doctrines, as well as for promotion of values of tolerance and acceptance of others, cooperation, constructive debate, exchange of ideas and opinions, respect for human rights, equality between men and women, In addition to permitting women to exercise all their rights without discrimination of any form.

In a liberal society where persecution is restricted and socioeconomic difficulties would decrease, I hope to become an efficient active member of the community able to express my desires and employ my energies

freely and without interference from any political, social or religious authority.

According to a study conducted by the Friedrich Nauman Foundation in cooperation with the Forum of Freedoms in Palestine, it was revealed that liberal-minded Palestinians believe in equality between Christians and Muslims and in that the ruling power has the duty of protecting religious minorities in the Holy land. Results also showed that these liberals support equality between men and women, and the right of women to hold public office without limitations or conditions, and to move or travel freely without obtaining a prior permission from anybody. (The Friedrich Nauman Foundation, 2010:14)

Liberal principles form the foundation for the establishment of a democratic pluralistic political system, circulation of power, and consolidation of the notion of citizenship. Rather than being a set of theoretical general principles, liberal enlightenment should be a way of life, underpinning democratic societies to deepen rational dialogue, promote principles of tolerance, human rights, acceptance of the other as well as equality, and simultaneously restrict religious intolerance and violations of the rights of citizens, thus contributing to the establishment of a sound productive civilized and advanced society.

As one of the most influential liberal intellectuals, John Stuart Mill developed a theory on liberty to address the nature and limits of the power that can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual. He argues that in accordance with legislation or tacit understanding between the government and the individual, each individual has the right to act as he wants, so long as these actions do not harm others, as he has also to participate in the preservation of society and the rights of its members (AL-Zubeidi, 2007: 168)

The principles of political participation and the participation of individuals in drawing up public policies through elections and affiliations with political parties or other civil organizations are two fundamental principles supported by liberalism to provide the individual with a sense of self-realization and effective participation in society, and to contribute to the establishment of political, social and economic stability.

In the Palestinian society, the liberal ideology should be a model and social movement, developed in harmony with circumstances and moral values predominating in the society to liberate the Palestinian citizen, both individually and collectively, from the political and socioeconomic constraints dictated by the authority. It is also a political, economic and cultural ideology that protects the individual and his liberties, and supports liberal democratic tendencies as well as political and socioeconomic reforms (Tanina, 2012).

On the other hand, in a state where a totalitarian authoritarian regime prevails, so many bad phenomena may predominate including suppression of liberties and individuals, proliferation of political turmoil and socioeconomic problems, as well as persecution and backwardness. Such phenomena, ascribed to the prevalent culture of tyranny and repression, the non-acceptance of others and intolerance, are predominant in Arab societies, and would result in revolutions and the elimination of tyrannical regimes as is the case with the Arab Spring. However, the possibility of building a liberal democratic pluralistic system away from totalitarianism and despotism is associated with ways of socialization and culture predominated over the past decades in which the authoritarian regimes took power.

Peoples oppressed by authoritarian regimes have yearned for all forms of liberty guaranteed by the liberal ideology and the liberal democratic regime, including freedoms of expression and press, political liberty represented by the formation of political parties, participation in political activities and organization of the free fair elections , in addition to the freedom of individual in the exercise of all his rights and his political, economic and social liberties without interference or abuse of any religious, political or social authority. Contrary to prevalent beliefs of focus on individualism and negligence of the interests of the society, the liberal ideology endeavors to protect the fundamental rights of the individual while simultaneously concerned with the protection of public utility through providing a protective umbrella to the community. The liberal theorists argue that the individual is the focus of their thought and the preservation of his/her rights and liberties would contribute to the

realization of public utility. Albeit, democracy is a secretion of liberalism, Mill criticizes democracy for being a threat to the individual's freedom as well as a method of dominance of the majority over the minorities. Accordingly, he advocates objection and heterogeneity as a means for further development and support of liberal thought. He argues that when issues are taken for granted intolerable of criticism, thought freezes and innovation decays ( Al-U'rwi, 1982:46)

However, since the stages of democratic transformation, the so-called interval phases between authoritarian regimes and liberal democratic regimes may last for years, as history indicates, it is too early to pass judgments on the consequences to be yielded by the Arab Spring through the fair and free elections that took place in Egypt and Tunisia.

