

# The Post-Territorial Dimensions of a Future Homeland in Israel and Palestine

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Many centuries from now the troublesome chapters tearing Israel and Palestine apart in the second half of the twentieth century may become dim and blurred in the collective memory of the people sharing the land as their homeland. Although judging from places such as Northern Ireland and the Balkans, even that is doubtful. What is quite certain is that in the near future any fruitful discussion of concepts such as homeland will be deeply planted in the interpretation of past events, especially those surrounding the year 1948, but also before and after that year.

The most dominant factor that should not be forgotten is that even for people who are newcomers to Palestine, it has become a homeland, and any future discussion in the concept and its practical implications must take into account that sense, whether it is genuine or the product of a very affective indoctrination. Thus defining the homeland and determining whom it belongs to will require the input of the people (or their representatives), whether they are the indigenous Palestinians, the veteran Israelis, the recent Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants or the Palestinians and their families that had been expelled from the land in 1948.

The principal argument of this article is that the road to a post-conflictual homeland in Palestine has to pass through reconciliation on abstract issues such as fairness, justice and guilt, and can not be limited to successful compromises on borders, nature of regimes or any other materialistic aspect of a political settlement. In fact, I argue that the possible achievements in the physical issues of land and borders are useless without significant progress on the moral and legal ground.

My departure point would be that “fairness” and “justice” are no less important bricks needed for building the future homeland than armies and territories. This is not an attempt to present only an ethical reflection; it is much more the outcome of a functional approach to the conceptualization of a future solution. An approach based on an assessment that in the discourse of homeland these moral issues are already evolving, no less than the materialistic question of percentages of territory, sovereignty and security. My guess is that the

moral issues would even override these practical aspects of a solution.

## The Historical Background

Power and knowledge go hand in hand and hence in the West one hears too often and too loudly the conceptualization of “fairness” postulated by the occupier, the winner and the victorious, in our case the Israeli side. One hears little about the point of view of the other side”, the subaltern, the Palestinian. This is why in past, British, UN, American, and Israeli conceptualizations of “fairness” dominated the search for peace and were based mainly on the territorial dimension of the conflict while neglecting totally the question of guilt, restitution and justice. These perceptions of “fairness” are closely connected to questions of homeland in the realm of possession, entitlement and future control. In the second part of this article I will argue that only by giving a dominant position to the Palestinian concepts of fairness will it be possible to construct notions of “homeland” conducive to the pacification of the conflict.

The Israel/Palestine conflict was an object of reconciliation, mediation and peace efforts ever since it had erupted in the late nineteenth century. The first significant efforts had been made by the British Empire during the mandatory period. At that early period one can distinguish between two stages. The first stage lasted until the 1930s; during that stage the various British initiators of dialogue wished to construct under British auspices a political structure—a joint homeland—that would represent equally the small Jewish community and the Palestinian majority on the land of Palestine. The second stage, beginning in the mid 1930s, was mainly inspired by the principle of partition: dividing the territory between the two communities and constructing two separate political structures. One can talk about a missed opportunity in the first stage, around the year 1928, when, after years of rejecting any compromise, the Palestinian leadership had agreed to discuss a joint federative structure. But the Zionist leadership, which had supported until that moment such a model,

opposed it when it learned about the Palestinian consent—a typical mode of behavior that would repeat itself in 1947. Compromises, which challenged the very essence of Zionism, were accepted by the Jewish community only when it was absolutely clear that they would be totally rejected by the Palestinian side.<sup>1</sup>

The joint and equally divided political structure of 1928 included restrictions on Jewish immigration and was a basis for a bi-national state. It was totally forgotten in 1947 when (inspired by Zionist and British schemes) the UN offered—instead, a partition plan for Palestine. This partition left an equal number of Jews and Palestinians within the future Jewish state. Therefore we can say that in a way the 1947 partition resolution offered a kaleidoscopic vision of a homeland divided into one bi-national state next to a uni-national one.<sup>2</sup>

As in 1928, so also in 1947 the Zionist leaders were offered a bi-national model. In 1928 they had rejected it and were let off by the British. In 1947, they succeeded in creating the impression that they, unlike the Arab side, preferred such a bi-national state next to a purely Arab state, as stipulated by the partition resolution. As the Arab and Palestinian rejection persisted, their bluff was never called.

One Israeli scholar was adamant in his conviction that the Zionist support for partition in 1947 stemmed from a clear knowledge about the general Arab rejectionist posture and the particular Palestinian refusal.<sup>3</sup> A very sensible act of historical deduction, but one which is difficult to substantiate with documents. It is quite clear nonetheless that a bi-national Palestinian-Jewish state—as offered by the partition resolution of the UN no. 181—would have defeated the most basic Zionist aspirations and that the Jewish leadership of the day would have resorted to any possible means—destruction and transfer included—to make the state as purely Jewish as possible.

