THE PALESTINIANS IN THE ISRAELI PEACE DISCOURSE: A CONDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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The literature of conflict transformation, especially concerning national conflicts in a colonial context, emphasizes as a precondition for reconciliation "recognition of equal worth," which in turn requires self-transformation, separation, and taking responsibility for past injustices. This article examines the writings and speeches of Israeli leaders during the Oslo process through this lens. Focusing on the peace leaders' discourse also sheds light on the hesitations that characterize the peace process in Israel and demonstrates how a change in the traditional narrative would threaten Israeli society's self-perception.

UNTIL THE SEPTEMBER 1993 OSLO AGREEMENT between Israel and the PLO, the Palestinians were absent from the official Zionist historical narrative, an absence most notoriously expressed in Golda Meir's formulation that "there is no such thing as a Palestinian people." Based on the biblical belief that God gave the land of historic Palestine to the Jews, the official Zionist narrative has at its core the divine bond between the Jewish people and the "Land of Israel."[1] This being the case, the existence of other peoples on that land, from the Zionist perspective, must have been temporary. The fact that this narrative clashed with the demographic reality in Mandate Palestine or afterward in no way diminished its power.

Since the Oslo agreement and the mutual "recognition" between Israel and the PLO, the Palestinians have been present in the Israeli public discourse. In the immediate wake of the agreement, it was even argued that a profound change had taken place. In response to Edward Said's criticism of Oslo and its implications for the self-determination of the Palestinians, one young scholar wrote:

> Said is wrong to assume that Israel has given up nothing
> except a bland acceptance of the PLO. The Israeli recogni-
> tion of "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" . . .
> the first genuine recognition in the history of Zionism that
> the Palestinians are "a people," renounces, no less than the

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>Palestinians have done, a key element of the Israeli narra-
>tive. If Zionism was founded by denying the very existence
>of a legitimate, indigenous Palestinian people, as Said him-
>self contends, then, by admitting the existence and "just re-
>quirements" of the Palestinians, the foundations of Zionism
>are shaken.[2]

Indeed, there is no doubt that Israeli leaders now allude to Palestinian suffering, and some have gone so far as to speak about their legitimate political rights. There are also increasing statements of sympathy concerning the Palestinian tragedy, to the point that many Israelis have expressed astonishment at the change in their leaders' rhetoric. Moreover, the leaders themselves recognized the crucial importance of far-reaching attitudinal change. As Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin wrote, "In order to bring an end to the state of war in the reality of the Israeli-Arab conflict, there must be change in the psychological components, the perceptions and interests, not only of governments and diplomats, but also of the peoples involved in the conflict."[3] Nonetheless, continuing setbacks in the peace process raise questions as to the depth of the change. Deep divisions on settling the conflict with the Palestinians—epitomized in Rabin's assassination—have continued, and it is clear that these divisions are based on entrenched perceptions.[4]

Given the crucial role played by leaderships in shaping the perceptions of their constituencies,[5] this paper seeks to assess the extent to which the leaders of the Oslo process in Israel have transformed their perceptions of the Palestinians and how this has influenced the Zionist narrative. An examination of the attitude toward the Palestinians in the Israeli peace discourse may also shed light on the hesitations that characterize the peace process in Israel and the degree to which a settlement of the conflict threatens the self-perception of Israeli society.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION, RECOGNITION, AND NATIONAL NARRATIVES

An interesting issue in conflict resolution theory is conflict transformation.[6] Given that immediate solutions to intricate, violent, and protracted conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are hard to reach, conflict transformation posits the need to improve the general environment of the conflict,[7] including through bringing about changes in attitude toward the enemy, mutual confidence-building by various means, and establishing a dialogue that will stimulate the wish to settle the conflict. In other words, conflict transformation relates to the sources of complex conflicts more than to their material symptoms. One of these sources is identity, since threat to identity may cause or escalate conflict.[8]

Communal, ethnic, and national conflicts are conflicts of identity, especially when the entire self-perception of the parties is imperiled. National

conflicts are a complex kind of identity conflict, where the national identities of the opposing sides are seen as being at odds. This is all the more true in colonial contexts, where the element of domination, expressed at all levels of life, plays a pivotal role in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled.