The radical Islamic movement that has gained precedence in the Arab countries that experiencing a democratic transformation are neither democratic nor liberal, but a political movement based on religious beliefs and a non-debatable doctrine that restricts critical thinking, innovation and creativity. The decline in the popularity of liberal movements is attributed to the destruction of the organizational structures of these movements by the dictatorships that have ruled for years, rather than to weaknesses in liberal thought or the rejection of liberal principles by the public. However, this is not the end of the road since a long time usually passes before the goals assigned by revolutions are attained, as it is the case in the French revolution whose goals were attained ten years following its victory. The events in the Arab world are no more than a reaction to the practices of the previous authoritarian regimes. The absence of a genuine democratic culture crushed by the previous regimes made the Arab people vote for the Islamic movements.

Being a recipe that determines the rights and obligations of citizens, equality reflected by the services delivered by the state, implies that all members of society are equal before the law regardless of their capabilities and socioeconomic conditions, sex and social class, or place of birth (Al-Shammas, 2008:44).

Discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims, or between men and women and the imposition of obedience to the governor in conformity

with the Islamic law adopted by Islamic movements as the basis for rule, violate the principle of citizenship and create more social problems within the society. Accordingly, it is expected that the policies adopted by Islamic movements would eventually fail, and we have to wait to see the consequences to be arrived at.

The events occurring in the Arab world nowadays are similar to those occurred in the Palestinian territories in 2006 when Hamas, representative of political Islam, won the legislative elections. Their victory is attributed to the sympathy of the silent majority of the Palestinians who voted for them, rather than to the popularity of the members of the party or their regulatory frameworks. The intellectual and ideological stagnation that characterized their policies made them unable to go on with their political career. In addition, Palestinian intellectuals will never forget the decisions issued by the party or their practices against Palestinian citizens, culture and thought.

The Islamic government in the Gaza Strip has issued a decree banning the mixing of the two sexes in the cinema and the theatre, and the display of artistic plays regarding them a violation to the Islamic law. In addition, the decree issued by the Minister of the Higher Education, Nasser el-Din al-Shaer to collect and burn Palestinian books that contain a series of Palestinian heritage, particularly a book entitled “ O Bird, What is your Say?” by Sharif Kannan pushed Palestinian intellectuals to march in mass demonstrations in Ramallah. On the political side, on the other hand, so many examples of bad practices or resolutions can be cited, which resulted in the political divide between the two parts of the country. In conclusion, I believe that compared to the failure of totalitarian regimes, liberal regimes with their ideologies and the principles of rationalism, objectivity and pluralism that they adopt, remained steadfast and persistent, and proved to be the best and most appropriate regimes for all countries all over the world. Therefore, from my point of view, the liberal thought or regime that believes in liberty and political pluralism, open the way for critical thinking,creativity and innovation, and permit the individual to obtain all his fundamental rights is the most appropriate solution that any Palestinian political system may adopt at the current

stage, particularly as in such an atmosphere, the individual would be the focus in all political, socioeconomic and cultural areas, human rights would be respected, women would obtain their rights, and principles of democracy, acceptance of others and tolerance would predominate.

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# **The Realization of Personal Freedom in the Palestinian Society Young Woman's Perspective**

**Abeer Zghare**



**Address: Jericho**

**Age: 22 years old**

Liberal ideas and the concept of Liberalism as we know it today date back to the era in European history that we call enlightenment. Since then, political liberalism and liberal ideas have spread beyond the borders of Western Europe and have been subject to controversial debates. These discussions have provided an enormous amount of incentives for discussion in various areas of human interaction, such as politics, society and economy. The outcome, I believe, has been a set of core beliefs, values and principles that have since then been essential when we talk about what it means to be “liberal”. All of them share the idea of personal freedom, self-determination and (gender) equality in its core. In order to certify someone or a whole society to be “liberal” it requires people acting according to these values.

When I think about my own society, the Palestinian society, however, the concept of “Liberalism” or the word “liberal” has never been at the center of my thoughts; quite the contrary, in fact. Speaking from the point of view of a young woman neither personal freedom, self-determination or gender equality has been sufficiently realized. Women are clearly the largest group suffering from an illiberal society.

But how, and if so to what degree, does the Palestinian society realize liberal principles and values, especially in regard to women?

From my experience, the Palestinian society is traditional and conservative in its core. Palestinians don’t even think in the categories of “liberal” and “conservative”. They act according to traditions without challenging the existing conditions, like in the case of gender equality, an issue that lies at the heart of any liberal debate concerning society. It is a value that I would like to see making much more progress than it currently does.