It is noteworthy that a few days before the UN partition resolution was adopted, the Zionist leadership discussed the issue and a consensus emerged that if Palestinians would remain within the future Jewish state they would have to be granted full citizenship. Three months later the military command of the Jewish community devised a plan for what we now call ethnic cleansing of the areas of the future Jewish state.<sup>4</sup>

So a “fair solution” until 1948 was a bi-national state, either all over Palestine, or on part of it, while the other part was to belong to the indigenous population. This “fair solution” was unacceptable at the time to the Palestinians, who regarded the Zionists as did Algerians the *Pied Noir*, with whom they had no wish to divide the land. But it was also totally unacceptable to the Zionist movement, the leaders of which decided to de-Arabize any part of Palestine that would be allocated to them or

they that would occupy. And yet in the international collective memory, the “fair” solution was accepted by Israel and rejected by the Arabs—a memory shaping attitudes especially in the West towards Palestinians as villains and Israelis as heroes.

And indeed the future concepts of homeland in the context of Israel and Palestine would be closely associated with the international community’s input in the peace negotiations. This input in turn is influenced significantly by perceptions of right and wrong and assessments of past behavior.

What blinded the UN at the time was the organization’s curious decision to opt for a solution which was adopted by the majority of its member states, and not to seek consent between the two warring parties on the ground. The future homeland of both locals and newcomers was to be defined and brokered by outside forces, this was never in history a successful recipe.

Partition was institutionalized in November 1947 by UNSCOP. The members of this committee did not know Palestine at all, and in a relatively short period adopted a plan already offered by the Royal Peel Commission in 1937 which had also been endorsed by the Zionist leadership. In essence partition meant dividing the land into two states while keeping between them an economic union and supervising them from abroad. This remained the basis for the peace efforts ever since. But already the initiators of the partition resolution recognized that not every issue in Palestine was divisible or negotiable on a “rational” basis. The resolution offered, perhaps contrary to its spirit, the internationalization of Jerusalem. The positions of both sides towards the city were born not in decision-making processes but laid on layers of conscience and consciousness. Even if not fully understood by the mediators, they realized that a solution to this question could not be based on the divisibility of the visible but rather should emerge out of respect for the non-divisibility of the invisible layers of the conflict.<sup>5</sup>

It was the first mediator in the history of the post-mandatory conflict, Count Folke Bernadotte, who tried to penetrate into these deeper layers in the post-mandatory Palestine conflict. A few days after the 1948 war erupted, on June 20, 1948, he was appointed a UN mediator. He offered two proposals to end the conflict by partitioning the land into two states. The difference between them was that in the second proposal he suggested the annexation of Arab Palestine to Transjordan. But in both proposals he stipulated the unconditional repatriation of Palestinian refugees as a precondition for peace. He was ambivalent about Jerusalem wishing it to be the Arab capital in the first proposal but he preferred it international in the second. In any case, he seemed to place the refugees and Jerusalem at the center of the conflict and to perceive

these two dilemmas as indivisible problems, for which only a comprehensive and just solution would do.<sup>6</sup>

Even after Bernadotte's assassination by Jewish extremists in 1948, the Palestine Conciliation Commission appointed to replace him pursued the same policy. The three members of this commission wished to build the future solution on three tiers: the partition of the land into two states—not according to the map of the partition resolution but corresponding to the demographic distribution of Jews and Palestinians, the internationalization of Jerusalem, and the unconditional return of the refugees to their homes. The new mediators offered the three principles as a basis for negotiations. While the Arab confrontational countries and the Palestinian leadership accepted this offer during the UN peace conference in Lausanne Switzerland in May 1949, as had done before them the UN General Assembly in resolution 194 of December 1948, it was nonetheless buried by the intransigent David Ben Gurion and his government in summer of that year. At first, the US administration rebuked Israel for its policy and exerted economic pressure on it, but later on, the Jewish lobby succeeded in re-orientating US policy onto pro-Israeli tracks, where it has remained until today.<sup>7</sup>

There was a lull in the peace efforts in the 1950s and 1960s, although into the air schema such the Anglo-American Alpha program and the Johnston Plan were thrown.<sup>8</sup> These and more esoteric initiatives, almost all of them American, were attempts to adopt a business-like approach to the conflict. This indicated a great belief in partition according to security interests of Israel and its Arab neighbors, while totally sidelining the Palestinians as partners for peace. The Palestinians were cancelled as political partners in the business-like approach. They existed only as refugees whose fate was considered within the economic context of the American Cold War against the Soviet Union. Their problem was to be solved within a new Marshall plan for the Middle East. This plan promised American aid to the area in order to improve the standard of living as the best means of containing Soviet encroachment. For that, the refugees had to be resettled in Arab lands and serve as cheap labor for their development (and thereby also distancing them from Israel's borders and consciousness).

Fortunately for the Palestinians they had the PLO, a movement which through guerilla warfare and welfare systems enabled the refugees to show enough resistance to encourage Arab regimes to leave the refugees in their transitional camps, despite the perception that they were a destabilizing factor. The association of the PLO with the Soviet Union was another factor pushing the Palestinians, wherever they were, from any prospective *pax Americana*.

The June 1967 war and its consequences clarified in the most striking manner the gap lying between business-like American-Israeli attitudes on the one hand and the Palestinian conceptualization of a "fair" solution, on the other. This chasm has disabled ever since 1967 any significant progress in the peace efforts. As I presently hope to show, the quantitative and divisible approach to the conflict, at best can produce military and economic rearrangements and configurations which reflect the balance of power; at worst it perpetuates past evils and injustices. Hence the occupier, Israel, remains in its previous role, and the Palestinians, the occupied, continue to live under the same oppression. And not even a very dramatic discourse of peace, dramatized by high profile ceremonies on the White House lawn, can hide this reality.

