

## Peace between Israel and Palestine?

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Talking to a relative of mine who lives in Israel, we exchanged by email about the Hamas terrorist attack and the brutal response of the Israeli Armed Forces that affected the entire Palestinian population of Gaza. He spoke to me about the moral right of the Jewish people to exist and I replied that the Palestinian people also had the moral right to exist. That ended the respectful dialogue we had. The Palestinian people's right to exist remained unanswered.

On October 28, the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, in his speech, spoke of "the war of humanism" against Hamas, referring to it as "the war of light against darkness", ignoring the Palestinian people, like the European states that justified the colonial wars of the 19th century exterminating entire populations by claiming to bring civilization to the savage, primitive people. In Netanyahu's speech, the Palestinian people's right to exist was not an issue. And so far in the attack on Gaza, he talks about the fight against Hamas and ignores talking about the Palestinian population, as if it did not exist.

It is not by ignoring the people, denying its existence, its identity, and annihilating it, that its memory will disappear. The experience of the Shoah has shown us that. Annette Wieviorka begins her work *L'ère du témoin* (Wieviorka, 1998) with a statement by Simon Dubnov to his comrades in the Riga

ghetto before he was murdered on December 8, 1941: "Good people, do not forget; good people, tell; good people, write!"

Just as the Jewish people have the Shoah, with all its individual and collective transgenerational traumatic effects, the Palestinian people have the Nakba with similar effects. For the Palestinian people, the memory of the Nakba is very much present as the Shoah is for the Jewish people. The difference is that in the West the Shoah is discussed, but the Nakba is ignored.

For centuries the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews (which the Israeli sociologist Yehuda Shenhav (2006) calls the "Arab Jews") have lived in a peaceful coexistence with the mostly Muslim natives of North Africa, which was not possible in the whole of Christian Europe plagued by histories of persecution, pogroms, inquisitions and to conclude with the extermination plan of the Shoah. In this context one can imagine what it means to conclude Pesach (Passover) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) with L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim (Next year in Jerusalem). In situations of insecurity and possible outbreaks of anti-Semitism, believing in an alternative that symbolized a salvation, a liberation from oppression, from existential insecurity, the prayer L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim is a message of hope, and at the same time the bearer of an illusion. What the prayer makes obvious is that the real Jerusalem, the land of Zion, has populations rooted there for centuries, with their cultures and traditions. To this day, part of the Israeli population cannot imagine that other peoples could have the same right to live on the same land. The longing to be able to live "finally" in a situation of security among their own people, that paradise which would free them from the constant threat of persecution, has its psychosocial effects which politicians take advantage of to justify the unjustifiable on the part of the State of Israel against Palestine.

The Palestinian people, for their part, after centuries under Ottoman rule, became a British protectorate in the first half of the 20th century. They lived for centuries under conditions typical of an oppressed and exploited colonized society, but what happened in 1948, they had never experienced before. It is what the Palestinian people will call the Nakba, i.e. the "catastrophe".

With the UN Resolution of November 29, 1947, the Palestinian territory was divided into two states: one Jewish and the other Arab, causing an intensification of tension on both sides. Attacks on Jewish settlements increased, but in April 1948, the situation took a catastrophic turn, causing 750,000 Palestinians to flee the countryside and the city<sup>2</sup>. On April 9, the massacre

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2 In 1950, when UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works

of the inhabitants of Deir Yasin<sup>3</sup> occurred, which, according to Uri Avnery (1954), was decisive in the panic reaction of the Arab population. Edward Said recounts:

“More than any other, the event that emerges from that dark period is Deir Yasin, the rapes, the beheaded children, the disemboweled women.... It takes time to understand the context and the true meaning of Deir Yasin... it was part of an overall plan aimed at emptying Palestine of its Arab population.” (Said, 1999)

Anthropologist Éléonore Merza Bronstein is of the same opinion: “I do not believe that the Zionist project is aimed at exterminating the Palestinians, I rather believe that the intention is to “de-Palestinize” so that we can live in peace among ourselves.” (Merza & Bronstein, 2018). In 1948, 678 Palestinian localities were destroyed by the Israeli Armed Forces and 22 localities by the Arab Armed Forces, as the Palestinians had no army<sup>4</sup>.

In the face of this desolate situation, there have always been Jewish minorities who have tried to react, to break the concealing silence about Israel’s responsibility for the Nakba. One such initiative is the Israeli non-profit organization Zochrot (They Remember), founded in 2002 by Eitan Bronstein, which aims to promote awareness of the Nakba. The motto: “Commemorate, witness, recognize and repair”. The founding action was

to plant posters in all the places in the country where the destroyed Palestinian villages were located and to organize tours for Jews and Arabs, provided by the refugees and their families of those villages.

As Edward Said says: “I have never stopped thinking that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict and that the only hope lies in a dignified and loyal coexistence “ (Said, 1999). It was him who founded, in 1999, together with Daniel Barenboim, the West-East Divan Orchestra, which brings together Palestinian and Israeli musicians.

But, as long as the international powers have other intentions and other interests, a dignified peace will be a titanic task.

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Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) began its operations, 750,000 people had Palestine refugee status. Today, more than 5.9 million are waiting to move from refugee status to full citizenship.

<sup>3</sup> More than 100 Palestinian Arabs killed.

<sup>4</sup> Data drawn from Noga Kadman. *Erased from Space and Consciousness. Israel and the depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948*. Indiana University Press, 2015, p. 189.