When we look at the issue in detail, we must distinguish between the areas in which efforts of achieving gender equality have already been made and areas that still lack this development. Recalling the past up until now, women in Palestine have always worked side by side with men, especially in the rural areas. Today, women go to school and

university like men do. Women have the right to vote and also the right to hold a political post. This seems like a satisfying set of practices proving that gender equality is part of our society. Though, it is not a sufficient set, not at all. If gender equality were all about those basic, although fundamental, practices, most women in the world would be part of societies that implemented gender equality.

In my opinion, the simple employment of some of these liberal values does not ensure a comprehensive realization of gender equality at all! It still lacks another important factor to employ gender equality, which is personal freedom. In the Palestinian society, women have mostly no personal freedom. Much worse, the traditions of the society grant men personal freedom to a degree that it takes possession of the women's freedom as well. Thus, women have to act according to men's mentality and mood. In most cases, women do not make their own decisions and plan their lives the way they want them to be.

The personal freedom of women is being restricted by society at different occasions. In order to be allowed out of the domain of the house, women need to prove themselves as trustworthy and strong human beings. Otherwise, women are barely allowed to spend time outside the house. And if they are allowed at times, they can only go out for a limited time or to specific places.

Women are also being restricted from traveling and living on their own. Whether for study or work purposes, women find it very difficult to persuade their families to allow them to leave the parents' house and live abroad. It would even be more difficult if they choose to live alone. The society considers the practice of controlling the woman's movement as part of taking care of them. These beliefs are deeply fixed in the mind of the Palestinian society. Fixed gender roles place the woman with her parents first and later with her husband. The belief that women are weak human beings requires them to constantly prove themselves.

That does not mean that there is nothing positive to say about that the Palestinian society. The picture of female students occupying the majority

of the seats in university lectures is worth mentioning. Women work very hard to prove their ability to work and exceed the limits that society draws for them. Yet, they barely achieve the full equality they seek to reach.

I think that decision-making is a crucial aspect for women. Women have to be able to decide if they want to cover their hair and body. They have to be able to decide where they want to study, whether it is in Palestine or anywhere else in the world. They have to be able to decide whether they prefer to get a job and work or get married. They also want to choose their men and not to be exposed to ten potential bridegrooms. Women in Palestine want to be treated fairly and given their personal freedom.

Given that the Palestinian society is traditional, conservative and male dominated, liberal values occupy a small place in its structure. The society restricts the personal freedom of its individuals, especially women, and that makes Liberalism a concept that has not found the space that it seeks to have in all societies around the globe. Liberalism could form the ideal society if its principles are applied. Rather, it could be too ideal to be practiced. Yet, the Palestinian society fears liberal values, whether it realizes what Liberalism means or not.

Considering personal freedom, the society sees it as a threat to its structure as if it were given totally to the individuals. When they are given this freedom to act and decide according to what they desire and believe in, the wall of traditions and conservative values that surrounds the society will become frail, or at least that is the traditional mentality of the society's decision-makers. Besides, dragging women into the position of creating the future and making decisions of their own, which is personal freedom, power of men will decrease. They will have real partners to share all those aspects of life with that were once limited to only men. Thus, the domination of society could highly lose its power.

To me, Liberalism is a belief that focuses on equality. If equality between all individuals in society is achieved and human rights are given, then the people will be granted a just society. I believe that men have got all their rights but women have not. Yet women, with all their power, are deprived

from their basic right to have personal freedom, which is a fundamental principle in Liberalism. Thus, I suppose that giving women the personal freedom they lack would bring the Palestinian society closer to becoming a liberal society. Right now, it is not a liberal one since there is no obvious equality between the sexes.

Adding women to the agenda of men will make us a better future. Making them equal decision-makers is essential. We are trying to build our state. Having women equal to men will give the Palestinians a better reputation in the world. But before competing to the world's societies on the development scale, we must realize that creating our own just society – socially, economically and politically – gives us at least internal freedom. Having personal freedom and living in equality as genuine individuals is better than not being free, neither as individuals nor as Palestinians.

# **The Liberal Thought: The Route to Liberty**

**Rand Naser As'ad**

**22 years old  
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Fourth Year**

Due to the precedence liberalism occupies in the Arab World, you always find two or more persons on television, radio, newspapers or internet, or at university as I used to do with my colleagues, arguing whether liberalism is the most viable trend capable of bringing into effect the desired development of the Arab World or not, or if we, as Palestinians, are real liberals.

