

# Neutralizing History and Memory in Divided Societies: The Case of Making Peace in Palestine/Israel

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During a visit to Nazareth on Monday, February 20, 2012, a fascinating exchange took place between a distinguished visitor, high school students from the city, and some educators. The exchange revolved around the past. In replying to students' and teachers' questions about why Arab schools do not teach the history of the Palestinian people and why students do not learn much about their past, literature, and poetry, the visitor said, "History isn't important anymore in our days. Let us move on and forget the past." He went on to claim:

As for the subject of history, it's not true that it isn't being taught, but there are some concepts and instructions that are not part of the curricula. As for the subject of the Nakba, I need to clarify that I always was and will remain in support of education and progress, but I guess the subject of history is no longer important in our days. What is important is the future, and I even see a big part of the Jewish youth saying that the past is not important. The world is developing very quickly, and the past is full of pain that causes hatred. So the Jewish and Arab peoples ought to learn to live in peace toward a prosperous future for both and to let them forget the past.

In response to several questions concerning the centrality of the past and history in education, he argued that "we should not teach the new generation much about the past and history, for it generates confusion and brings weird ideas. Take Napoleon's war, for example. Is it important to teach kids about it? I do not think so." Then one of the educators, Faisal Taha, asked, "But the Holocaust that the Jews experienced during Nazi Germany is still being taught in the schools of the Jewish sector. Is that not part of the past?" The visitor replied, "The issue of the Holocaust is a rare issue that does not happen frequently, and this story ought to be taught to students so these catastrophes do not happen again." He further argued:

In my opinion, what is important is that the new generation learns about the future—how to behave, how to coexist—and not about the past. You learn about the past through a click on the computer to get all the information about it. But if the person wants to know the future, he or she should use his or her imagination. That is what distinguishes humans from other creatures. Only humans can have imagination and can see through their future. You ought to learn and care about academic studies and your own future, and this is what matters most. Some say we need to learn about the past to avoid the same mistakes, but they learn about the past and commit other mistakes. Once again, I repeat, the task of school is not teaching you about the past, for today anyone could, through a computer or an iPhone, learn information about history, etc., and that is easy.<sup>1</sup>

These claims are those of the former Israeli president Shimon Peres, one of the lead architects and an enthusiastic supporter of the Oslo Accords, who visited the city of Nazareth upon the invitation of its then-mayor Ramiz Jaraisy. The perspective that emerges from Peres's statements to the Palestinian students and educators on the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is strikingly future oriented and places at its core the demand to "neutralize history." It is a call to move forward and engage with and prioritize the practical concerns and needs of the present over invoking a contentious, antagonizing, and traumatizing past. A closer reading of the Oslo Accords and a critical analysis of the underlying discourse of what has since become known as the "peace process" demonstrates the prevalence and even dominance of this forward-looking and history-neutralizing approach. Neutralizing history

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"Peres to Students in Nazareth: Forget the Past or Learn It through the iPhone" (in Arabic), Panet, February 22, 2012, <http://www.panet.co.il/online/articles/71/73/S-515094,71,73.html>. Translated by the author.

involves forgetting, breaking with the past, bracketing history from politics, encouraging historical amnesia, focusing on the future, and constructing and promoting reductionist historical narratives, as well as other strategies. These are invoked under the pretext of collective advancement in place of remaining trapped in a traumatizing past that is likely to revive and prolong resentment, anger, and hostility, which may undermine and destabilize an already fragile society. Needless to say, the quest to neutralize history is hardly an apolitical move. It is a political demand par excellence through which asymmetrical power relations are concealed, legitimacy is conferred on past injustices, and the more-powerful continues to enjoy its privileges. The demand to neutralize history often follows the logic of the perpetrators and the victorious.

Shimon Peres is not original in his advice to forget. In his arguments about what constitutes a nation, the French philosopher and religion scholar Ernest Renan claims that besides selective remembering of the past, selective and “strategic” forgetting and even “historical error” are crucial for the formation of a nation. Renan argues that historical inquiry and studies pose a danger to the formation and cohesion of a nation, for these bring to light the divisive deeds of violence that took place at the origin of all political formations.