Israel had occupied a large share of Palestine already in 1948—77 percent of it; it completed Palestine's takeover in 1967. This total control of the land enabled American negotiators such as William Rogers and Henry Kissinger, and Swedes such as Gunar Yaring, to produce and market an equation they presented as the ultimate and fair solution. Territories for peace. An equation that was wholeheartedly endorsed by the pragmatic Israeli labor movement. It is a strange formula if you stop and think about it: on the one end of the equation you have a quantitative and measurable variable, on the other, an abstract term, not easily conceptualized or even illustrated. It was less bizarre as a working basis for bilateral peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors where indeed it operated quite well, for a while, in the case of Egypt and Jordan. And yet we should remember it produced "cold peace" in the case of these two countries, as it did not offer a comprehensive solution to the Palestine question. And indeed what had this equation to offer to the ultimate victims of the 1948 war; whose demand for "justice" is the main fuel kindling the conflict's fire?

Justice is not demanded only by Palestinians, it is asked for by the Arab world at large. Justice in the local regional context is a less abstract term than it sounds. Justice for Palestinians is part of the reshaping of the post-Colonialist Middle East agenda. And even if Arab regimes tend to forget it, their civil societies remind them of this particular context of the Palestine question. Peace with Israel, even in the case of Egyptians and Jordanians, is reconciliation with the last colonialist movement—even if it had been also a nationalist one—remaining on Middle Eastern soil. For those who were not direct victims of this colonialism it may be easier to reconcile due to economic interest or in recognition of the balance of power with the Jewish state; but for its victims, not only from 1948, but victims of a continual campaign of destruction of the Palestinian people,

economic interests and balance of power can only induce the few, the uncommitted, not the devoted many. They not only seek rectification of past evils, they also seek immunity from present and future devastation.

Thus a fair peace in the eyes of the Palestinians can only be based on the healing of past wounds and, far more important, security against future desolation. Can territories assure that? Or put more in a way that would fit the present discussion: does a future homeland consist only of territorial dimensions?

### **The Oslo Discourse of Fairness**

The architects of the Oslo accord thought it could. They resold the merchandize of “peace for territories”. Hallowed concepts such as Israeli recognition in the PLO and “autonomy” for the Palestinians was meant to strengthen the business-like approach for a solution. The solution was perpetuation of the Israeli occupation through indirect military control. . This solution was displayed with a dramatic discourse of peace.<sup>9</sup>

I am not underestimating the progress made in Oslo, but one should never forget the circumstances of the accord’s birth; they tell you why it was such a colossal failure. Dramatic changes in the global and regional balance of power, and an Israeli readiness to replace the Hashemites of Jordan with the PLO as a partner for peace, opened the way to an even more complicated formula of “territories for peace.” Territories, and everything else which is visible and quantifiable, could be divided between the two sides. Thus the only non-Jewish parts of post-1948 Palestine—23 percent of the land—could be re-divided between Israel and a future Palestinian autonomous entity. Within this 23 percent of Palestine, the illegal Jewish settlements could be divided into 80 per cent under Israeli control and 20 percent under Palestinian authority, most of the water resources to Israel, most of Jerusalem in Israeli hands. Peace, the *quid pro quo*, meant a stateless Palestinian state robbed of any say in its defense, foreign or economic policies. As for the Palestinian right of return, according to the Israeli interpretation of Oslo, which is the one that counts, it should be forgotten and erased. This conceptualization of fairness was presented to the world at large in the summer of 2000 at Camp David.

For Palestinians the summit in Camp David was meant to produce the final stages in the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza strip (according to resolutions 242 and 338 of the UN security council) and prepare the ground for new negotiations over a fair settlement on the basis of UN resolution 194—the return of the refugees, the internationalization of Jerusalem, and a full sovereign Palestinian state. Even the US voted in favor of this resolution at the time and has ever since.

The Israeli Left, in power ever since 1999, regarded the Camp David summit as a stage for dictating to the Palestinians their concept of fairness: maximizing the divisibility of the visible (evicting 90 per cent of the occupied areas, 20 percent of the settlements, 50 percent of Jerusalem) while demanding the end of Palestinian reference to the invisible layers of the conflict: no right of return, no full sovereign Palestinian state, and no solution for the Palestinian minority in Israel. After Camp David fairness meant that as long as the Palestinians would not accept the Israeli dictate, the occupation, exile, and discrimination would continue until the Palestinians would budge. With or without Ariel Sharon’s violation of the sacredness of Haram al-Sharif, the second uprising broke out in the territories and in Israel in October 2000 and it would be there with us for a very long time.