The concept of liberalism originated in Europe as a means to resolve the conflict between the emerging middle class and the feudal system, or the conflict raging between Catholics and Protestants, which led to the dissemination of the ideas advocated by Protestants, namely individualism and liberty, the terms that constitute the core of liberalism and provide support for the rights of middle class citizens.

Albeit earlier liberals were concerned with just economic affairs, the theory was later developed to include political and social aspects of life. Some liberal theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are credited for the establishment of liberal thought that promoted development and progress at all levels in Europe. Their contributions represented the incentive for Europeans to liberate themselves from the clutches of underdevelopment, particularly following the two World Wars. Liberals were indeed capable of surmounting the shortcomings advocated by certain theorists such as John Rawls and Immanuel Kant among others who adopted the slogan: “Let Businessmen administer their own Affairs”.

Regardless of the seeming easiness in the application of liberal principles, at least theoretically, the wide array of views advocated by liberals created more divergence and sophistication, in addition to the dilemma in deriving a concise inclusive definition.

Liberal theorists are also concerned with the society in general. Smith argues that the individual has the right to self-realization and fulfillment of aspirations as long as his quest never affects others’ rights. Individual liberty is to some extent contingent on the non-infringement of others’ rights or causing damage to their interests. Accordingly, individualism never contradicts collective interests; for the good of the community is

viewed as harmonious with the freedom of the individual. Smith believes that “By pursuing his own interests, the individual frequently promotes that of the society”, and thus welfare would prevail.

Locke, a liberal philosopher, is credited for the development of liberal concepts. He fiercely defended private property, arguing that the government has the duty of legislation and approval of sanctions just as a means for the regulation and protection of individual property. Liberal theorists agree unanimously on the non-interference of the state in economic activities, stating that such interference would restrict the sacred right of individual liberty.

Liberalism is concerned with human natural rights, as many liberal theorists called for self-realization through satisfaction of man’s quest for labor, ownership and self-interests.

John Stuart Mill went on to justify revolution and resistance as natural rights for individuals in case the governor violates political rights or public freedoms. He argues that freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, religious freedom, as well as freedom of choice and labor are among liberties that every individual has the right to enjoy through positive laws that ensure justice, impartiality and equality.

Due to the possibility of amendment and further development, liberalism, in its various forms, namely political liberalism and economic liberalism, is characterized by flexibility and pliability. Social liberalism, a new branch developed to surmount the obstacles hindering further application, addresses social issues, such as unemployment, health insurance, pensions and laws of minimum wages.

Periodic confidential elections and separation of powers are among the principles advocated by political liberals. The former is supposed to ensure the arrival of the fittest to power, whereas the latter is a mechanism to prevent the governor to become a dictator with autocratic powers, thus having dominant influence over people’s lives, or depriving them from their freedoms. Legislation and constitution, as liberals argue, are the guarantees in the face of authoritarianism, to protect citizens from

tyranny and coercion exerted by the ruling power.

In the Arab World, people have experienced colonialism, underdevelopment and high illiteracy rates for ages. However, scientists and intellectuals influenced by liberalism, including Mohammad Abdo, Ahmad Al-Saied, and Qasem Ameen, Rashid Rida, Kheir el-Din Al-Tunisi, as well as Bustrus al-Bustani and Dean of Arabic literature, Taha Hussein, have worked hard for the advancement of Arab societies, and the termination of subordination, ignorance, and disease. In their endeavor to achieve such goals, they advocated reform, freedom, and liberation of the Arab thought from metaphysics, in addition to the need to adopt rationalism in scrutinizing Arab-Muslim heritage.

However, liberal principles addressed by these intellectuals in their writings, particularly, equality, freedom of choice, the role of the state in society along with separation of powers as a mechanism to prevent authoritative autocratic dictatorship, with all powers under the control of one individual, were addressed from an Islamic perspective. The Islamic doctrine, they argue, advocates several liberal principles, particularly liberty, equality, consultation, and the election of the fittest for presidency, as seen from the aphorisms announced by Mohammad, the prophet: “Muslims are equal just like the teeth of the comb”, or by the second Orthodox caliphate, Omar ibn-al-Khattab, in rebuking totalitarians: “How do you enslave people who were born free?”

Through advocating liberty, equality and equal opportunities, these intellectuals along with others influenced by their ideas, were capable of contributing to the development of the Arab renaissance movement in the late nineteenth century. As nothing is generated out of the blue, it is rational

to say that writers, scientists and intellectuals are credited for their struggle for years to bring about the desired change.