Given the importance of identity in colonial contexts, any transformation of the conflict requires the ruler to recognize the identity of the ruled and their right to manage their lives independently. The struggle waged by the ruled for recognition is not of merely symbolic and tactical significance. Far from being a procedural step in the process of reaching an accord on a solution to conflicts, it carries political, economic, cultural, moral, and ethical implications. This issue was addressed by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor.[9] While Taylor is mainly concerned with recognition in multicultural contexts within the constitutional state, his discussion has great relevance for protracted ethnonational conflicts.

For Taylor, recognition and identity are linked, both having become central in modern life. He notes several forms of recognition, with various implications. Besides the liberal notion of recognition, which is based on the Kantian concept of "equal respect," he points out the need for a deeper form of recognition in the contemporary reality founded on "equal worth." This definition is better suited to contexts in which occupied peoples struggle for liberation from a hegemonic state that speaks in the name of a republican, distinct collective good.[10] National movements in colonial contexts offer the clearest expression of struggle for recognition where the foremost demand of national and ethnic groups is recognition of their equal worth and cultural uniqueness; this means the right to self-definition in a separate political framework. Such a demand exceeds the framework of the constitutional state. The struggle for recognition is not over the character of the state, but over separation from it and the creation of a parallel framework. The struggle for this recognition carries implications not only for the identity of the ruled but also for that of the ruler. Therefore, Taylor's theory must be carried on to deal with several implied processes.

The first has to do with self-transformation. According to Susan Wolf, the significance of recognition of the "other" necessarily includes transformation of the "I."[11] Therefore, recognition of the other that does not carry with it some modification in the self-identity of the dominant side may be meaningless in reality. The second process is that of separation. Taylor's recognition assumes a possible separation between the ruler and the ruled. This assumption might be simple in some cases, but it has proved to be much more complex in postcolonial conditions. This is especially valid in national contexts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian case, where the demographic structure of the Jewish and Palestinian populations have become interwoven.

The third process implied by Taylor's recognition of equal worth is that of taking responsibility. In colonial situations, this means taking juridical, ethical, and moral responsibility for the negative effects inflicted on the subju-

gated. Therefore, a process of recognition that shies away from sharing responsibility for past injustices is an impaired process.

In the Israeli-Palestinian case, these processes can be examined within the context of national narrative. The historical narrative of the nation does not represent an external historical reality but is the ontological basis for the inescapable existential consciousness itself.[12] In the Israeli-Palestinian case, the principal struggle has been over land. But, as Edward Said has argued, "When it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, . . . and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative."[13] The Zionist narrative shapes the connection between the Israeli identity and the physical and human environment and embodies images of the Palestinians.[14] Accordingly, the power relations between the two sides are expressed not only through economic exploitation and physical coercion, but in cultural and symbolic terms. Israel, as the representational regime, includes stereotypes of the Palestinians whose discursive hegemony and images have silenced Palestinian history.[15] The Israeli national history has become a literary text in which it is hard to expose the power system constructed vis-à-vis the Palestinians.[16] Therefore, the narrative plane may be the space wherein the subject of recognition can be tested.

In this context, the struggle for recognition does not end with the acquisition of formal independence and the creation of a new economic order, but involves dismantling the symbolic relationship that has formed over the years between Israelis and Palestinians. Recognition of the equal worth of the Palestinians entails not only some acceptance of their narrative, but also transformation of the Israeli self-narrative and separation that is not mere evasion of assuming responsibility for the past.

THE OSLO PROCESS AND THE NEW REPRESENTATIONAL REGIME

Yitzhak Rabin's electoral victory over the Likud in June 1992 marked the real beginning of the peace process that had been inaugurated in Madrid. A starting point for examining how Palestinians are depicted in the new peace discourse is Rabin's speech before the Knesset on 13 July 1992, the day he formed his new government following his election. In his speech, he addresses himself directly to the Palestinians, though mainly to the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza since, "It is our fate to live in common on the same tract of land in the same country. Our lives are conducted with you, beside you, and against you." After this opening, he goes on to say,

> A century *of your bloodletting and terror against us* has caused you only suffering, pain, and loss. . . . For 44 years and more now, you have stumbled about in illusion. *Your leaders guide you by falsehood and deceit.* They have missed every opportunity. They have spurned all our pro-

> posals for a solution, and have brought you to disaster upon
> disaster.[17]