Ever since the outbreak of the second intifada, “Territories for Peace” is no longer on the peace table. . An uprising that spilled over into Israel itself, the second intifada led the Palestinian minority there to call for the deZionization of the Jewish state. In turn, it allowed the West Bankers to demand the Palestinization of Muslim and Christian Jerusalem. It allowed the inhabitants of Gaza to raise arms against the continued occupation and united refugees around the world in their call for the implementation of their right of return. What this last intifada makes abundantly clear is that the end of occupation is a precondition for peace; it is not peace itself. The Israeli peace camp, we are told by its “gurus,” is insulted. It feels its leaders maximized the equation by offering most of the territories Israel occupied in 1967. They demand now, like never before, a Palestinian recognition of the Zionist narrative of the 1948 war: Israel has no responsibility for the making of the refugee problem, the Palestinian minority in Israel—now twenty per cent of the population—is not part of the solution to the conflict and Palestinians should recognize as forever Jewish the settlement belt encircling Jerusalem and planted at the heart of the Palestinian cities such as Nablus and Halil (Hebron).

Thus the conceptualization of a future homeland is tied to values such as fairness no less than to eviction from territories. The post-territorial dimensions of the solution are closely associated with the direct recognition by the Israelis of their role as colonizers, expellers, oppressors and occupiers.

This is a most difficult task for the Jewish people in Israel since they imagines themselves to be the victims. This is done consciously and unconsciously by the national systems in Israel that cultivate through their discourses and conduct the fear of attributing to the Palestinians positive or even empathetic images. This particular dilemma was revealed in Israel in the early 1950s. The state system by then conveyed a very clear

negative stereotyping of everything that was Arab. It was the hated Other, symbolizing everything we, the Jews, are not. This juxtaposition ran into trouble when Israel encouraged about one million Arab Jews to immigrate. There was a conscious effort to de-Arabize these Arabs immigrants: they were coached to scorn their mother tongue, reject Arab culture and make an effort to be Europeanized.<sup>10</sup>

The other, complementary, side of this coin, was a systematic effort to deny acts of barbarism against the Palestinians, and attribute the ability for such human abuses only to the other side. This particular dilemma can be seen in the way Israeli historiography dealt with Jewish atrocities in the 1948 war or Jewish terrorism in the Mandatory period. Atrocities and terrorism are two modes of behavior Israeli Orientalists attribute solely to the Palestinian resistance movement. Therefore it can not be part of an analysis or description of chapters in Israel's past. One way out of this dilemma would be to accredit a particular political group, preferably an extremist one, with the same attributes of the enemy, which would clarify the mainstream moral national behavior. This is why the Israelis always admitted to the massacre in Dir Yassin, committed by the right wing Irgun, but tried to hide the many other massacres carried out by the Hagana and later on by the IDF.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, a fair solution requires a new Israeli approach to the issue of victimhood. As I have shown recently in an article, the Israeli TV series, *Tekkuma*, celebrating Israel's jubilee in 1998, was the first popular attempt to ponder the possibility that Jews were not only the ultimate victims of the twentieth century, but also victimizers. This was done by allocating space on TV to show, alongside the Zionist narrative, chapters from the Palestinian version of history. Although this was a very cautious attempt, which did not deviate too much from the Zionist narrative, it was enough to bring the wrath of all the political system on the series' editors and producers.<sup>12</sup>

Such a recognition of the victimizing role they played would become a vital and necessary station in the socialization of the Jews in Israel, no less than the horror destinations to which high school children in Israel are now forced (and one hopes that at least some of them go by their own accord) to visit in Holocaust Europe. But until that recognition occurs, there is very little chance for progressing on issues such a "fair solution" in the construction of a future homeland for both Palestinians and Jews.

For the Israeli Jews, recognizing the Palestinians as victims of their own evil is deeply traumatic, for it not only questions the very foundational myths of the state of Israel and its motto of "A state without a people for a people without a state," but it also raises a whole panoply of ethical questions with significant implica-

tions for the future of the state. This fear on the Israeli side is the stronger of the two aversions and most destructive in the Jewish society's ability to turn a new leaf in its relationship with the Palestinians. The fear from allowing the other side to become a victim of the conflict would not have been so fierce had this victimhood been related to natural and normal consequences of a long-lasting bloody conflict. From such a perspective both sides are victims of "the circumstances" or any other amorphous, non-committal concept which absolves human beings and particularly politicians from taking responsibility. But what is demanded by the Palestinians, in fact has become a *conditio sine qua non* to many of them, is that Israel would recognize them as victims of its own evil. The fear is deeply rooted in the way Israelis choose to tell the story of 1948, and more importantly how the Israelis react to the way the Palestinian narrative tells the story of that year, the year of the *Nakbah*.

In Israel, educators, historians, novelists, cultural producers in general, have been all involved in a campaign of denial and concealment. The horrors of 1948 were hidden from the public eye and generations to come by those who committed them. Only in the end of 2000, did one brave journalist in *Haaretz*, a voice in the wilderness, cry out in an article: how could you lie to us for so many years? Very few ask this question now and even fewer are willing to answer it.<sup>13</sup>

The historians and educators in particular are the main villains in this case. They all in one way or another helped to construct and preserve a national narrative that eliminates the collective Palestinian memory. This elimination is no less violent than expulsion and destruction; it is the main constitutive element in the construction of collective Jewish identity in the state of Israel. It is manifested in the tales told by child minders on Independence day and Passover, in the curriculum and text books in elementary and high schools, in the ceremonies of freshmen and graduation of officers in the army, it is broadcast in the printed and electronic media as well as in the speeches and discourse of the politicians, in the way artists, novelists and poets subject their works to the national narrative, and in the research produced by academics in the universities about the Israeli reality in the past and the present.

