The Relational Shaping of National Identities in the Early Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is today one of the most researched and written about conflicts in modern times. Taking place in an easily ignited region, rich in history and holy to the three oldest monotheistic religions, this conflict remains an unresolved puzzle that has attracted the world's attention for more than a century.

Looking at the very beginning of the conflict and the birth of national aspirations offers a variety of keys to understand today's reality. The moment of encounter between Palestinian-Arabs and Zionist immigrants is described and debated at length in literature, therefore this paper will focus on a very specific approach, looking at this early period of what is today the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, through "identity" and "relational" lenses. At the beginning of the 20th century, the birth and rebirth of nations and nationalisms offer a perspective on the course of events that unravelled at the transition period from the Ottoman to the British rule of Palestine between Palestinian Arabs native of the regions and Zionist Jews immigrating and joining the few thousands native Jews inhabitants of the region at that time.

Researching the shaping of both sides' national identities, their evolution into rival nationalist movements and their implementation on the ground will allow a deeper understanding of the intricate current situation. This research process questions the inherent roots of the conflict between Jewish Zionists – later on Jewish Israelis – and Palestinian Arabs – later on Palestinians. When focusing on this

early period before the establishment of the State of Israel, one of the questions that arises is to what extent are Zionist and Palestinian national aspirations incompatible, and if they are incompatible, is it by essence or as a result of history.

This paper firstly looks into the theoretical notion of "national self" to better grasp what defines a nation and allows a better understanding of the emergence of Palestinian and Zionist national identities. This initial collective-identity shaping process will lead national identities to evolve into active nationalist movements whose development and implementation on the ground will be looked into in the last part of this paper. Throughout this demonstration, the focus of understanding the two sides' journeys is meant to sense the relation between the "two sides in shaping" and define its nature by essence and by actions of time.

The Social Construction of the 'National Self'

The essence of what is a "nation" and what core elements gravitate around this concept are central to understanding the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" from its beginning until today. The first section of this paper looks at different theoretical approaches in order to grasp the roots of the two "national selves".

In ancient Greece, the 'ethos' was the *fundamental values* or *character* of a population, or in today's understanding, of a People or Nation. Deriving from this term, the ethnic school of nationalism

is based on “the concept of ‘ethnie’- a more primordial *locus* of cultural, religious and political heritage, born out of a mythical belief in common origins, shared texts and specific territories.”[1] Anthony Smith followed John Hutchinson to further develop the “ethnic” approach, contemporary national identities are built on ’layers’ of cultural meanings and collective memories.[2] Those elements are highly subjective and shaped within the group itself, therefore, as Benyamin Neuberger put it, there is an ongoing “dissensus as to what constitutes a true national self.”[3]

If a collective or a community can define their “layers” of commonality to legitimize the conceptualization of themselves as a nation (right), external actors could be unable to see it or even want to deny it (wrong). This internal/external debate challenges the definition of collectives as nations, which is conceptualized by Benedict Anderson through the notions of ‘invented’ versus ‘real’ nations. The constructivist approach tries to answer this debate by moving away from the “right” or “wrong” argument and “focusing instead on the dynamic modes of identity construction.”[4] A nation would, in those terms, keep on building a ‘collective imagination’ that designs its “commonality” in a dynamic and adaptive way and the imagining of itself as a nation should be what prevails. As Anderson admitted: “Nation, Nationality, Nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse”[5], yet he still defined three central elements that allow a collective entity to ‘imagine’ itself as a nation: First, it is ‘*limited’,* meaning it has “finite boundaries beyond which lie other nations”; Second, the nation imagines itself as ‘*sovereign’* and free; Lastly “it is imagined as a ‘*community’*” in which “deep, horizontal comradeship” and “fraternity” prevail.[6]

1 O. Yiftachel (2002), Territory as the Kernel of the Nation: Space, Time and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine, p.218
2 Ibid. p.218
3 B. Neuberger (1995), National self-determination: dilemmas of a concept, Nations and Nationalism, p.303
4 M. Litvak (2009), Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity, p.7
5 B. Anderson (1983), Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, p.7
6 Ibid p.7

This broad and flexible theory allows us to conceive of both Jews (Zionists/Israelis) and Palestinian-Arabs (today Palestinians) as nations in the constructivist sense, based on how both entities imagine themselves. Using this conceptualization in this paper is a methodological choice that purposefully seeks to rest any debate on the recognition of both sides as nations and peoples. Although nations can imagine themselves *in abstracto* of relations to the other nations and power dynamics, it is widely accepted that social entities impact each other on levels as deep as the core identity and 'self'. Neuberger explains that the early 'formative stages', moments when the national self emerges and develops itself, are when a "process of differentiation" and opposition to another group is essential.