Here we find no admission of any possible Israeli responsibility for past de-
velopments, but finger-pointing accusation. Thus, while the Israelis, inno-
cent victims of Palestinian "bloodletting and terror," have magnanimously
offered "all our proposals for a solution," the Palestinian leadership has mis-
led the people and, insensitive to their well-being, spurned these proposals.
In the hectoring tone of the schoolmaster, Rabin, contrasting by implication
the Palestinian leadership's "falsehood and deceit" to the Israeli leadership's
wisdom and generosity, admonishes the Palestinians to behave and threat-
ens them with the consequences if they don't. "If the Palestinians reject the
proposal," he tells them, ". . . instead of extending a hand of friendship we
shall activate all means to prevent terror and violence. The choice is in the
hands of the Palestinians in the territories."[18]

   Though Rabin elsewhere resurrects the old claim that "there is no one to
talk to" ("among the Palestinians . . . there is no authoritative leadership and
there is much terror and fear"[19]), this does not prevent him from heaping
scorn on the leadership when Israel's proposals are rejected. Regarding the
Israeli proposal of autonomy for the Palestinians on the West Bank and in
Gaza, he says:

> We have offered the Palestinians a series of proposals to fill
> the idea of autonomy with content and to set out on a new
> road. We have offered them arrangements and rights that
> will allow them to administer their daily life. . . . At this stage
> there is no Palestinian response to our proposals as they
> stand. I fear that the Palestinians are *again straying into il-
> lusion, they are perhaps again suffering from delusions.*
> Instead of learning from their mistakes over a generation,
> instead of taking what they are offered, or at least discussing
> it seriously, some of them still adhere to "all or nothing." If
> this is the case they will end up with nothing.[20]

   Israeli proposals for local autonomy assume the Palestinians of the occu-
pied territories to be entirely disconnected from the Palestinian problem as a
whole. Nor is there any hint in these words that Israel's creation had any part
in creating the Palestine problem; instead, it is the Palestinian insistence on
pursuing national goals that is held to blame. Indeed, this ahistorical ap-
proach is reflected in the Oslo agreement itself, which splits the Palestinians
into groups to be dealt with in separate frameworks.

   The most salient feature of the new Israeli discourse is Palestinian guilt
and Israeli innocence. Israel uses force only in activating "all means to pre-
vent terror and violence." The violence and terror are always Palestinian—
indeed, any resistance to Israeli policy and any attempt by Palestinians to

protect their rights can be dismissed as terror. Just as the Israeli "defense" concept refers to wars "of no alternative," "preventive war," "retaliatory action," and the like, so the Israelis engage in violence only when forced to do so by the Palestinians, who appear in the Israeli national narrative as the obstacle to the realization of the Jewish dream of living in peace in their land. Rabin drives this point home: "For over a century we have been fighting for the right to live here in peace, in quiet, and in tranquillity. And in the course of that century we have been met with attacks of terror and murder. We have known hardly a single day of serenity."[21]

Similarly, in his speech at a special Knesset session after the signing of the Oslo agreement that was to mark a new beginning, Rabin stated:

> For more than a century we have wished to build ourselves a home in the only place on earth that was and will be our home, here in the Land of Israel. For more than a century we have wished to live in peace and tranquillity, to plant a tree, to pave a way. For over a century we have wished for good neighborliness with those around us, for life without fear and dread. For a century we have dreamed and fought. . . . Our way of life in this tormented land has been accompanied by volleys of shooting, by landmines, and by hand grenades. *We planted, they uprooted—we built, they destroyed; we defended, they attacked.* Almost daily we buried our dead.[22]

Shimon Peres as prime minister used the same tone of aggrieved innocence in his speech at the signing ceremony of the interim agreement with the PLO in May 1994 in Cairo. Where one would have hoped, on such an occasion, for a hint of a new way of looking at the Palestinians, instead there is full attribution of moral and practical blame to them, indeed a full reconstruction of the defensive ethos that characterized the Zionist narrative all along.[23]

> We wanted to return to the land of our forefathers, the land of the Bible. We wanted a homeland. We wanted a home. We wanted a refuge. We wanted a place where we could lay our heads. We wanted to live like all peoples. To be like all peoples. We wanted to live. . . . The war over the land of our forefathers robbed us of the best of our sons and daughters. It sucked from us many spiritual and bodily forces, and directed all our soul and our might into channels that we did not want, channels of blood and pain.[24]

It is interesting to note that the return to the land of the forefathers, as described here and in Rabin's Knesset speech, is reminiscent of the "empty land" myth in its total disregard for the existence of another people.