This act of symbolic violence and thought control had been intensified ever since October 2000. It is particularly evident now in the educational system and the media, but mostly evident in the Israeli academia—a state of affairs which requires non partisan scholars here and elsewhere in the USA to rethink what they can and should do in their relationship with an academia that supports oppression, occupation, and discrimination.

This self control guards even peace makers in Israel from not opening the Pandora's box of 1948 and the

whole question of victimhood. This can be seen in the particular posture adopted by the “Peace Now” movement in Israel. For its members, peace and reconciliation are translated to the need of mutual recognition between the two national narratives, in a way that would eliminate clashing. The way to do it is to make divisible everything that is visible: land, resources, blame *and* history into a pre-1967 when we the Jews were Right and Just and a post-1967 when You the Palestinians were Right and Just.<sup>14</sup>

Viewed from this perspective, victimhood in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can also be divided into those two historical periods. The same righteous approach of the Israeli peace camp applies to the early, more distant chapter in the history of the conflict as one in which the Jews were the victims, namely the pre-1967 era and the recent chapter, i.e., after 1967 in which the Palestinians were victims. The periodization is very important since the earlier period is considered to be the more crucial one. Thus, having been the just party at that time, in the formative period of the conflict, justifies the existence of Zionism and the whole Jewish project in Palestine; in the same way, it doubts the wisdom and morality of Palestinian actions in that period. It obliterates out of any discussion the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Jews in 1948: the destruction of 400 Palestinian villages and neighborhoods, the expulsion of 700,000 Palestinians and the massacre of several thousands Palestinians.<sup>15</sup>

From this perspective, Israel deviated from the moral and just road after being forced to occupy the West Bank and the Gaza strip. But this misbehavior does not cast any doubt on its very essence and justification.

But peace and mutual recognition entails bridging over the invisible, hence the indivisible, layers of history, guilt and injustice. Blame can not be divided, not if peace and reconciliation mean respect for the Other’s narrative. The Palestinian narrative is that of suffering, reconstructed on the basis of oral history—a continued exilic existence, and re-discovered historical narratives—read backwards through the prism of contemporary hardships. In that narrative, Zionism or Israel, is the absolute evil, the arch-villain as well as the ultimate victimizer. How can this image be divided in the business-like approach to peace, preached by American and Israeli peacemakers?

It can not, of course. When peace is discussed in this context one should appeal to ways in which communities of suffering, world-wide, reconcile with their victimizers. The narrative of suffering is an interpretative construct describing a collective evil in the past, employed for the political needs of a given community in the present, in order to improve its conditions in the future. This is the tool employed by the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, the native Americans, the African Americans, the Muslims in

Bosnia, and by the African majority in South Africa.

In order to avoid a reductionist view of the narrative of suffering, I will add that in the case of the Palestinians especially, as well as other communities which continue to live the aftereffects of the original action which led to this narrative, such a concept has also a redemptive value—for the communities themselves. However, the way this narrative is manipulated by cultural production and political actors for political ends is another issue.

This narrative is reproduced with the help of educational and media systems, a commemorative infrastructure of museums and ceremonies, and it is preserved by employing an adequate discourse. It can serve a community in conflict; it is more difficult as means for reconciliation. In the case of the Palestinians this takes form especially in crowding the calendar with significant days that have to be commemorated: days such the Balfour Declaration, the Declaration of Independence, the End of the Mandate, the Partition Resolution, and the day of the *Fatah*’s foundation. It is admittedly less a case of collective museums as the Palestinians continue to lack such a basic infrastructure in the absence of a *terra firma* on which to establish some commemorative rituals. For example the mass graveyard of the Sabra and Chatila massacres has been used as a massive garbage dump for the past nineteen years. Every year it is cleared up in September, but usually takes activists from outside the camp to generate some memorial event before it disintegrates into a dump again. In one community at least, of the Palestinian activists of the PLO residing in Tunis between 1983 and 1993, the living room in private homes had a corner in which a kind of a museum representing a narrative and a discourse of national identity could be found.

While Palestinians live the memory of the Nakbah, the Israelis deny it out of fear. This Israeli fear plays a crucial role in the violence exercised daily in the Israeli struggle against the Palestinian narrative, the memory and the assumption of victimhood. Victimized the other and negating its right for the position of a victim are intertwined processes of the same violence. Those who had expelled Palestinians in 1948 deny the ethnic cleansing *that took place*. And so the self-declaration of being a victim is accompanied by the fear of losing the position of the Jew as the ultimate victim in modern history to the other, the ultimate victim of Israel and Zionism.<sup>16</sup>

How can we deal with this fear, a subject that has to be encountered if the hypothesis of this article is accepted—that without such confrontation there is very little hope for a different kind of coexistence or for the construction of a post-conflict homeland. Let me suggest, briefly, two possible very different ways of approaching this complex question of reconciliation.

### Post-Conflictual Possibilities

The first and most difficult approach is legal. The very idea of considering the 1948 case in the realm of law and justice is anathema to most Jews in Israel and hence outside pressure would be needed here.