The Emergence of Palestinian and Zionist National Identities

In what is called today the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict", history is a central element to understand how the two sides were formed; developed national aspirations; claims; and how the conflict erupted. In this section, the historical lens is used to grasp the essence of the conflict through diving into the formation of the Palestinian and Zionist national identities.

For 400 years, from 1516 until 1917, the Ottomans ruled over the area that is today commonly known as Israel and the Palestinian Territories. By the end of that era, at the beginning

of the 19th century, the large majority of its inhabitants were Arabs (Muslims and Christians) who lived together with a minority of "native Jews"[7] or "Arab-Jews" or as Golda Meir would later describe them "Palestinian Jews". In her words, at the time, "there was no such thing, in this area, as Jews and Arabs and Palestinians, there were Jews and Arabs."[8] Golda Meir was using this terminology to describe the reality of identities' boundaries; This dichotomy was used as the official way to differentiate the two entities up until the UN partition plan of 1947, which aimed to create a "Jewish" and an "Arab" state in Mandatory Palestine. Furthermore, in his book "*Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron*", Menachem Klein portrays the relations between Arabs and Jews whose identities' central defining element was the *locus* – place – of their community lives "more than the religious or ethnic components."[9] Arabs and Jews lived according to traditional ways of life, based on the local culture and exchanges, at the time cohabitation in mixed cities was a fact of life. Religious and ethnic prisms would slowly come into play and offer a vacuum for national aspirations to grow and "brutally separate the two words Arab and Jew".[10]

The end of the First World War brought a new world order that was designed in a dual manner: on one hand in Europe, the long-standing defeated Empires were dismantled and the principle of "self-determination", proclaimed by US President Woodrow Wilson in his "Fourteen Points" speech in 1918,[11] served as a guideline in the creation of a dozen new nation-states. On the other hand, the fall of the Ottoman Empire was a process that took place between the armistice of Mudros in 1918 and the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate in 1922. During those years, this process led to the partition of the Ottoman Empire territory, which had been

7 In opposition to "Zionist Jews" who immigrated to the region from the 1880's on.
8 Golda Meir, Prime Minister of the State of Israel, interviewed on Thames Television in 1970.
9 Ibid. p.19-20
10 Ibid. p.19-20
11 President Woodrow Wilson's speech in front of the United States Congress on January 8th 1918 – "A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable government whose title is to be determined."

orchestrated ahead of time by the Allied powers mainly through the Sykes-Picot agreement signed in 1916. The late Ottoman Empire territory was not split using an identity-based guideline, like in Europe, even though national aspirations were starting to be shaped; "a universal process was unfolding in the Middle-East during this period, involving an increasing identification with the new states created by the post-first World War partitions".[12]

On the one hand, the Jewish movement for self-determination, emancipation and independence emerged in this stream of thoughts and its claim was reinforced with this historical process. On the other hand, at the turn of the 20th century the Palestinian-Arab elite described the incipient Palestinian-Arab identity as built around an identification "with the Ottoman Empire, their religion, Arabism, their homeland Palestine, their city or region, and their family, without feeling any contradiction, or sense of conflicting loyalties".[13] Furthering Khalidi's views on the birth of an Arab-Palestinian national identity, Neil Caplan explains the identity shift that happened "from a pan-Arab struggle to a specifically local form of Palestinian-Arab nationalism"[14] in the aftermath of the First World War. Palestinian historians explain that their national identity was pre-existing to the Zionist movement settling the area, refuting to a certain extent the idea that identities form themselves greatly in relation to the 'Others'. Due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, popular narratives have been built with the political purpose of developing national pride, therefore, somehow rejecting the theory that would recognize the influence of Zionism on their identity construction. Nevertheless, Palestinian intellectuals like Rashid Khalidi have to some extent recognized that the encounter with Zionists, as others, has shaped

12 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.20
13 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.19
14 N. Caplan (2011), The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories, p.121

the Palestinian national identity: "Although the Zionist challenge definitely helped to shape the specific form Palestinian national identification took, it is a serious mistake to suggest that Palestinian identity emerged mainly as a response to Zionism"[15] and "Palestinian identity crystallized much more rapidly than it might otherwise have done due to the urgency of the threat the Zionist movement was perceived as posing."[16] Historically, Palestinian society was built according to a feudal structure, separating the *fellahin* – peasants – living in the countryside, from the notables – mainly intellectuals and landowners – who lived in the cities. But in a process of defining a national self, the opposition to the Other, namely the Zionists, enhanced unity in the Palestinian national consciousness.