Another argument advanced by the advocates of forgetting does not place the emphasis on “strategic” grounds, but rather on a revolutionary ontology of selfhood. Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche’s argument in favor of forgetfulness, some have insisted on the liberating and self-realizing potential of the power of active forgetting.<sup>2</sup> According to Nietzsche, the power to willfully forget, to sustain an “as if not” attitude toward transgression, represents the will to power of “noble morality” that seeks action/transformation, happiness, and personal development. He argues that forgetfulness can be a positive and empowering act of the self, representing a sovereign neglect of just deserts. The demand for vengeance, Nietzsche claims, is reactive because it remains shaped by the transgression and limits both the victim and perpetrator to a logic of retribution. Indeed, Nietzsche views forgiveness and punishment as opposites of forgetfulness. Though he continues Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s focus on the master-slave dialectic as engendering identity formation based on negation (that is, recognizing what one is not), Nietzsche comes to different conclusions. He does not accept that teleological progress will lead to synthesis and closure (i.e., the end of history), and thus suspects reconciliation and recognition as a universal morality that is indiscriminately applicable to all human beings. Reconciliation and recognition may well be temporary measures or steps or positions that one takes, but not a total universal mortality. In other words, it is the will to power that is most at work, not Christian and Kantian ideals such as forgiveness, equality, free will, and rationality. Nietzsche does not reject history as such, but warns against becoming mired in what allegedly is a universal morality premised on the equal worth and dignity of each person. He appreciated and respected heroic history (for example, Napoleon, Homer, the Medici family, and the ancient Greeks) that serves as a model for transcendence, renewal, strength, confidence, creativity, and recreation of the self.

One can identify Nietzschean moments in Peres’s speech. The weak, defeated, and massacred European Jew is replaced by an active, empowered, colonial, and powerful new Jew in Palestine. Through actively colonizing Palestine, the victorious Zionist Jew seeks renewal, recreation, and transformation that breaks with and transcends the past in which the Jews were viewed as weak, defeated, and impotent. And yet, and as Peres himself claimed, concerning the centrality and uniqueness of the Holocaust and its memory, this renewal and development demands historical amnesia—not as a universal mode of being but only in the context of the Palestinian Nakba and establishment of Israel. In line with a critique that is also applicable to Nietzsche’s theoretical argument, one could argue that Peres’s demand of forgetting is problematic because it is difficult to demonstrate how not holding Zionism, and later the State of Israel (i.e., victimizers), accountable for the Palestinian Nakba and dispossession results in self-realization for Palestinians (i.e., victims), rather than furthering the harm and injury inflicted upon them. Following Renan’s warning, Peres’s demand that Palestinians forget stems from the worry that historical inquiry will, among other things, likely reveal the brutal violence, dispossession, and colonial practices that took place, and that continue today on a different magnitude, at the foundation of the State of Israel.

Instead of creating war crimes tribunals and truth commissions, forgetting is proposed as a way to come to terms with the past. Forgetting often entails no acknowledgment of pain, loss, and crime, and no compensations, either material or symbolic; sometimes amnesty is offered to perpetrators. It is the demand of forgetting that is the most problematic in reaching historical reconciliation and transitional justice. For it is often suggested that

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Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

transitional justice or reconciliation requires “coming to terms with the past.” Coming to terms or reckoning with the past requires investigating and publicizing past abuses and crimes. In some cases, coming to terms with the past may confirm what many already believe happened rather than expose unknown crimes. Indeed, coming to terms with the past and revealing new knowledge about past crimes and abuses may further antagonize conflicting parties rather than mitigate tensions. However, some scholars have argued that revealing and investigating past injustices, combined with other moral imperatives (such as mutual respect, recognition, and legitimacy), in fact promotes reconciliation and the formation of a new and inclusive political order.<sup>3</sup>