Peres was among the first Israeli leaders to speak of the Israelis and Palestinians as being equal. His book *The New Middle East* is a testimony to his belief in the need for change. In it, he emphasizes the importance of images in relations between peoples. "Sadly," he writes, "shaping this world also meant terrible wars, suffering, and pain. So much suffering, so much pain that Israelis and Arabs were blinded, making us incapable of changing our images of either 'them' or ourselves. That is how opportunities are missed." Peres insists that "we must study history to learn its critical lessons, but we must also know when to ignore history. We cannot allow the past to shape immutable concepts that negate our ability to build new roads."[25] But underlying this apparent sharing of blame for the ongoing conflict, there is no doubt that it is the Palestinians who are responsible for the fact that the "new roads" he alludes to are not being built:

> After all, I have always tended to be overly optimistic, while I also tow around a collection of old-fashioned ideas—the residues of earlier missions. I know that what happened to the Jews was unprecedented: a nation returned to its homeland and its ancient language after centuries. I thought that something unprecedented could also happen to the Palestinians: a group who had never been a people could now be a people among peoples.[26]

Clearly, the Palestinians are not seizing the opportunity offered them by the Israelis to become "a people." For Peres, still faithful to biblical myths, the Jews were always a nation by virtue of their divine bond with the Land of Israel. The Palestinians are not, since their existence on the land is mere happenstance, but Israel is opening this opportunity for them. Israeli recognition of a Palestinian state would make the Palestinians into a nation among other nations. Far from assuming responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy, Peres implies that the Palestinians have actually benefited from the Zionist project. He is able to do this because he brushes aside any debate over historical right ("we must also know when to ignore history") and reduces everything to practical modalities: for him, the existing status quo is the starting point of Palestinian history.

This understanding, which severs all causal connection between the creation of the State of Israel and the present situation of the Palestinian people, would allow the transfer of the asymmetrical situation on the ground to an agreed solution of the conflict. The issue of responsibility for the tragedy of the past is no longer relevant.

ASYMMETRY AND THE GAP BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND RIGHTS

As we have seen, since the Madrid Conference Palestinians do exist in the Zionist national discourse. But the recognition of their existence as a people has been accompanied by reiteration of blame for a century of conflict and for being obstacles to the realization of legitimate Israeli aims. The Palestinians thus pass from being "absent" to being "outsiders."

Moreover, the recognition accorded to the Palestinians did not include recognition of their rights. This was clear from the exchange of letters between Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasir Arafat that was meant to seal the mutual recognition between the two peoples, just before the signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993. Thus, while Arafat in his letter recognized, on behalf of the Palestinians, Israel's legitimate right to exist in peace and security, the Israeli prime minister merely recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, without any mention of rights. Arafat confirmed that the clauses in the Palestinian National Charter that are not in keeping with the undertakings in the letter were henceforth null and void, while Rabin merely wrote that "in light of the commitments of the PLO . . . the government of Israel has resolved to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and to begin negotiations with the PLO in the framework of the peace process in the Middle East." Uri Savir, one of the major Israeli negotiators at Oslo, clarifies the importance of this issue:

> The Palestinians had no problem recognizing Israel in the context of the peace process. . . . We [Israelis] were prepared to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people but not the PLO's version as leaders of a Palestinian state. Thus we insisted, on orders from Jerusalem, that Arafat would sign his letter to Rabin as the chairman of the PLO and not, as he had been accustomed to signing his correspondence since 1988, as the president of Palestine.[27]

The asymmetry that characterizes the letters of recognition continued to characterize the agreements signed between the two sides. The Declaration of Principles in September 1993, the Gaza-Jericho agreement of early May 1994, and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza (Oslo II) in September 1995 all maintain the unequal relationship.[28] All maintain the distinction between the Palestinian people and their rights. And despite the references in the agreements to the "Palestinian people," in fact all are addressed to only one segment of the Palestinians—the residents of the West Bank and Gaza.