> *"It is clear that opposition to land sales to the Zionists, (...) was an important shared element in cementing the link between members of the Palestinian elite who opposed Zionism on the grounds of principle, and the fellahin whose resistance caught the popular imagination and thereby played a vital role in mobilizing opinion both in Palestine and the Arab world. This opposition united the peasants, (...) together with the urban intellectuals and notables."*[17]

The perception of the danger that Zionism posed to the Palestinian identity was a catalyst. Palestinian-Arabs would distinguish between Arab Jews (Palestinian natives) and 'Ashkenazi Zionists' (European Jews coming to settle the land with the goal to establish an independent Jewish entity in the region): "Whereas Arabs viewed the former as natives of a somewhat inferior status, the latter were seen as European invaders who had to be repelled.".[18] This distinction was not relevant to Zionist Jews who saw this endeavour

15 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.20
16 Ibid, p.172
17 Ibid, p.114
18 M.Klein (2014), Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron, p.21

as the implementation of a holistic and inclusive national movement of and for all Jews.

On the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, the Jewish national identity embodied by the Zionist movement emerged in Europe during the second half of the 19th century. Jews are defined as a people and a nation in addition to Judaism being a religion.[19] Their main national and religious aspiration has been, in their terms, the "return" of the Jewish people to its ancestral land usually referred to as "Zion" or "Eretz Israel". The national aspirations have been built – amongst other things – around religious traditions, peoplehood, culture and the scattering of Jews around the world as a "diaspora".

From religious and traditionalist perspectives, Jews have been solidifying their aspirations and connection to "Zion" (which refers to both Jerusalem and more broadly to the "Holy Land") by repeating and reaffirming year after year the same prayers: The first one is "if I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. Let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour."[20] This has been understood as an unbreachable connection to Jerusalem, which Jews should never forget, even in the happiest and most prosperous moments of their lives 'in exile'. The second is a hopeful wish for the Jewish people to be reunited: "Next year in Jerusalem" is the final prayer of both "Yom Kippur" (the day of atonement) and Passover, and has been repeated as a *rengaine* lulling generations of Jews worldwide.

This religious aspect might have been a sort of cement or unifying basis in the formation of the political national aspirations of Jews as

19 M. Nicholson (2002), The Jews are a nation and were so before there was a Jewish state of Israel, *International Relations: A Concise Introduction*. NYU Press. p.19
20 Bible – Psalm 137

a movement as the beginning. Throughout the Enlightenment period and until the beginning of the 20th century, nationalist aspirations started to develop outside and even in opposition to religious circles, leading to a national movement in which its own leaders were majorly secular European-minded Jews.

According to Theodor Herzl, one of the most famous thinkers and leaders of the Zionist movement, Zionism's aim is dual: answering independent aspirations by creating a "national home" for the Jewish people as well as finding a long-lasting solution to put an end to anti-Semitism and Jewish suffering. From 1882 and the beginning of the "First Aliyah" (organized wave of Jewish immigration to the region) dozens of thousands of European Jews would come settle in what they saw as "Eretz Israel" and join the "Arab Jews" who have been living there for generations. This was the concrete implementation and realization of the Zionist ideology that happened in parallel to its ideological and political build in Europe.

When it comes to an oppositional relationship shaping the Zionist identity, it can be noted that it started before the actual move to the region, during the ideology building phase, before actually encountering the Palestinian-Arabs. The books and speeches of most, if not all Zionist leaders, demonstrate a strong "orientalist colonial attitude typical to Europeans in settler societies."[21] The Zionist ideology in regard to the native Palestinian-Arabs can be summarized in three steps:

Firstly, they cultivated the myth that the land of Palestine was "empty" using the widely spread image of "a land without a people for a people without a land" described by Anita Shapira

21 O. Yiftachel (2002), Territory as the Kernel of the Nation: Space, Time and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine, p.226

as “the slogan”[22] of the Zionist movement at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This can be understood as either denial or ignorance regarding the reality of a far ‘Middle-East’ most of them had never visited.

Secondly, the architecture of the “Zionist enterprise” followed rhetoric common to the colonial mind of that time in Europe. Their approach could be summarized in this way: The “natives” are considered undeveloped, un-cultured and uneducated masses that will inevitably be grateful for the innovation, progress and prospects the Zionist will bring to the region. This vision is best described in this dialogue written by Theodor Herzl in the utopian novel “*Altneuland: The Old-New-Land*”:

> “ – *Those who had nothing stood to lose nothing, and could only gain. And they did gain: Opportunities to work, means of livelihood, prosperity. (...)*
>
> – *Don’t you regard these Jews as intruders?*
>
> – *Would you call a man a robber who takes nothing from you, but brings you something instead? The Jews have enriched us. Why should we be angry with them?”*[23]