If it is possible to bring onto the stage of international tribunals Israel's conduct in 1948 and ever since, it may deliver a message even to the peace camp in Israel that reconciliation entails recognition of war crimes and collective atrocities. This can not be done from within as any reference in the Israeli press to expulsion, massacre, or destruction in 1948 is usually denied and attributed to self-hate and service to the enemy in time of war.<sup>17</sup> This reaction encompasses, the media and the educational system, as well the political circles. The reaction shows what a powerful disincentive the current power structure is. It reveals how deep is the fear that members of Israeli society, including prominent figures, would be implicated in actions the likes of which have been condemned by the entire world.

Tribunals like this, even if they are staged public events, can teach us in advance about the mechanism of future settlement—for instance how does one quantify the suffering? One of the best means of approaching this quantification of suffering was offered by the Israelis and Germans in their preparation agreement. The agreement included pensions calculated according to inflation across the years, estimation of real estates, and other aspects of individual loss. A different set of agreements translated the collective loss to monetary terms in the form of grants to the state of Israel. Salman Abu Sitta has begun such thinking in some of his works, giving us an idea of the real value of assets lost in the *Nakbah*.<sup>18</sup>

A “softer” approach is to offer non-retributive paradigms of justice. Howard Zehr in his book, *Changing Lenses*,<sup>19</sup> talks strongly against the pro-punishment judicial system. One of the questions Zehr raises is relevant to our discussion of the means by which Jews in Israel could overcome their fear of facing the past. He asks, should justice focus on establishing guilt or should it focus on identifying needs and obligations? In other words can it serve as a re-regulator of life where life was once disrupted? Justice cannot be made to inflict suffering on victimizers, let alone their descendents, but to discontinue suffering.

Such a non-retributive panel was offered by the truth committee of Bishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa. The power underlying the truth commission lies both in its disinclination to inflict heavy penalties, and in its insistence on discussing future relationships between different communities in South Africa. It ensures that victims do not transform too easily into victimizers

themselves.

Another legal approach is offered by the American psychologist Joan Fumia, who focuses her work on the transformation of attitudes in conflictual situations.<sup>20</sup> She bases her work on the relationships that develop between offenders and victims in the American legal system resulting from a recently introduced new procedure which offers victim-offender mediation. This method involves a face-to-face meeting between offender and victim. The most important part of the procedure is the readiness of the offender to accept responsibility for the crime. Thus, the deed itself is not the focus of the process, but its consequence. The search in this method is for restorative justice, which is defined as a question of what can the offender do to ease the loss and suffering of the victim. It is not a substitute for the criminal proceedings, or in the case of Palestine, it cannot be an alternative to actual compensation or repatriation, but a supplement to any final solution. Fumia claimed that in South Africa this model was successfully implemented.

If Israeli responsibility for the *Nakbah* were to be discussed as part of the attempt to reach a permanent settlement for the conflict (at the present stage, unlikely), it would obviously not reach the international court, as did the cases of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Or at least, this is what one can assess, given the way the *Nakbah* is perceived by governments in the USA and Europe. These political actors have so far accepted the Israeli peace camp perspective on the conflict, as elaborated above. However, the civil societies in America and in Europe as well as governments in Africa and Asia have different views on this, and the situation may change (the move to prosecute Ariel Sharon in a Belgian court, is one such example). But as long as this balance of power remains as it is now, one doubts the possibility of establishing a truth commission *a la* South Africa. But the demands of the 1948 Palestinian victims would remain in a very dominant position on the peace agenda, whether or not this procedure is followed.

This outcry would continue to face the offenders. The fear of the offender would have to be taken into account in order that the settlement of the conflict could move from the division of the visible to the restoration of the invisible.

The second approach is educational and requires a dialectical recognition of both communities as communities of suffering. For this, a very natural process of negating the other should be overcome first. The destruction of the collective memory of the Other through the construction of one's own memory is a central element in the formation of national identities. Violence, direct as well as symbolic, plays a crucial part in the way collective memories are produced, repro-

duced, disseminated, and consumed within concrete historical power relations, interests, and conceptual possibilities and limitations. In the case of Palestine and Israel, control of the collective memory is part of the internal and external violence and counter violence each of the rival collectives applies to secure its existence. That is, the way the two sides to the conflict construct their collective identity is a dialectical process whose impelling force is the total negation of the Other. Within this dialectic each side sees itself as a sole victim while totally negating the victimization of the Other. The violence used in order to conquer the centers of power relations and dynamics aims at positioning more “effectively” one’s own narrative, interests, values, symbols, goals, and criteria. At the same time, efforts to secure those of the Other are marginalized, excluded, or destroyed. Incommensurability has the upper hand and dialogue has no chance of finding a starting point. Collective self-constitution, negation of the legitimacy of the Other’s otherness, victimizing the Other and refusing to acknowledge the Other’s suffering become inseparably bound up with each other. Self-proclaimed victimhood, refusing to acknowledge the evil inflicted on the Other, and insisting on being sole victim are fused into the kind of practice which reflects the position of the Other. In the case of the Israeli/Palestinian coexistence, the struggle over the control of the memory of victimization is a matter of life and death, and suffering and death, as actuality and as memory, are philosophical, political and existential issues.