Similarly, while the agreements deal with territorial issues, the Palestinians are clearly not seen as having legitimate rights to the land. This attitude is apparent in the settlement expansion that continued despite the supposed

"settlement freeze," which the government (even while promoting the peace process) explained did not apply either to building for "security purposes" or to private building. As Rabin noted, "We told them that we would not negotiate over the territories but that we are ready to discuss land and we are willing to make a division: land intended for Jewish settlement and land under Palestinian ownership. Most of the terrain, by the way, is state land, whose future we will be willing to discuss later."[29] Such statements demonstrate Israelis' deep and abiding conviction that the land is not "occupied," but fundamentally *theirs*.

The Labor party's 1996 platform, when Shimon Peres was party leader, sends the same message. While emphasizing that "settlement of the problem of the Palestinian refugees [will be] outside the State of Israel, with denial of the right to return," the platform also calls for "retention of most of the Israeli settlers under Israeli sovereignty,"[30] a position implying annexation of sizable areas in the West Bank. The inclusion of these two items in the "peace platform" well reflects Peres's compromise posture involving an adjustment of the status quo without altering the essential Zionist concept of the land as belonging to Israel, with Israel having the right to establish facts as it sees fit. (Even so, the platform may not have been sufficiently nationalist for Israeli voters, which may be one of the reasons for Peres's defeat in the May 1996 elections.)

> *Labor's "peace platform" involves an adjustment of the status quo without altering the essential Zionist concept of the land as belonging to Israel.*

That the peace process was intended to bring about separation not between Israel and the territories but between Israelis and Palestinians is clear in the maintenance of two distinct legal systems in the West Bank and Gaza, one for the Israelis and one for the Palestinians. The political and juridical separation applies to the people, not to the land. The economic protocol signed in Paris in 1994, which considers all territory west of the Jordan River as a single trade zone without restriction on the transfer of goods, is another illustration of Israel's desire to keep control of the land. Uri Savir, writing about the negotiations for the Paris Protocol, explains the Israeli requirements for a single customs union and control over Palestinian trade with the Arab countries and then adds, "Above all, however, Israel wanted it understood that the free movement of Palestinian goods and citizens be subject to security considerations. In short, the Palestinians would be wholly dependent on Israel's economy and security—or, to be more precise, on Israel's *sense* of security."[31]

CONDITIONAL RECOGNITION AND THE SPLIT "OTHER"

Indeed, it is Israel's "sense of security" that has determined all dealings with the Palestinians: the Palestinian problem does not exceed the framework of its security concept. Savir's description of the negotiations in Cairo for the Gaza-Jericho agreement is telling in this regard:

> For the rest of the session, Rabin lectured Arafat about se-
> curity as the key test for the Palestinians . . . [The positions
> of the two sides] remained essentially fixed even as the gap
> between them incrementally narrowed, mostly to the bene-
> fit of the stronger side. That Israel's approach was dictated
> by the army invariably made immediate security considera-
> tions the dominant ones, so that the fundamentally political
> process had been subordinated to short-term military
> needs.[32]

It is also according to security that the Palestinians are now defined. After
Oslo, not only have they been divided geographically into the "residents" of
the territories and those outside, but also into "good" Palestinians and "bad"
Palestinians according to whether they accepted or rejected the agreement.
Part of the Palestinian population won recognition on the basis of their con-
tinuing support for Oslo, while those who opposed it continued to be seen
as terrorists or potential terrorists bent on the destruction of Israel. The
"good" Palestinians became partners with the Israeli side in the struggle
against the "bad" Palestinians. According to Rabin, "One of the main aims of
the peace killers and the murderers of Jews and Palestinians is to gravely
undermine Israel's security position, to sow fear and dread in its citizens, to
wear us down and tire us out, so that a weakened Israel will come to the
negotiating table."[33] Thus, Jews and Palestinians are now united in a new
category, the victims of Palestinian "peace killers."