The state of restlessness and alertness the Arab peoples experienced for ages have lately resulted in revolutions of great achievements. Authoritarian despotic Arab regimes, whose leaders pretended to be

liberals, albeit liberalism is innocent from their allegations, have brought so much devastation to their communities. Their allegation is no more than a screen to disguise their practices of violating all principles of liberalism, particularly public liberties, equality, justice, equal opportunities, democratic regime, the right of nomination and free fair elections, as well as freedom of opinion and assembly, to name only a few.

Even though, the Palestinian society is an unprejudiced community, in which citizens practice their freedoms, and legislation ensures the rights of minorities and indiscriminate, it still, like other Arab communities undergoes oppression and subjugation, either due to the practices of the Israeli occupation, or violations committed by some influential personalities and groups. Accordingly, regardless of the liberal principles prevailing in the Palestinian society, which are still in need for more efforts to be firmly established, development and advancement would never be confirmed except when the Israeli occupation that hinders public freedoms, namely freedom of choice and movement of citizens, would terminate. In addition, for Palestinians to build a liberal civil state, educational curricula, being the basis for the socialization of future generations, should first be modified and developed, and media of all forms shall be granted further freedom.

After all, I hope the Israeli occupation that restricts personal freedom in Palestinian territories would terminate, so that Palestinians would be capable of building a society they are proud of.

Due to being distinguished by flexibility and capability for further development and handling of various deficiencies, liberalism remains the optimum, most preferable and fittest doctrine to pave the way for the advancement towards the vast space of liberty and creativity, and whereby the Palestinian society would be able to move forward and dispose of the deficiencies it endures.

## What does liberalism mean to the Palestinian youth?

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**25 years old**

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Liberalism and freedom are two sides of one coin since the term liberalism advocates all forms of public freedoms including freedom of belief and thought, political freedom, and freedom of choice, particularly regarding the style of life the individual selects, and is concerned with all the practices the individual likes to follow without restrictions or obstacles, and all the issues that occupy human mind, or that are consistent with one's desires and aspirations.

However, realities in the Arab societies in general indicate the existence of practices that restrict the potentials and capabilities of the youth, hinder their thinking as a result of contradictions regarding what is permissible and what is prohibited, without proving evidence on right practices for the youth to adopt. Accordingly, revolutions have broken out due to gaps between the aspirations of the youth and the practices of repression and coercion executed by Arab authoritative regimes. Discrepancies and contradictions exist between principles advocated by liberals and the culture or political doctrines predominating in societies; a situation not restricted to the Palestinian or Arab societies but extends to include approximately all societies even those regarded as liberal, democratic, civilized or unprejudiced societies.

Like their counterparts all over the world, Palestinian young men realized the significance of liberalism, but have rarely experienced its application in real life. However, what distinguishes the Palestinian youth from other youths is the Israeli occupation of their territories, and the great political fluctuations that have an impact upon their perception of the liberal ideology, in addition to the social barriers of warnings they hear every now and then, such as “It is permissible to ...” “It is prohibited to.....” ,or “You have to .....” “You do not have to....” and the like, without being able to come to a compromise between such paradoxes.

Liberalism liberates the individual from restrictions imposed and executed, against his/her will, due to the predominant culture and traditions, religious beliefs, or the adopted policies.

The following are just examples to illustrate what the term “liberalism”

means to Palestinian youth.

Ahmad: Tomorrow, I will go swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, in Haifa, at a distance of less than forty kilometers from here.

Ali: But you know that young Palestinian men are prohibited from entering Haifa.

Ahmad: Why?

Ali : The Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint will force you to return back, and if you refuse, you will be severely beaten.

Ahmad: But I did not commit any violation, and I have the right to go wherever I like

Ali: Oh! Poor man. To perform rituals at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, you must be above forty-five years old, that is, two or three days prior to death! If you have the chance to!

\*The Israeli occupation is the biggest farce that has occurred and still occurs nowadays. The Israelis usually put aside liberty, liberal and democratic principles, or even humanitarian feelings when communicating with young Palestinian men who have realized their rights and freedom.

(An example of what may be called **political despotism**)

Sami: I would like to join the faculty of “Fine Arts”.

Dad: “Fine Arts! Curse... you have got an average of 94% in the General Secondary Examination, and want to study Fine Arts! It is prohibited....! Do you understand? Tomorrow, go to the University and have a seat in the Faculty of Engineering.