Lastly, very little understanding or care was given to the natives’ national aspirations as they were seen as a broader unified entity, usually referred to as the “Arabs”, “Muslims” or “natives” with no differences or specificities. Moreover, the connotation given to these people was mostly a pejorative one, which the European powers should protect their peoples from. “We should there form a portion

22 Anita Shapira (1992), Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948, p.41
23 T. Herzl (1902), Altneuland: The Old New Land, p.78

of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."[24]

In order to give an accurate picture of how Zionism was shaped in relation to the 'Other' – understood as the Palestinian-Arabs – it is essential to present some of the different Zionist approaches because Zionism was never a monolithic movement. Amongst the ideological divisions, the topic of the relations to and with the local inhabitants of Palestine would bring disagreements. Three influential schools of thought within the Zionism movement gave their visions of the relation to the 'Other' which they considered playing a role in defining their national self.

Firstly, the founder of the 'spiritual Zionism' doctrine Ahad Ha'am was one of the leaders of the national movement who had been traveling to Palestine and adapting his views and ideology to the reality he saw. After his visit in 1891, he engaged with the leadership of the movement back in Europe in the following way:

> *"The Arabs, and especially those in the cities, understand our deeds and our desires in Eretz Israel, but they keep quiet and pretend not to understand, since they do not see our present activities as a threat to their future. Therefore they try to exploit us as well, to extract some benefit from the new visitors as long as they can. Yet they mock us in their hearts."*[25]

His understanding of the situation alerted some Zionists who started theorizing ways to deal with an 'Other' who would be hostile or reluctant to their project.

24 T. Herz (1896), The Jewish State.
25 Ahad Ha'am (1891), "The Truth from the Land of Israel, p.160

Second, the socialist stream within the Zionist movement was the most considerate of Palestinian-Arabs; 'Labor Zionism' leaders, like Ber Borochov, would envision a positive and respectful coexistence or even cooperation:

> *"When the waste lands are prepared for colonization, when modern technique is introduced, and when the other obstacles are removed, there will be sufficient land to accommodate both the Jews and the Arabs. Normal relations between the Jews and Arabs will and must prevail."*[26]

Finally, the third approach emerged amongst Palestinian-Jews who joined the Yishuv (Jewish Zionist autonomous body before the establishment of the State of Israel) such as Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche. He grew up in the "pre-nationalism" period under the Ottoman ruler, spoke fluent Arabic and was part of the local Palestinian culture. In his late years, he was very vocal about the damages and missed opportunities Zionists had caused by not building a relationship with the Palestinian-Arabs:

> *"We will state here the bitter and horrible truth, but the truth, that our managers and many of the builders of the Yishuv who came from the Diaspora to direct us did not in anyway appreciate the great value of neighbourly relations, of this fundamental and simple rule. Perhaps they did not understand it, or did not want to understand it, and in not considering this question they are much to blame for how the issue has done so badly"*[27]

26 B. Borochov (1917), Eretz Yisrael in our Program and Tactics.
27 M. Klein (2014), Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron, p.113

Consequently, these two national movements, which defined themselves both on their own and through their relationship to the "Other", divided the population of Mandatory Palestine into two opposite camps. And in Klein's words, Zionism and Palestinian nationalism "drew boundaries of animosity against the Other."[28] This ambivalent and dual relationship is very representative of this conflict from the very beginning: on the one hand boundaries trying to separate both Peoples and on the other hand, their identity building processes being influenced by one another.

Nevertheless, until 1948, for both sides, the 'Other' was actually 'Others'. In effect, other external actors (political powers) played an important role in affecting the reality of the region and therefore influencing the relations between the two nations. Only public agreements and documents will be used as basis for this section, and secret correspondences will be left out because their content and authors' intent are still debated by historians[29] (For example the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence between 1915-1916). Two main public documents that were released by external actors and influenced the relationships between the two national movements will be looked at: the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the Faisal-Weizmann agreement of 1919. Two declarations of intent in the name of the British Empire and of a prominent Arab leader, Emir Faisal which both gave legitimacy to the Jewish national aspirations.