But the new partnership is conditional upon how much the Palestinian
Authority can contribute to improving the security situation in Israel. In this
light, one can understand that recognition of the Palestinians was not a mat-
ter of principle, but merely tactical. Israel was prepared to make an agree-
ment with the PLO not as the representative of a people with legitimate
rights with whom reconciliation was sought, but as the political instrument
capable of exercising on its behalf a security role among the Palestinians and
contributing to Israel's security. This idea was well expressed by Shimon
Peres in response to a remark that it was Arafat's weakness that made Oslo
possible. Peres replied, "Yes, the weakness of Arafat and the danger that he
would disappear. I mean, his disappearance was in my opinion a greater
danger than his existence."[34]

For Israel, the principal role of the Palestinian Authority has been to pre-
vent terror. Savir admits that Israel's "security people usually pressed Arafat,
on every possible occasion, to send his policemen from house to house con-
fiscating illegal arms."[35] These expectations reflect the way in which the
peace process with the Palestinians is viewed. Savir sums up the question as
follows: "For Israel the critical issue was security; for the Palestinians it was
political and national pride."[36]

The Israeli security concept is based on the clear separation between Jews
and Palestinians. As Israeli sociologist Gershon Shafir has pointed out,

"Decolonization is justified by the rationale that territorial separation of Israelis and Palestinians will provide security to the former and sovereignty to the latter."[37] Shimon Peres represents the separation formula more effectively than any other Israeli politician. In his view, "Those who speak of the territories without considering the Palestinians residing there are shutting their own eyes and throwing sand in the eyes of the public. The territories are not the problem with which we must deal, but our future relationship with their inhabitants is."[38] It is, of course, the desire to maintain the Jewish majority in Israel that necessitates this separation, and it is for this reason that Peres speaks exclusively of the "inhabitants" of the territories, to whom the proposed solution applies, rather than to the Palestinian people as a whole. Historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin explains it in the following terms: "The Oslo Accord and the shift in attitude towards the PLO were accepted by many Israelis because it helped them to preserve their identity and political goals."[39] The separation from the Palestinians made possible by Oslo, he goes on, "became a golden opportunity to return to the image of innocence."[40]

Peres's emphasis on the Palestinian problem as an Israeli problem does not necessarily entail recognition of the Palestinian narrative, any more than his desire to end rule over the Palestinians implies recognition of them as legitimate partners of equal value. The Palestinians are quite simply a demographic danger: "those who speak of annexation of the territories really mean annexation of their people, with all the long-term demographic and political implications for the entire national future of Israel, its identity as the one state of the Jewish nation, and its democratic government."[41] Peres's rejection of annexation has nothing to do with a belief in the Palestinian right to self-determination on what is left of their land; his concern is the nature of the State of Israel, particularly not to compromise the Jewish identity of the state. Nor can he conceive of the notion of a shared life within a single state expressing the national desires of both peoples. For Peres, as for the other Israeli peace leaders, it is taken for granted that living together in one state could only mean Israeli rule. Thus, "the desire to govern and control another nation is no longer feasible. We never intended to become the rulers of another people. The Intifada highlighted the abyss between 'us' and 'them.'"[42] For the Israelis, then, the separation made possible by Oslo is not a solution to the Palestine problem, but the solution to Israel's problem with the Palestinians.

Physical separation also allows the issue of rule to be severed from that of moral responsibility. Rule over the Palestinians implies moral responsibility for their welfare. Physical separation, by transferring rule from the overt political-military level to other levels, notably economic (through the economic agreements signed in Paris), allows Israeli control over the Palestinians to continue even while Israelis can feel free of responsibility for their fate.

NEW TACTICS, TRADITIONAL RHETORIC

In January 1997, Israeli politicians of the Right and Left drew up an under-standing on the general outlines for a final settlement with the Palestinians. The document, known as the Beilin-Eitan agreement after its authors, Yossi Beilin of Labor and Michael Eitan of Likud, reflects the comprehensiveness of the Israeli national narrative. According to the document, any agreement with the Palestinians must be guided by three principles:

1. The dialogue with the Palestinian Authority must be exhaustively pur-sued, and a final agreement may involve the establishment of a Palestinian entity "whose status will be determined in negotiations between the sides and the limits of whose sovereignty will be detailed in the following sections."

2. Following agreement on the permanent settlement, Israel must retain its ability "to prevent any injury or threat of injury to its territorial integrity, to the safety of its citizens and their property, and to its vital interests in Israel and abroad."