It will not be easy to overcome such a powerful dialectical process in the case of Israel and Palestine. The way to go about it is by treating the history of the conflict as a chain of victimization. The violence that bred the national awakening of the Jews and their search for a homeland in Palestine did not justify past or present evils inflicted by the movement, or later by the state of Israel, on the Palestinians. And while Zionism may not be a historical case of pure colonialism, it can still be defined as a colonialist movement, and therefore the Palestinian violence and counter-violence cannot be judged in the same way as Zionist violence against Palestine. In this sense, no injustice was inflicted by the Palestinian on the Israelis, as no injustice was inflicted by the Algerians on the French colonialists though there certainly was violence. But there was a European injustice inflicted upon the Jews that can be recognized as a first link in the chain of victimization.

In the reformulation of collective memory currently under way in South Africa, the Africans are not diminishing the catastrophes that propelled white settlers to come to South Africa. While reintroducing the crimes of apartheid into the collective memory, the dialogue here creates space for the traumas that led whites to leave Europe in search of another “homeland.” Similarly, one

cannot equate injustice and Palestinian resistance to Jewish expulsion and ethnic cleansing.

Both sides need to accept difficult demands: on the one hand is the need to avoid dwarfing or eliminating the role of the Holocaust in the Jewish national identity and collective memory; on the other hand is the need to stop instrumentalizing the *Nakbah* in a way that obstructs the chances for peaceful dialogue.

The demand not to instrumentalize the memory of both catastrophes is of course directed to both sides. Such a demand can not be accepted unless the political structure of the future homeland is a-national or bi-national. Only in such a political formation can one hope for non-ethnocentric, polyphonic reconstructions of the past that can produce in their turn more reflective and humanistic attitudes towards the suffering of both sides.

The starting point is to overcome nationalism and ethnocentrism. Without this no Palestinian-Israeli dialogue on historiographical, moral, and philosophical levels is possible. Critical theory and postmodern elaboration of the historical constitution of the subject, knowledge, identity, and memory, together with empirical studies, should impel this deconstruction and reformulation of the hegemonic Palestinian and Israeli narratives. The enemy here is not so much the hegemonic interpretation as it is the position of exclusivity demanded by one side or the other and by the denial of the Other’s narrative. The demand for exclusivity in the case of the Holocaust is understandably a very touchy issue. The recognition of the universality of the memory of the Holocaust and its expropriation from the hand of Zionism does not and should not diminish its uniqueness in the history of mankind. This uniqueness, however, is manifested *inter alia* also in the *Nakbah* and the Palestinian suffering. Such an attitude contains new political possibilities currently overshadowed by both sides’ one-dimensionality.

But those who go down this road will encounter many obstacles. Those who adopt a critical “humanist” or “universal” approach that does not simply dismiss humanism will find themselves set apart from the accepted intellectual, cultural and emotional levels within the history of “their” societies and they may be pushed into eternal exile. On such marginal spots can these people still be considered as “Palestinians” or “Israelis”? This is but one question to be answered within this future dialogue.

Indeed how will Israeli Jews challenging the Zionization of the Holocaust memory fare, and how could Palestinians challenge openly the national instrumentalization of the *Nakbah* in direct clash with mainstream Palestinian conception of the *Nakbah* memory?

In the 1990s, on both sides, hopeful signs for the beginning of such a dialogue appeared. The “new histori-

ans” in Israel challenged the foundational myth of the Jewish state, while on the Palestinian side, self-criticism emerged about the tendency to minimize the Holocaust memory and its universal implications. Edward Said, Azmi Bishara, and few others deconstructed the way Arab and Palestinian literature dwarfed, ignored, and at times denied the Holocaust memory as a constitutive element in the Jewish collective memory.<sup>21</sup> This is how Edward Said has put it:

“What Israel does to the Palestinians it does against a background, not only of the long-standing Western tutelage over Palestine and Arabs... but also against a background of an equally long-standing and equally unflinching anti-Semitism that in this century produced the Holocaust of the European Jews. . We cannot fail to connect the horrific history of anti-Semitic massacres to the establishment of Israel; nor can we fail to understand the depth, the extent and the overpowering legacy of its suffering and despair that informed the postwar Zionist movement. But it is no less appropriate for Europeans and Americans today, who support Israel because of the wrong committed against the Jews to realize that support for Israel has included, and still includes, support for the exile and dispossession of the Palestinian people.”<sup>22</sup>

The universalization of the Holocaust memory, the deconstruction of this memory’s manipulation by Zionism and the state of Israel, and the end of Holocaust denial and underrating on the Palestinian side can lead to the mutual sympathy Said talks about. However, it may need more than this to convince the Israelis to recognize their role as victimizers. The self-image of victim is deeply rooted in the collective conduct of the political elite in Israel from the very early years of the state. It is seen as the source for moral international and world Jewish support for the state, even when this image of the righteous Israel on the one hand and the David and Goliath myth on the other became quite ridiculous after the 1967 war, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and the intifada. And yet the fear is there of losing the position of the victim, next to the fear of facing the unpleasant past and its consequences, not far away from the fear nourished by the political system, substantiated by Arab hostility, of being physically eliminated as a community.