The Balfour Declaration expresses that the Empire is favorable "to the establishment, in Palestine, of a national home for the

28 Ibid, p.22
29 N. Caplan (2011), The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories, p.115

Jewish people".[30] In this document, the Palestinian-Arabs were not mentioned as such by the Empire but were refered to as the "non-Jewish communities in Palestine," which reinforces the Palestinian-Arab sentiment against the Zionist movement. Moreover, some Palestinian intellectuals have noted that the Balfour declaration recognizes only their civil and religious rights, but not their political or national ones. If the declaration created resentment and increased the threat that Palestinian-Arabs felt from the Zionist enterprise, Neil Caplan explains that "Most Arabs rejected *a priori* the legitimacy of the Balfour Declaration and the terms of the Mandate. (...) Together with the disappointment and frustration of not enjoying independence in the wake of World War I, Arab nationalists viewed the British role as nefarious and prejudicial to their rights and interests, both in its broader colonialist impact of blocking Arab independence and in its specific implementation in Palestine, with the Mandate's articles fostering a Jewish national home".[31]

Two years later, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 where peace agreements were signed after the end of World War I, Emir Faisal led the Arab delegation – after he had proclaimed himself 'King of the Arab lands' in 1916. He was offered political power and territory where the late Ottoman Empire stood and was therefore inclined to advance British interests in the Middle-East. Emir Faisal and Chaim Weizmann (leader of the Zionist movement back then) signed an agreement for Arab-Jewish cooperation that *de jure* supported the British commitment to developing a Jewish State in Palestine next to an Arab State according to Articles I and II: "Immediately following

30 Lord A. Balfour (1917), "Declaration Balfour"
31 N. Caplan (2011), The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories, p.116

the completion of deliberations of the Peace Conference, the definite boundaries between the Arab State and Palestine – *the Jewish State* –[32] shall be determined by a commission to be agreed upon by the parties hereto."[33]

As well as encouraging Jewish immigration in its Article IV:

> *"All necessary measures will be taken to encourage and stimulate immigration of Jews into Palestine on a large scale, and as quickly as possible to settle Jewish immigrants upon the land through closer settlement and intensive cultivation of the soil. In taking such measures the Arab peasants and tenant farmers shall be protected in their rights, and shall be assisted in forwarding their economic development."*[34]

Both these documents were considered highly ideologically-minded by the two sides: Where Zionists saw validation, support and legitimation of their aspirations for self-determination in Palestine, Palestinian-Arabs felt betrayed by the Arab leadership (and King Faisal specifically) and disappointed by the British power. The reaction was felt on the ground with a wave of violence from the Palestinian-Arab side against both the Zionist and the British Mandate agents and institutions.[35] In conclusion, these external inputs affected gravely the shaping of identity between the two sides which were pushed further away from one another by these sort of referees, taking sides and promoting interests.

32 This has been added for clarity purposes and isn't part of the official document.
33 Faisal-Weizmann Agreement (1919)
34 Ibid
35 N. Caplan (2011), The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories, p.124-127

From National Identities to Nationalist Movements

"The national school of self-determination defines the achievement of independence as the goal of national self-determination."[36]

At this point, the external actors had recognized only one nation's legitimate right to self-determination and minimized the existence of the other, even though both national consciousness were already formed into national movements wanting to be recognized as such and obtain independence. By the 1920's, the situation had turned into a conflict on the ground as described by Klein, and "as the conflict escalated (...) a phenomenon that could have shaped the new society (the Arab-Jewish identity) gave way to separate national-ethnic identities."[37]

These two identities and the national aspirations and movements had already become irreconcilable, they were so different from each other that they could not be made compatible anymore. From local patriotism and national consciousness on the Palestinian side and from peoplehood and ideological conceptualization on the Zionist side, nationalism was the means and fuel of both nations in the time of Mandatory Palestine. "Real, imagined or invented nations have declared themselves to be nations. By asserting their nationalism, they claim our attention."[38]

In Hedva Ben-Israel's words based on the school of historical thought founded by Johann Gottfried von Herder "Nationalism

36 B. Neuberger (1995), National self-determination: dilemmas of a concept, Nations and Nationalism, p.300
37 M. Klein (2014), Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron, p.115
38 H. Ben-Israel (1992), Nationalism in historical perspective, p.370

itself combines both universalist and particularist assumptions."[39] The universalist aspirations, on the one hand, are based on the Enlightenment *Weltanschauung* (vision of the world) in which nations are free to define, organize and govern themselves. On the other hand, by accepting the uniqueness and limitations (cf. B. Anderson) of each nation and its desire to achieve its own independence, "nationalism *ipso facto* also holds up particularist goals"[40] by nature. The dilemma we encounter in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict of the Mandate period is based on the evolution of this dual nature from cultural to political. In that sense, one's nationalism will use its particularist assumptions to compare itself to others': grading, prioritizing, excluding other nations. This relation based on judging one nation's values and ethos in comparison to one's own, creates a hierarchical dynamic which makes it political. According to Hans Kohn, "making nationalism a truly universalist and spiritual creed was simply a matter of eliminating this political aspect."[41]