3. No agreement signed by Israel will include a commitment to uproot Jewish settlements in western Palestine or compromise the settlers' right to retain their Israeli citizenship and their ties as individuals and as a com-munity to Israel.[43]

This document, not unlike Rabin's security vision, makes clear that the fundamental right is Israel's. There is no question of a negotiating partner-ship: It is Israel that will determine the borders and dictate the nature of the final agreement. Like the declaration of independence of 1948, which estab-lishes the spiritual, historic, and cultural ties between the Jewish people and the land, the Beilin-Eitan agreement disregards the connection of another people to the same land; its starting point is the Zionist narrative and the Jewish link with the land. The settlers' right to their settlements is a given, their sovereign tie with Israel unquestioned, thus cancelling out the possibil-ity of genuine Palestinian sovereignty over the territory they will get within the framework of the peace process. Also like the 1948 declaration, the doc-ument omits any definition of Israel's borders; the "constructive ambiguity" of Menachem Begin at Camp David on the Palestinian issue, allowing the powerful party to impose its will, has been maintained. In whatever agree-ment emerges, the Palestinians will have what is left after the Jewish side has satisfied its "requirements."

The Beilin-Eitan agreement's section on borders, which it states will be drawn according to Israel's security needs, again drives home the marginal-ity of the Palestinians in the Israeli peace discourse. Again, they have no sta-tus as players with equal rights, but become part of the Israeli security problem. Given the document's stipulation of no return to the 1967 borders, its explicit retention of the Jordan Valley, and its requirement of "preserva-

tion of territorial continuity between the settlements and the State of Israel," what seems to be envisaged is a kind of Palestinian demographic enclave within the territorial continuity of Israel, where Israel retains ultimate sovereignty. According to Rabin, it was "precisely out of the security imperative [that comes the need to] bring about separation in order to give security. Without separation there will be no personal safety."[44] The mechanism of separation is closure, which grants Israeli society a kind of immunity to problems arising from rule over the Palestinians. Rabin argued in this context, "Alongside enclosure, which stemmed first of all and above all from the need to restore the feeling of personal safety . . . there arose, in my opinion, the opportunity to solve further problems of the Israeli economy and society."[45]

The preoccupation with security is used to camouflage the national dimension and to shift the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from issues of historic rights and justice to matters of practical politics. Economics is used in a similar manner. Shimon Peres leads the way in this regard: "The world is reorganizing itself, this time without lines of military confrontation but according to new lines of economic logic; no longer nations but markets, in which states will compete daily in the spheres of production, inventiveness, and trade ties."[46] From this it follows that the national issues, at least where others are concerned, become marginal. Thus, Peres suggests "a halt to dealing only with national problems or with relations between nations," calling instead for "adoption of a broader outlook, a common regional outlook. . . . An environment has to be created that will vouchsafe its people improvement in their conditions of existence."[47] This enables him to downplay the issue of land when it comes to the Palestinians. Thus, the central issue between Israel and the Palestinians should not be how much land there is but how much it can yield. With Israeli assistance, Peres explains, the Palestinians will be able to produce far more from a smaller area than what they can produce alone.[48]

Yossi Beilin, one of the authors of the Beilin-Eitan agreement, was also one of the main architects of the Oslo process and is considered by many as one of the most "humanistic" of the Israeli negotiators in his approach to the Palestinian issue. His attitude toward the conflict is therefore instructive. In his book *To Touch Peace*, he describes his own political evolution to acceptance of the existence of a Palestinian people and its right to self-determination. In describing Israeli attitudes toward peace, he presents the following analogy:

> We are not ready for peace. We are so used to non-peace
> and to constant danger that we shall have to accustom our-
> selves to the new circumstances. It's like when a man has
> been in an accident and has to use a wheelchair for many
> years. One day he has an operation and he can begin to
> walk again, but when he gets up out of the chair and takes
> some steps he keeps looking for his chair, which he is so

> used to. At that moment, it seems to him more comfortable
> in the chair than on his own feet, and he needs time to get
> used to walking again and being sure of himself.[49]

These words, ostensibly self-critical ("we are not ready for peace"), show the immense resistance—even in the most "forthcoming" leadership circles—to any real change in the Israeli narrative. Beilin's overriding message, like that of virtually all of Israel's leaders, even of the peace camp, is one of Israel's essential innocence. The cause of the problem is an "accident." Accidents happen; they are not intended. It is this same sentiment that has repeatedly been conveyed by Israeli leaders, most recently Prime Minister Ehud Barak, in their refusal to accept any juridical or moral responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem. This position is especially interesting given Israel's long insistence (prior to Oslo) that the Palestine problem is a refugee problem.