Besides very few references to major historical events, such as Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the text of the Oslo Accords is excessively formalistic and legalistic. It details procedures, processes, governmental and institutional arrangements and settings, shared committees, and distribution of functions and authorities. Briefly, the Accords are mostly concerned with practical and institutional arrangements, and history remains largely silent, buried, and neutralized. The most, and probably the only, “political” paragraph in the Oslo Accords is the opening paragraph of the Oslo I Accord, which states that the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) “agree that it is time to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual legitimate and political rights, and strive to live in peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process.”<sup>4</sup> The ordering of the sought-after aims here is remarkable: achieving a just and lasting peace settlement and historic reconciliation comes last. One could argue that the ranking of aims (from thin/minimal to thick/maximal) is reasonable, because under conditions of political transition from protracted conflict to peace, you start with practical and thin aims—ending confrontation and striving for peaceful coexistence—and gradually move to more ambitious aims like just peace and historical reconciliation.

As I will demonstrate below, the Oslo Accords generated a peacemaking discourse focused on thin aims, while its legalistic terms and conditions structurally and intrinsically undermined—and even blocked—the possibility of accomplishing thick aims. That is, achieving a just and comprehensive peace and historical reconciliation requires engaging with the past, rather than burying and neutralizing it.

### Peacemaking: Between Conflict Resolution and Historical Reconciliation

The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993 are constitutive components in what has become known as the Middle East Peace Process. This process has been largely premised on a peacemaking discourse, according to which the Palestine/Israel question is one of peacemaking between two equal parties, both of which have symmetrical and equally legitimate interests, needs, claims, and rights. Furthermore, after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) following the Oslo Accords, a new discourse of development concerning the Palestinian economy and society became an integral component of the peacemaking discourse. The pursuit of the development discourse as part of the peace process is directly connected to the formation, on October 1, 1993, of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), chaired by Norway, which was established as a coordination mechanism for aid and assistance to the PA. The development discourse of the AHLC has emphasized that international donor aid to the Palestinian people should be mainly directed toward fostering state-building, transparency and good governance, private sector and trade investment, and economic growth.<sup>5</sup> It aims to create a healthy and enabling environment for sustaining the “peace process.” The peacemaking discourse on Israel/Palestine includes components of economic peace, conflict management, conflict settlement, and conflict resolution, and hence inherited some of their central weaknesses.

Several strategies and approaches have been proposed to settle and solve intractable political conflicts, all with their own limits and weaknesses. These problem-solving approaches include economic development and growth (economic peace), conflict management, conflict settlement, and conflict resolution. *Economic peace* focuses, among other things, on development, economic growth, and good governance. *Conflict management* seeks to maintain the status quo and manage the conflict rather than settle it. *Conflict settlement* seeks to

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See, for example, Paul Muldoon, “Reconciliation and Political Legitimacy: The Old Australia and the New South Africa,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49, no. 2 (2003): 182–96; and Ernesto Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree: Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Political Violence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

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“Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements,” About News, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://middleeast.about.com/od/documents/a/Declaration-Of-Principles.htm>.

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“Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC),” Local Development Forum, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.lacs.ps/article.aspx?id=6>.

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For more on the differences between conflict settlement and conflict resolution, see John Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990); and Nadim Rouhana, "Group Identity and Power Asymmetry in Reconciliation Processes: The Israeli-Palestinian Case," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2004): 33–52.

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There is a growing literature that seeks to critically assess the failures of the Middle East Peace Process in general and the Oslo Accords in particular, addressing different dimensions. For example, see Ian Lustick, "The Oslo Agreement as an Obstacle to Peace," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 61–66; Edward Said, "What Price Oslo," *CounterPunch*, March 23, 2002, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/03/23/what-price-oslo/>; and Hilde Henriksen Waage, "Norway's Role in the Middle East Peace Talks: Between a Strong State and a Weak Belligerent," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 6–24.

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Bashir Bashir, "Accommodating Historically Oppressed Social Groups: Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Reconciliation," in *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies*, ed. Will Kymlicka and Bashir Bashir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 48–69.

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Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, 20–27.

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Rouhana, "Group Identity," 33–52.