This applies to both Zionist and Palestinian nationalisms: on the one hand, their universal assumptions was the basis and legitimation of their ideological claim for independence and self-determination. On the other hand, the particularist assumptions have been politicalized by both sides' leaders to show priority over the other nation or at least over the other's national aspirations. In the highly politicized framework of the British Mandate, the two nationalisms used the notion of "priority status" understood as "granting a higher moral claim for contemporary control over Israel/Palestine".[42] Their particularist assumptions took over the universalist ones using priority rhetorics with the Other and with the international Powers to have their claims regarded and treated as more important than the Other's. In a way, "the 'when' of the Zionist and Palestinian

39 J. G. von Herder (1784), Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit – in Ibid p.371
40 Ibid p.371
41 Ibid p.371 reference to Hans Kohn (1964), Living in a World revolution p.54
42 O. Yiftachel (2002), Territory as the Kernel of the Nation: Space, Time and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine, p.222

narratives provides both sides with rigid historical accounts, geared to justify their claim to temporal priority (and hence legitimacy) in their current territorial aspirations."[43]

Nationalisms in Actions and Reactions

From consciousness and theory to strong nationalism, the effects "on the ground" followed this evolution and the two sides became more entrenched, hardening their positions and strategies to turn their claim into a reality.

The strategy from the Zionist side was to create facts on the ground. The two main areas they were focused on were the purchasing of land and Jewish immigration.

From Herzl's writings and other leaders' it was a very clear goal to secure land for the "Jewish home" in Palestine. The way this goal was reached was through the purchasing of two-thirds of the land by wealthy individuals of Jewish faith, living mostly abroad, wanting to allow Jewish immigration and secure land for the establishment of a future Jewish State. And the remaining third of the purchased land was bought through the Jewish National Fund – *'Keren Kayemet Le'Israel'* an organisation established in 1901 that was responsible for looking for land in Palestine, evaluating its value, approaching potential sellers (Palestinian-Arabs living in Palestine, or absentee landlords – both Palestinian-Arabs and non-Palestinian-Arabs) and lastly, buying the land itself.

43 O. Yiftachel (2006), Ethnocracy: Land And Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine, p.52

Because of the feudal system in place in the Palestinian-Arab society at the time, the Arab peasants lived and cultivated lands that they did not own. Therefore, when Zionists bought lands from their owners (either present or absent) the peasants were "removed"[44] and left without a place to live. With the arrival of the second wave of Jewish emigrants (1904-1914) the major change that gravely affected the Palestinian-Arab *fellahin* was the readiness of the new 'pioneers' to work the land themselves and develop the region with their own hands. Unlike previously when the purchasing of the land did not mean it would be settled right away by Zionist immigrants. From then on, the Zionist enterprise of buying land would mean that Arab cultivators would lose their place to live and work and their source of income. As a result, Palestinians-Arabs reacted with violence against the Zionists that would happen periodically between 1918 and 1921.

> *"It is clear that opposition to land sales to the Zionists, particularly sales by absentee landlords (both Palestinian and non-Palestinian), was an important shared element in cementing the link between members of the Palestinian elite who opposed Zionism on the grounds of principle, and the fellahin whose resistance caught the popular imagination and thereby played a vital role in mobilizing opinion both in Palestine and the Arab World. This opposition united the peasants, who tried desperately to cling to their land, or retaliated against the Zionist settlers in a violent fashion if they lost it, together with the urban intellectuals and notables."*[45]

44 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.102
45 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.114

According to Benny Morris, "the Zionists sought radically to change the status quo, buy as much land as possible, settle on it, and eventually turn an Arab-populated country into a Jewish homeland."[46] This was at least the position of revisionist Zionist leaders like Vladimir Dubnow who, from the end of the nineteenth century, was loudly stating "The ultimate goal (...) is, in time, to take over the Land of Israel and to restore to the Jews the political independence they have been deprived of for these two thousand years (...). The Jews will yet arise and, arms in hand (if need be), declare that they are the masters of their ancient homeland."[47] At that same period, Ahad Ha'am, leader of the spiritual Zionist stream, came back from a visit to the region and wrote in his book "The truth about Eretz Israel" that "if the time comes when the life of our people in Eretz Israel develops to the point of encroaching upon the native population, they will not easily yield their place."[48]

Meanwhile, the second fold of the Zionist strategy was Jewish emigration to Palestine. It was clear that there was a majority of Palestinian-Arabs in Palestine and therefore, one of the priorities of the Zionist movement was to bring 'pioneers'. On the one hand, so as to advance their goals, Zionists had to work towards making Jewish majority a reality in Palestine and therefore organize massive waves of immigration. On the other hand, as exposed previously, one of the two goals of the Zionist movement was to offer a shelter for Jews against anti-Semitism. In the Russian Empire, thousands of Jews were assassinated, communities were destroyed and villages were erased from the map. Two main periods saw the number of pogroms increase and the desire to leave Europe grew consequently. From 1881 to 1884 and from 1903 to 1906 were times when immigration to Palestine might have been founded on

