When Processes Collide: Leadership, Legitimacy and Liberation in Palestine

Philippa Barnes

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i S213, Samhällsvetarhuset, fredagen den 13 december kl. 10.15. Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Docent Lisa Strömbom
Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, Lunds universitet
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Abstract
Palestinian national movement leadership has long been intertwined with the context of the national movement processes – liberation, peace and state building. Over time, as these processes have not come to fruition, the numerous leadership groups have had to negotiate their relationships with these processes as both the groups and processes increasingly overlap, creating significant observable points of tension within Palestinian politics. There are currently multiple levels of leadership across the national movement: two representative governing institutions – the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian Authority; two dominant political movements – Fatah and Hamas; and numerous popular resistance initiatives such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement coalition that has different levels of endorsement (or lack of) by the other leaderships. This thesis seeks to map the Palestinian national liberation movement leadership, examining the inter-relations between the multiple leadership groups and internal (i.e. intra-Palestinian) legitimacies.

Examining the internal legitimacies of the Palestinian leaderships results in an expansion of how internal legitimacy can be conceptualised. For the historical period (1958-2008) analysed, I found revolutionary, representative, oppositional, institutional, democratic and moral legitimacy types within the Palestinian case. Furthermore, these were all attributed to respective national movement processes. Analysing the recent period (2016-2017) requires the use of a relational approach to further develop understandings of legitimacy. This approach transforms legitimacy into a process of (de)legitimisation, which interacts with the national movement processes and helps us capture and analyse the complexities of the Palestinian case – that of concurrent, multiple and contending perspectives. I found the continuation of the liberation and state building processes as simultaneous bases of legitimisation to be a critical point of tension within the tandem legitimisation-delegitimation process. Engaging a relational approach demonstrated the need for ongoing leadership reconstruction. I conclude that, in order to negotiate the interactions and contestations between the multiple and dynamic processes that underlie legitimacy, leaderships face an ultimatum of ‘reconstruct or delegitimise’. Where Palestinian leadership groups have stagnated and not engaged with a process of reconstruction, we see processes of delegitimisation arising that can explain the current leadership complexities within the Palestinian national movement.

Keywords
Leadership, legitimacy, legitimisation, relational, Palestine, liberation, national movement, peace process, state building