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See Thomas McCarthy, "Coming to Terms with Our Past, Part II: On the Morality and Politics of Reparations for Slavery," *Political Theory* 32, no. 6 (2004): 750–72; Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon, 1998); and Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 77–86.

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Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, 41–48.

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Bashir Bashir, "Reconciling Historical Injustices: Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Reconciliation," *Res Publica* 18, no. 2 (2012): 127–43.

terminate the conflict through reaching a formal agreement representing the existing power relations between governments, where mutual interest is the main motivator of the two parties. *Conflict resolution* aims to achieve a historical compromise and create a new relationship based on mutual acceptance, cooperation, and the promotion of equality and reciprocity. Thus, conflict resolution aspires to achieve profound changes in the basic structures and policies of the institutions as well as attitudes of societies.<sup>6</sup>

A close examination of the peacemaking discourse in Israel/Palestine, which encompasses core elements from the above-mentioned problem-solving approaches, reveals striking flaws. More precisely, the peacemaking discourse is problematic because it sustains the existing conditions by seeking stability (conflict management); it presupposes equality between the two conflicting parties, which are in fact strikingly unequal and embedded in an asymmetrical power relation (conflict settlement); it fails to convincingly address the core issues of the conflict, such as occupation, settlement, Jerusalem, borders, refugees, and natural resources, by bracketing their discussion and focusing instead on economic and security matters (economic peace); and it avoids coming to terms with the historical injustices caused by the conflict (conflict resolution).<sup>7</sup>

Several scholars have argued that in the context of intractable conflicts with a legacy of historical grievances, none of the previously listed problem-solving approaches satisfactorily address the historical injustices experienced by the conflict's parties. Put differently, as I have argued elsewhere, the historical dimension of long-standing legacies of injustices gives rise to a set of distinctive demands that transcends the requirements of economic peace, conflict management, conflict settlement, and conflict resolution.<sup>8</sup> These demands require a politics of reconciliation that goes beyond the familiar requirements of peacemaking and state-building.<sup>9</sup> Reconciliation is not about achieving economic growth, managing conflicts in terms of restoring order and preserving the existing arrangements of power relations, or promoting self-interests and achieving coexistence or mutual acceptance. Historical reconciliation represents a force with the potential to generate social and political changes based on mutual legitimacy, recognition of asymmetries and the coming to terms with past injustices, and the laying of foundations for a more just, inclusive, and equal political order and community.<sup>10</sup> These are precisely the components that are largely missing from the peacemaking discourse of the Oslo Accords.

What are the constitutive elements of historical reconciliation and the alternative and more promising approach that they propose to engage with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? For the past two decades, the politics of reconciliation has received exceptional attention from political theorists who have produced an extensive literature to address the different dimensions of reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> Although reconciliation has various meanings,<sup>12</sup> it is generally agreed that its most fundamental components include confronting past injustices and achieving mutual recognition and legitimacy.<sup>13</sup> In my article "Reconciling Historical Injustices: Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Reconciliation," published in the journal *Res Publica*, I identify the core principles of reconciliation essential for reckoning with past injustices, addressing asymmetry of power relations, and attaining mutual legitimacy.<sup>14</sup> These principles include collective memory of exclusion, acknowledgment, taking responsibility, and offering apology and reparations.

Let us turn to examining some of these principles in the case of Israel/Palestine and their contribution to addressing the weaknesses found in the existing peacemaking discourse. Firstly, the politics of reconciliation requires recognizing the significance of collective memory and the history of oppression. These are important because they often serve as invaluable sources for challenging and questioning the dominant views, stories, narratives, and past and present political arrangements and practices. The hegemonic national account of history either denies or downplays the occurrence of past injustices, effectively absolving the dominant group of responsibility for causing these injustices. In other words, collective memory and history of exclusion operate as counternarratives to the hegemonic and often celebrated account of national history. The significance of these counternarratives is to bring to public attention voices and stories that have been ignored or silenced and inequalities that have been underestimated or denied. Collective memory of oppression, nevertheless, does not necessarily imply uniformity and homogeneity of counterviews. By putting