## Conclusions

The nuclear arsenal, the gigantic military complex, the security service octopuses, have all proved themselves useless in the face of the two intifadas or the guerrilla war in South Lebanon. They are useless as means of facing an ever frustrated and radical million Palestinian citizens of Israel, or a local initiative by refugees unable to contain their dismay in the face of an opportunist Palestinian authority or a crumbling PLO. None of the weapons the real or imaginary fear pro-

duced can face the victim and his or her wrath. More and more victims are added daily to the Palestinian community of suffering, in the occupied territories, and in Israel itself. The end of victimization and the recognition of the role of Israel as victimizer are the only useful means of reconciliation.

So a post-conflictual homeland can not be constructed on the basis of a division of the shared imagined homeland in the most unfair balance thinkable: 78 per cent a Jewish state and 22 per cent a Palestinian protectorate of a kind. It is even less thinkable as a solution when the offer on the international agenda is dividing even the 22 per cent with a further partition. A fair solution can not be a solution which allocates to Israel exclusive say in security, foreign, and economic matters. The future construction of a homeland can not be a Jewish state in which Palestinians are second-rate citizens, and it can not be a perpetuation of an occupation, even if it is described with new terminology.

But above all, a future constructed homeland can not survive as a physical and political entity when an estimated four million Palestinian refugees and their right of return are erased from its agenda. A future homeland, from which the symbolic and actual violence is reduced or even extracted, is one in which the past evil of transfer is rectified by repatriation of those who had been expelled. This principle should be discussed as a practical solution, taking into account demography, economy, cultural inclinations and above all fears.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The 1928 episode was covered by Eliakim Rubenstein, “The Treatment of the Arab Question in Palestine in the Immediate Period after the 1929 Events and the Establishment of the Political Bureau—Political Aspect,” in Ilan Pappé (ed.), *Jewish-Arab Relations in Mandatory Palestine; A New Approach to the Historical Research* (Givat Haviva: Institute of Peace Research, 1995), 65-102 (Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup>On the circumstances that led to the resolution and its content see Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1951*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), 16-46.

<sup>3</sup>Simcha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myth and Realities* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 13-54.

<sup>4</sup>Ilan Pappé, “Were They Expelled?: The History, Historiography and Relevance of the Refugee Problem,” in *The Palestinian Exodus, 1948-1988*, eds. Ghada Karmi and Eugene Cortran (London: Ithaca, 1999), 37-62.

<sup>5</sup>I have dealt expansively with this issue in Ilan Pappé, “Angst, Oferschaft, Selbst- und Frembilder,” *Angst in Eignen Landn*, ed. Rafik Schami (Zurich: Nagel and Kimche, 2001), 65-77.

<sup>6</sup>Ilan Amitzur, *Bernadotte in Palestine 1948: A Study in Contemporary Humanitarian Knight-errantry*, (London: Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>See Pappé, *The Making*, 203-243.

<sup>8</sup>Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall; Israel and the Arab World* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000), 109-110.

<sup>9</sup>For a critique on Oslo see Ilan Pappé, “Breaking the Mirror: Oslo and After,” in *Looking Back at the June 1967 War*, ed.

Haim Gordon (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 95-112.

<sup>10</sup>See Ella Shohat, "Sprache in Spiel: Erinnerungsfragmente einer Arabischen Juden," 84-95.

<sup>11</sup>See Ilan Pappé, "Fear, Victimhood, Self and Other," in *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 1 (May 2001).

<sup>12</sup>Ilan Pappé, "Israeli Television Fiftieth Anniversary Series: Tekumma: A Post-Zionist Review?" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 27:4 (Summer 1998), 99-105.

<sup>13</sup>*Haaretz* (1 November, 2000).

<sup>14</sup>I have elaborated on the "Peace Now" syndrome in "Post-Zionist Critique: Part I: The Academic Debate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26:2 (Winter 1997), 29-41.

<sup>15</sup>The scope of the tragedy is well described in a collection of articles: Ghada Karmi and Eugene Cortran (eds.), *The Palestinian Exodus, 1948-1988* (London: Ithaca, 1999).

<sup>16</sup>Ilan Gur-Ze'ev and Ilan Pappé, "Beyond the Destruction of the Other's Collective Memory: Blueprints for an Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue," *Theory Culture and Society*, 18:2-3 (April-June 2001).

<sup>17</sup>Ilan Pappé "I Profughi Palestinesi tra Storia e Storiografia," *In Fuge; Guerre, Carestie e Migrazioni nel Mondo Contemporaneo*, ed. Marco Buttino (Napoli: L'Ancora, 2001), 81-106.

<sup>18</sup>Salman Abu Sitta, "The Feasibility of the Right of Return," 171-196.

<sup>19</sup>Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses; A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Ontario: Herlad Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup>Joan Fumia, "Restitution versus Retribution: The Case for Victim-Offender Mediation, Conflict Resolution), *Suite101.com*, published for the first time in October 1988, reporting the Victim-Offender Program (VORP) at work in US legal system.

<sup>21</sup>All quoted in Gur-Zeev and Pappé.

<sup>22</sup>Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), 167.