46 B. Morris (2001), Righteous Victims: A history of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001, p.49
47 B. Morris (2001), Righteous Victims: A history of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001, p.49
48 Ahad Ha'am (1891), The truth about Eretz Israel.

both the Jews' fear for their lives and the growing understanding that these waves of anti-Semitic violence were not anecdotal but periodical events which kept coming back. A posteriori, Zionists look back and focus on the national aspirations which were the basis for immigration to Palestine, but the reality was tainted and Zionism was conceived as a "collective survival-revival"[49] movement for the Jewish people. This aspect of Jewish immigration to Palestine aiming for "survival" was central then and would become of critical importance in the 1930's and throughout the Second World war when Jews were being persecuted and exterminated in Europe and immigration to Palestine was turned down by the British Empire trying to appease tensions between Palestinian-Arabs and Zionists.

On the Palestinian-Arab side, the reactions were getting stronger, more violent and generalized to all groups of society. This unity was the result of a process that was not natural from the beginning as the Palestinian-Arab society was split into two main social groups.

> *"The notables also made an effort to recruit support from rural Palestine. This proved very difficult, however. For one, the notables were themselves either exploitative landowners or liberal professionals, whose world had very little in common with that of the peasant. (...) Economic exploitation continued, even after the urban notables succumbed to the lure of nationalism, and adopted its discourse of solidarity and concern for the people as a whole. (...) They (the notables) were unable to advise their people on how best to confront the Jewish community and its ambitious expansionist plans. They failed to curtail Zionist expansion, but encouraged their rural, peasant*

49 O. Yiftachel (2002), Territory as the Kernel of the Nation: Space, Time and Nationalism in Israel/Palestine, p.226 – reference to G. Shafir, Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict 1882-1914.

communities to clash, unprepared and disorganized with the Jewish settlers."[50]

It seemed that Palestinian-Arab society stayed, to a large extent, divided around individual or "class" interest as Rashid Khalidi deplores: "it is true that many Palestinian landlords and fellahin sold land (to the Zionists), whether out of greed and lack of patriotism, or because of need and without knowing who would ultimately control it."[51]

In parallel, a highly ideological and national struggle had started against firstly the Zionist purchasing of land by trying to "maintain their position as its rightful inhabitants" and secondly, against Zionist immigration and settlement of the region as a way to try and "retain the Arab and Muslim character of the region"[52]. At the same time, Palestinian-Arabs were fighting the colonial British Empire, trying to get their independence as well as trying to force them to prevent Zionists from implementing their strategy on the ground. These parallel struggles broke out into what is called the "Arab revolts" or riots that erupted in Mandatory Palestine between 1936 to 1939. This was a turning point that marked the start of the Palestinian-Arab resistance on a nationalist basis.

"The Palestinians had not only to fashion and impose their identity and independent political existence in opposition to a European colonial power, but also to match themselves against the growing and powerful Zionist movement, which was motivated by a strong, highly developed, and focused sense of national identification, and which challenged the

50 I.Pappe (2006), A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples, p.103
51 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.114
52 B. Morris (2001), Righteous Victims: A history of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001, p.49

national rights of the Palestinians in their own homeland, and indeed the very existence of the Palestinians as an entity."[53]

At this point, the conflict was violent and both sides felt clearly endangered by the other's national aspirations and their implementations during the first two decades of the British Mandate. It was obvious that the turn of events had brought the two parties to a point of active negation of the Other, trying to nullify and make ineffective their claims, actions and '*raison d'être*'. The situation had reached a deadlock that was understood by all players at the time as an inherently zero-sum situation, because then, whatever was gained by one side was to be lost by the other. This zero-sum is representative of the Zionist-Palestinian-Arab conflict which emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century and seems to give the basis of understanding and analysis for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until today.

It is important to note that some minor initiatives tried to implement a different reality in Palestine, one that did not accept the logics of the zero sum exposed before. On the Zionist side there were strong differences on how to look at the potentially conflicting interests and results of Zionism in Palestine. The majority of Zionist leaders thought, as developed previously, that Arab inhabitants of Palestine would either benefit from the Zionist development of the land and the innovation it would bring to the region, or understood that the locals would not reject Zionism and fight its implementation. However, a minority of Zionists like the Hashomer Hatzair party believed in the establishment of a bi-national state from the early years. Considered as radical socialists or communists, they based their ideology on the class struggle which Jews and Arabs had to fight together against

53 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.20

the colonial British Empire and the bourgeoisie Arabs and Zionists. "Cohabitation was not only practised in a few isolated circles in Palestine: it was an ideology."[54] As a result of this marginalized group of strong and active Zionists and their Palestinian-Arab partners, 1400 commercial partnerships were established on the "interracial basis", creating, in Ilan Pape's words "an alternative history."[55]

On the Palestinian side, according to Rashid Khalidi, "since the early days of the Zionist movement, Palestinian intellectuals and political figures perceived that Zionism had objectives that could be achieved only at the expense of Palestinian aspirations."[56] Some authors wrote that the Palestinian elite might have been alarmist very early on, when there were no actually facts proving their fears and things could have been different if only the leaders' fears had not taken over the general discourse.