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There has been an interesting debate among historians revolving around the relationship between the historical and the ethical, namely whether these two components are contradictory or identical/complementary. One of the central aspects of this debate concerns the "public use of history" (for example, the use and abuse of history in the form of redemptive narratives of liberation by nationalist elites) in the context of national and ethnic conflicts. While this debate has direct bearing on the claims presented here, it is certainly beyond this essay's scope to address this crucial argument. Nevertheless, as the analysis in this essay demonstrates, the use of history has to be epistemologically and ethically consistent, including when this consistency challenges redemptive and emancipatory narratives of the oppressed. For more on the debate on the relationship between the historical and the ethical, see Dirk Moses, "Hayden White, Traumatic Nationalism, and the Public Role of History," *History and Theory* 44, no. 3 (2005): 311–32; Dirk Moses, "The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Rejoinder to Hayden White," *History and Theory* 44, no. 3 (2005): 339–47; and Hayden White, "The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses," *History and Theory* 44, no. 3 (2005): 333–38.

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Edward Said, "Afterword: The Consequences of 1948," in *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 257.

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In support of this claim, see Burke A. Hendrix, "Memory in Native American Land Claims," *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 763–85; and McCarthy, "Coming to Terms with Our Past."

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Indeed, some Israeli scholars, mostly the new historians and critical sociologists such as Benny Morris, Tom Segev, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, and Baruch Kimmerling, have also challenged and questioned the Israeli Zionist mainstream narrative. See, for example, Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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For more on the claim of taking responsibility, see Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree*, 41–48. The issue of responsibility has several complications. For more on these complications, see Andrew Schaap, "Guilty Subjects and Political Responsibility: Arendt, Jaspers and the Resonance of the 'German Question' in Politics of Reconciliation," *Political Studies* 49, no. 4 (2001): 749–66.

emphasis on diverse counternarration, a collective memory of oppression guarantees room for contestation.<sup>15</sup>

The master narrative that underlies the hegemonic Zionist historiography views the story of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as one of salvation, a return to the patriarchs' land and the Promised Land, and an adequate answer to years of anti-Semitism and persecution in Europe. The Palestinian national revival after the Nakba posed profound challenges to the Zionist hegemonic narrative. Undoubtedly, the Palestinian collective memory of dispossession has contributed immensely to the revival and development of the Palestinian identity and struggle in the last sixty years. Since the beginning of the "peace process" in the 1990s, Palestinian politics has been expected and encouraged in various ways to set aside or minimize the role of these memories of dispossession and to enter the peace process simply as an equal party to Israel—as Peres's statements show. The demand to suspend a significant part of Palestinians' history and present ignores or downplays the defining memories and experiences of dispossession and domination that they have been enduring as a result of the 1948 war. Neutralizing history or suspending parts of it through reducing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to negotiating the political future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which were occupied by Israel during the 1967 war—as happened in the Oslo Accords—conceals the striking disparities and inequalities between the Israeli and Palestinian parties. Focusing on searching for a solution "now" requires an amnesiac politics that ignores the traumatic and enduring results of the Palestinian national ruin in 1948.<sup>16</sup> The events of 1948 are the origin of the enduring asymmetries and inequalities between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The politics of reconciliation provides a more hospitable platform for these memories, stories, and experiences of domination and dispossession to be expressed and voiced. It recognizes their significance in revealing the inequalities, asymmetries, and imbalanced power relations. Voicing these stories of historical injustices is crucial but insufficient, because they also need to be acknowledged. This imperative leads to the second principle of reconciliation: acknowledgment. Reconciliation involves acknowledging the occurrence of historical injustices. As long as these past injustices are denied or portrayed as accidental historical incidents, and not as an integral part of the national narratives, the achievement of historical reconciliation is hardly attainable, if at all, from the perspective of the historically oppressed and excluded groups.<sup>17</sup>

Palestinian memories and experiences of historical injustices not only challenge the mainstream Zionist narrative by insisting on the inequalities and injustices, they also demand acknowledging the Nakba and its ongoing consequences.<sup>18</sup> Put differently, Palestinians insist that since 1948 they have continuously experienced various forms of injustice. The Zionist movement and later the State of Israel largely denied or ignored the injustices brought upon Palestinians. Even when these injustices were recognized by some Israeli and Zionist quarters, they were either underestimated or portrayed as historical contingency or a catastrophe that the Palestinians brought upon themselves.