Two years later, Sami was dismissed from the faculty, and joined the Department of Information Technology. However, after graduation, he was unable to find a job, and thus became idle and had to stay at home.

\*So, if the young man wants to study Fine Arts, what is wrong with the matter? Surely, there is nothing wrong, but people used to say the son of this man is an engineer, and the son of that man is idiot, he studied Fine Arts!

(An example of what may be called **Social despotism**)

Adel: By God! The Palestinian curricula are difficult to understand, so I would like to study in Germany, and to obtain a German citizenship.  
(Adel seems to be convinced with the idea)

Parents: How can you leave us behind! God may guide you to the right way. Forget the idea of traveling, your country is better than other places.  
(A liberal method of persuasion)

Or Parents: Travel is prohibited, you have to join one of the local universities, whether you like or not. (Coercion and compulsion)

A young man obtained a passport and went to the Israeli crossing point to travel abroad, where an Israeli soldier told him: “Your father was fighting alongside with a terrorist resistance movement in Jenin, and I myself killed him when you were seven years old, Do you remember! Leave now! (An example of what may be called **cultural despotism**)

Muneer: Look at this young man! What a dog he is! It seems that he was brought up badly. Every day he has a different brand of alcohol, once beer..... another time whiskey ... and so on.

A relative speaking to his parents: Alcohol is prohibited, Go and see where your son has a drink. (Illiberal method)

Or, A relative speaking to his parents: Alright, let him have a drink, he is free as long as s/he neither harms others, engage in aggressive actions or behaves badly.

\*This young man did not receive advice from anyone on how to behave, so he believes that alcohol is a source of comfort and relief.

(Violence is never a method to settle controversy)

(An example of what may be called **intellectual despotism**)

Look! In addition to being Christian, she smokes, dresses in accordance with the latest fashion, and goes out with uncovered, loose and flowing hair.

Albeit such remarks and critiques are rarely heard, the example is cited just to show that religious liberty and the right to choose the lifestyle are among public liberties that every citizen must enjoy without restriction or outer interference.

\*As you live in our country, you have to perform rituals in our own way, rather than in yours. (An example of what may be called **doctrinal despotism**)

The examples cited above evidently indicate some concepts related to *fait accompli* as well as to barriers that restrict the aspirations of the Palestinian youth, who like their counterparts anywhere else recognize their rights and freedoms, particularly regarding the concept of “self” and lifestyle, or the necessity for self-reorganization, and their endeavor to be efficient members in their society through the fulfillment of their aspirations and hopes, as well as through holding the position they yearn for.

### **Palestinian Youth under Occupation**

Under occupation, the occupied experience of unlawful land seizure, restriction of public freedoms in addition to deprivation from choosing their own lifestyle, particularly as the occupier endeavors to control their lives to turn them into inferiors subordinate to imposed policies. However, regardless of the violence, degradation and all forms of despotism Palestinians endure, Palestinian youths have become convinced that they have to strive to fulfill their entities, of which they are proud, to the utmost degree, through their attitudes, will and aspirations that make them capable of obtaining the rights and freedoms to which they constantly aspire.

Being susceptible to the practices of the occupier, the significance of liberalism Palestinian youths have in mind should commence by and focus on:

#### 1- Freedom of Education

Palestinian universities should be permitted to open new departments.

of which they are still deprived.

## 2- Freedom of movement and travel

Some Palestinian youth are prohibited from travelling to neighboring countries, and performance of rituals in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is restricted to individuals above forty-years old.

## 3- Freedom of thought and belief

Worship places are continuously attacked, strictly monitored or demolished while building new ones is prohibited.

## 4- Political Liberty

Albeit each Palestinian has the right to affiliate with any political party, and exercise various political activities in accordance with provisions stipulated in the Palestinian Basic Law, Palestinian activists striving to speak up about the tyranny and injustice they endure are oppressed or imprisoned.

## 5- Freedom of labor and trade

Flooding the Palestinian market with Israeli commodities along with the excessive taxes levied by the Israelis on all exports to the Palestinian territories are two policies adopted as a means of destruction of Palestinian products, and restriction of job opportunities, thus leaving Palestinian youths unable to practice certain careers.

## 6- Cultural Freedom

Endeavors exerted by the Israelis to distort the image of Palestinian culture to come out as a form of underdevelopment, or to destroy it by force through their usual method of sticks and carrots used for the eradication of one culture and the replacement through another.

\* These liberties, albeit guaranteed by all international conventions, are denied to Palestinian youth who are still deprived of their basic rights.