The main elements that define both national movements by nature were and are still clashing with the other side's own core components in a manner which demonstrates the overlap of aspirations and needs. It is clear that throughout their history, "the expectations of one rival were the other's nightmare"[57] and therefore, the two peoples developed their identities, movements and narratives in total rivalry. In this case, both Zionists/Israelis and Palestinians have been competing for full achievement and implementation of their national aspirations and the political rights which follow. Moreover, as we touched upon earlier, superiority in the context of this conflict has been seen as a way to bring legitimacy to one side's claims over the other. The "adversarial closed-mindedness"[58] that both parties have demonstrated through techniques of point-scoring, both ideologically and on the ground,

54 I.Pappe (2006), A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples, p.115
55 I.Pappe (2006), A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples, p.116
56 R. Khalidi (1997), Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness, p.24
57 M. Klein (2014), Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron, p.113
58 N. Caplan (2011), The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Contested Histories, p.222

reflect the competing standpoints and identities at stake. In the Zionist/Israeli-Palestinian framework, it seems that from very early stage up until today, both sides are building up their discourses and actions through striving against one another validating Edward Said's theory that "the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing *alter ego*."[59]

Fundamental elements of competition have existed from the earliest moment of encounter between Palestinian Arabs and Zionist Jews which are still at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Amongst those elements which make this situation zero-sum are religion, culture (and language), territory, the connection to the land and ideological narratives as well as national aspirations and quest for self-determination. Nowadays, in the built-in political and historical construct of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, those elements not only seem incompatible but truly exclusive of one another.

Conclusion

Throughout the early stages of shaping their 'national self' and until today, the two peoples' national identities. aspirations and claims have been and remain inherently and by essence incompatible. They are, as demonstrated in this article, inevitably incapable of coexisting with the "Other" by nature. This theoretical demonstration aims to best imagine, in political terms, which solutions to the conflict can be considered. By understanding

59 Edward Said (1995), Orientalism, p.332

the reality of the conflict as it is: two incompatible processes of 'national self' simultaneous expressions which exclude one another while currently existing next to each other; the logical solution to this conflict must bring a separation on the ground. The famous "two-state solution" is, according to the result of this historical process, the only actual solution for two peoples whose paths have been proven to be incompatible in principle and in fact for over a century. The one, "binational State" resolution of the conflict, is in fact not a sustainable conflict resolution path as it doesn't solve nor satisfy the core aspirations of both sides and only offers a logistical and political option. Hence the so-called "one-state solution", is not an actual solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is at best a way to manage it while negating national self-determination and independence claims and aspirations. Since the emergence of nationalism and the showdown it has brought on the ground, the "binational state" supporters on both sides have become marginalized minorities that don't directly influence local politics: on the Israeli side, mostly the far-right ultra-nationalists and on the Palestinian side, mostly Hamas and voices amongst the Palestinian diaspora and Palestinian citizens of Israel. These actors are, for various reasons, unlikely to convince the majority on their "side" to turn down a "two-state solution" (would it be on the table) that would bring to both peoples a sovereign independent state fulfilling their own national self-determination. Therefore, it is a political proposition "by default" which can't answer or truly solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nowadays, the main arguments against the settlement of the conflict by the establishment of a Palestinian state next to the State of Israel are; On the one hand the "facts on the ground' which, with the Israeli

settlements expansion has made it harder – but not impossible – to draw a map based on the widely accepted 1967 borders as a basis for negotiations. On the other hand, one of the most prominent arguments is the long-lasting failure of the peace process based on that idea of a two-state solution; It has created a fatigue and disillusionment amongst a majority of people on both sides and even despair and loss of faith. Hence, the voices rising against the two-state solution aren't based on the invalidity of this approach to peace, nor on its viability but mostly on the failure of past attempts, missed opportunities, absent ripeness, lack of leadership or political commitment on both sides. This fatigue isn't an ideological argument delegitimizing the validity of the "two-state solution" but it is, nevertheless, a growing sentiment shared by people on both sides which seems to weaken the many grassroots calls for peace.

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