The demand of acknowledgment is intimately linked to the third principle of reconciliation: taking responsibility. Reconciliation requires not only the acknowledgment of historical injustices but also expects the oppressors to take responsibility for causing these injustices.<sup>19</sup> The oppressing side taking responsibility for causing injustices does not exempt the oppressed side from having a certain level of responsibility for its undesirable situation, and neither does it justify internal oppression, that is, oppression within the oppressed group itself. Furthermore, it does not legitimize morally inconsistent and unacceptable activities and violence committed by the oppressed against members of the oppressing group. Undoubtedly, the Palestinians view the Zionist movement and the State of Israel as the principal and major reason for their Nakba. Thus, they claim that the Zionist movement and the State of Israel should be held responsible for causing the historical injustices Palestinians have been experiencing until today. How and why can responsibility be taken? What would force the more powerful to face their history and reconcile with the oppressed, and what would make the oppressed also take responsibility for their mistakes and accept or deal with the fear of the oppressor? One should not underestimate these very challenging questions of power relations and social psychology. However, as some

historical examples have shown, external and internal pressures, as well as an inclusive egalitarian vision premised on parity rather than revenge, are likely to encourage the oppressors and the oppressed to reconcile, facilitating a move from exclusionary and oppressive politics to an egalitarian and inclusive one. External pressures involve international sanctions and boycott. Internal pressures include civil disobedience, resistance, and internal (from within) opposition. The inclusive vision calls for creating a new common political community and order based on dismantling privileges for the sake of freedom and equality rather than for the sake of revenge and reversing oppression.

Taking responsibility, advocates of reconciliation argue, is of great significance not only for moral reasons of admitting wrongs, but also because of the demand and need to repair these wrongs. This leads us to the fourth principle: offering reparations and apology. Reparations require, among other things, the setting of mechanisms through which material resources will be redistributed according to principles of restorative justice. Additionally, offering reparations goes beyond distributive changes and entails an apology and a set of symbolic activities, such as the creation of national symbols, public holiday, museums, memorials, and the introduction of new curriculum in the education system, to commemorate these past injustices.<sup>20</sup>

The task of these activities is not to romanticize and perpetuate guilt or victimhood. Rather, they are significant because of their political, social, psychological, and pedagogical influence. In other words, they are important because they help citizens transform their understanding of history and their connection to the current political, social, and economic inequalities. Furthermore, they help members of stigmatized and oppressed social groups to reclaim, redescribe, and transform their self-understanding and self-image.

Of course, taking responsibility and offering an apology are incomplete if they remain purely symbolic. That is, if they are disconnected from efforts to redress inequalities and injustices, or if they exclusively assume the form of material compensation, disconnected from efforts to change national narratives and historiography. The Palestinians demand a clear and sincere apology from the State of Israel and its representatives for the historical injustices wrought on them by the war of 1948.<sup>21</sup> Also, mechanisms of compensations and reparations need to be created to compensate for and repair the injustices the Palestinians have endured due to their loss of lands, homes, properties, and family members. Indeed, reparations, though the conditions are not ones of symmetry and equality, should also accommodate the legitimate claims of Israelis who have suffered injustices as a result of Palestinian violence.