CONCLUSION

Since the inauguration of the peace process, the Palestinians clearly have been present in the official Israeli peace discourse. But despite clear expressions of empathy, the discourse remains essentially true to the traditional Zionist narrative. At the same time, the "recognition" of Oslo does not embrace the Palestinian people as a whole, but only the residents of the occupied territories who support Oslo, and it falls far short of any recognition of equal worth. As Herbert Kelman has noted, "The mutual recognition of the Oslo agreement . . . did not go beyond a pragmatic acceptance of the fact that the other exists and must be accommodated in order to achieve a mutually satisfactory solution of the conflict."[50]

Indeed, what stands out most clearly in the Israeli leadership's peace discourse is the instrumentalization of Palestinian needs and their subjugation to a security formula defined by Israel. Far from promoting the legitimate presence of another people with equal rights to the land, the Israeli peace leaders remain caught within the materialist dimensions of the conflict while constructing an image whereby everything the Palestinians get is not by *right* but granted by virtue of Israel's generosity and good will. Instead of leading to real reconciliation between the two peoples, this image promotes bitterness among the Palestinians, and among the Israelis the notion that they are the ones who are making the concessions while the Palestinians are greedy extremists.

In short, there has been entrenched resistance to the "self-transformation" that is a sine qua non of reconciliation in the Palestinian-Israeli context. The boundaries between the Israeli "I" and the Palestinian "other" are vague and are separated functionally into two levels: First, the Palestinian "other" is separate from the Israeli "I" on the level of culture and identity but not so entirely external as to constitute an independent subject. Second, the

Palestinians are the "other" within the Israeli "I" whose presence, being una-voidable, must therefore be coped with. This situation is reflected in official Israel's adherence to a basically unchanged Zionist historical narrative and the submersion of the Palestinians within it. The unwillingness to accept any responsibility for the past is another aspect of the resistance to self-transfor-mation. Nonetheless, the debate within Israel among the various approaches to the nation's history highlights the internal rift in Israeli awareness regard-ing the struggle with the Palestinians.

There is no doubt that recognizing the equal status and historic rights of the Palestinians would be extremely painful for the Israeli side insofar as it would cast doubt on the justice of the entire Zionist enterprise. Nonetheless, the continuing dominance of the traditional Zionist narrative made clear in this study has obvious implications not only for relations with the Palestini-ans but also for internal quiet within Israeli society. As long as leaders of the peace camp in Israel continue to embrace the traditional Zionist discourse, not only is true reconciliation with the Palestinians not possible, but true normalization of Israeli society will also remain out of reach.

NOTES

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3. Yitzhak Rabin, "Peace in the Na-tional Order of Priorities," in *Israeli-Arab Negotiations: Political Positions and Con-ceptual Frameworks*, ed. Tamar Herman and Robin Twite (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1993), p. 15 [in Hebrew].

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13. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), xiii.

14. David Finlay, Ole R. Holsti, and Richard R. Fagen, *Enemies in Politics* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), pp. 1–24.

15. See Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 259; and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

16. Homi Bhabha, ed., *The Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–7.

17. Yitzhak Rabin, Speech to the Knesset, 13 July 1992, reproduced in *Pursuing Peace: The Peace Speeches of the Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1995), p. 17 [in Hebrew] (emphasis added).

18. Ibid., 17.

19. Yitzhak Rabin, "Peace in the National Order of Priorities," in *Israeli-Arab Negotiations*, ed. Herman and Twite, p. 19 [in Hebrew].

20. Yitzhak Rabin, Speech to the Knesset, 8 November 1993, in *Pursuing Peace*, p. 92 (emphasis added).

21. Yitzhak Rabin, Speech to the Knesset, 21 September 1993, in *Pursuing Peace*, p. 87.

22. Ibid. (emphasis added).

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27. Uri Savir, *The Process* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 74–75.

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37. Gershon Shafir, "Israeli Decolonization and Critical Sociology," *JPS* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 23–35.

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41. Peres, *The New Middle East*, p. 15.

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43. The Beilin-Eitan agreement as published in the Israeli press on 19 February 1997, reproduced as Doc. B2 in *JPS* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1997), pp. 160–61.

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45. Ibid.

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49. Yossi Beilin, *Laga'at Bashalom* (To touch peace) (Tel Aviv: *Yedi'ot Aharonot* and Sifrei Hemed, 1997), p. 16.

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