Reconciliation demands not only coming to terms with past injustices and addressing asymmetrical power relations. Unlike the previously discussed problem-solving approaches, which seek mere mutual acceptance or coexistence, reconciliation strives for recognition and mutual legitimacy. Under conditions of coexistence and mutual acceptance, and despite some changes that are likely to take place, the relationships between the conflicting parties are likely to remain governed by distorted, asymmetrical power relations. A master and a slave can coexist and exchange acceptance. Reconciliation, however, seeks egalitarian recognition and mutual legitimacy that base the interactions between the two conflicting parties on more ambitious grounds, namely on reciprocity, parity, and equality. Mutual denial governed the political discourse of the Palestinian national movement and the Zionist movement for decades. According to this political discourse, both parties attempted to delegitimize each other. With the beginning of the Middle East Peace Process, both parties moved to a more accommodationist approach (signs of this approach already started to emerge in the mid 1970s), according to which some form of coexistence and mutual acceptance has developed mostly on pragmatic grounds. This accommodationist approach of the peacemaking discourse has been criticized because it did not aspire to achieve egalitarian recognition and mutual legitimacy. Rather, the exchange of letters of recognition on September 9, 1993, between Israel and the PLO, according to which a state (Israel) and an organization (PLO) recognized each other, newly reproduced the asymmetrical and colonial relationship between the two parties. Egalitarian recognition and mutual legitimacy entail the dismantling of the colonial structures and privileges, as well as the coming to terms with the individual and national rights and identities of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

Arab intellectuals in general and the Palestinians in particular have hardly engaged with the “Jewish question” and Jewish rights for the past thirty years.<sup>22</sup> Apart from the often rehearsed and reasonable views on the colonial and imperialist character of Zionism and the claim that Jews do not qualify as a national group—views that have been discussed and

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Articles that point to the significance of taking responsibility and offering an apology and their material and symbolic manifestations include Lawrie Balfour, “Reparations after Identity Politics,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 786–811; McCarthy, “Coming to Terms with Our Past,” 765–66; and Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*.

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See, for example, Bashir Bashir, “Bi-national state in Israel/ Palestine: A Moral and Practical Solution,” in *Third Annual Conference: Toward a Palestinian Strategy Capable of Realizing the Palestinian National Aims* (in Arabic) (Al-Bireh: Palestine Media, Research and Studies Centre, Badael, 2009), 136.

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There are a few exceptions. See, for example, Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

presented for decades—there have been very few attempts to further explore and revisit these claims or the considerable challenges that emerged from the last seventy years of societal, cultural, and political development of Jewish presence in historic Palestine. From the perspective of a politics of reconciliation, the engagement with the Jewish question and Jewish rights and identities in historic Palestine is a moral and normative requirement and a pressing political necessity. Under conditions of historical reconciliation—in which the Nakba and its past and present consequences and injustices are starting to be acknowledged, addressed, and restored—an engagement with Jewish rights and identities in historical Palestine entails recognizing and respecting collective Jewish national rights, most prominent among these being the right to national self-determination.

Critical, reflective Jewish engagements with the Arab question are also rare.<sup>23</sup>

Although one can identify various Zionist postures toward Palestinians (iron wall, confrontation, implied recognition by way of opposition, and ad hoc and imposed accommodation),<sup>24</sup> denial or misrecognition of the existence of a Palestinian national identity has been the leading strand within Zionism.<sup>25</sup> More recently, central Zionist strands have moved toward a more accommodationist approach. The Israeli accommodationist approach is largely premised on the parameters that have been guiding the Middle East Peace Process as discussed above. However, this approach falls short of fully recognizing the Palestinian people as an equal and legitimate nation entitled to the same rights. Mainstream Israeli politicians propose either an enhanced national autonomy or a fragmented and territorially discontinuous Palestinian state on less than 22 percent of historic Palestine as the adequate solution to the conflict. Reconciliation demands coming to terms with Palestinian rights, nationalism, the Nakba, and injustices wrought on the Palestinian people by the conflict.

Finally, the peacemaking discourse of the Oslo Accords and the peace process has assumed that territorial partition is the preferred frame within which to resolve the conflict. Put differently, territorial partition and separation between the people are seen as the best mechanisms to realize the conflicting parties' interests and rights. The recent overwhelming global consensus on the two-state solution (publicly and frequently endorsed by the majority of states in the world, as well as by leading international players like the UN and similar bodies) is the ultimate manifestation of support of the partition logic. Indeed, historical reconciliation is not by definition incompatible with territorial partition. Territorial partition as it was proposed in Palestine was viewed by Palestinians and others as an imperial and colonial enterprise that privileged the rights, history, and claims of European Zionist Jews over those of the Palestinian Arabs. Within this frame of partition, Palestinian rights, national identity, history, and memory were either underestimated or denied by the British Mandate for Palestine and mainstream Zionism.<sup>26</sup> The discourse of partition (though some Zionist quarters rejected it) in its earlier stages—that is, before and for a few decades after the Nakba—rendered the Palestinians and their rights and history invisible and not worth recognizing and respecting. These strategies of denial and invisibility, though developed over time into more nuanced forms, remain powerful still today. More specifically, during the past four decades the partition discourse has developed a hegemonic paradigm according to which the 1949 armistice line (called the Green Line) is descriptive of the realities in Israel/Palestine. This post-Nakba hegemonic paradigm of partition has additionally led to a dominant, silencing, and imposing epistemology in Israel and elsewhere according to which the constitutive moment of the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinian national movement is 1967, and not around 1948.<sup>27</sup> Thus, within the frame of this recent discourse of partition, Palestine is reduced geographically to the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the Palestinians politically (in the political sense of citizenship rights) to the residents of these territories.

Therefore, the paradigm of partition and its hegemonic epistemology tend to neutralize history and memory through primarily focusing, as the Oslo Accords and the peace process did, on 1967 as the historical point of reference for framing and settling the conflict. However, this paradigm of partition has largely ignored or underestimated the social, demographic, and political realities of the pre-1948 and post-1967 context, and certainly the increasing intertwinements, though asymmetrical and wretched, that have resulted from the colonial expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Therefore, partition as a colonial discourse and enterprise of conflict resolution seeks to neutralize history and memory through privileging the historiography and interests of Zionism while ignoring the requirement of historical reconciliation to seriously address the consequences of the Nakba. The right of Palestinian refugees to return is chief among these consequences that

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Early critical Jewish engagements include those of Yizhar Smilansky, who suggested that the "Palestinian question" is not an "Arab question" but entirely a Jewish question, and Yitzhak Epstein, who strongly criticized Zionist leaders for neglecting the existence of another national group that is deeply rooted emotionally and historically in the land. He referred to the lack of Zionist engagement with the existence of the Arabs of Palestine as "a hidden question," which is, according to him, weightier than all other questions put together.

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For more on this point, see, for example, Ian Lustick, "Abandoning the Iron Wall: Israel and 'The Middle Eastern Muck,'" *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 3 (2008): 30–56; and David N. Myers, *Between Jew and Arab: the Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz* (Waldam, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008).

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On denial and misrecognition, see Simha Flapan, *Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979).

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For more on the centrality of denial and invisibility of Palestinian rights and culture, see Beshara Doumani, "Palestine versus the Palestinians? The Iron Laws and Ironies of a People Defined," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 4 (2007): 49–64.

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For more on the Green Line as a paradigmatic and political trap, see Yehouda Shenhav, *Beyond the Two-State Solution: A Jewish Political Essay* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

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For more on different empirical aspects of the increased Jewish and Arab territorial, demographic, economic, and institutional intertwinements in Israel/Palestine, see, for example, Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Marco Allegra, "Citizenship in Palestine: A Fractured Geography," *Citizenship Studies* 13, no. 6 (2009): 553–73; Elizabeth Mavroudi, "Imagining a Shared State in Palestine-Israel," *Antipode* 42, no. 1 (2010): 152–78; and Meron Benvenisti, *The Dream of the White Sabra: An Autobiography of Disillusionment* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 2012).

cast serious doubts on territorial separation and the Green Line as its ultimate signifier and marker.<sup>28</sup> Stated differently, if coming to terms with the past requires addressing the question of Palestine within the time frame of around 1948 and its consequences, as well as taking into serious account the nascent colonial yet intertwined realities in the West Bank and inside Israel, then historical reconciliation in Israel/Palestine undermines separation, segregation, and neutralizing history and calls for alternatives to partition and to what paradigmatically has become known as the two-state solution.

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