

Conflict Theory, Temporality, and Transformative Temporariness: Lessons from Israel and Palestine

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I. Introduction

This article examines the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in an effort to theorize the centrality of time in the inception and resolution of conflict. It argues that since time and temporality, which are central dimensions of all power relations and conflict, remain insufficiently explored on theoretical and practical levels, it is worth exploring how time is utilized as a central avenue of domination and resistance, and as a result has to be reconstructed in any reconciliatory process. It also argues that such a process between conflicting parties must address the mutual constructions of time, as history and memory, and as continuous flow of the present, before addressing their material manifestations. Since temporal perceptions are spheres of conflict reflecting power relations, parties in conflict develop and utilize different conceptions of time in their competing narratives. This is mostly apparent in asymmetric conflicts, where the powerful party seeks to rob the weak party of its time and its control, seeking to institutionalize temporal hegemonic schemes. Dominated parties resist not only through their efforts to return to history, but also by delegitimizing the time frame of their opponents and rendering it temporary.

For reconciliation to take place, it is argued that conflict resolution must entail *transformative temporality* as a form of accommodating historical oppression, deconstructing past injustices and addressing existential threats. Transformative temporality refers to acknowledgement and action based on the notion that there is no fixed direction of the flow of time, nor is there a rigid ahistorical and apolitical beginning that orders events and the developments following it, granting these events and developments natural legitimacy or historical factuality. Rigid and fixed time frames that determine the relationships between groups or individuals are human constructions that, in conflict, should be replaced by more flexible and fluid ones that enable mutual recognition and understanding. The shift to transformative temporality is about admitting that there was no coherent self-identity prior to conflicting temporalities and that conflict that is based on this assumption can be overcome if such temporalities are reconstructed. This change questions one of the basic principles of national time expressed in all theories of nationalism, something that makes post-national formulas the only path to reconciliation in such conflicts.

To demonstrate this argument and explain its complexities and its social, political, and existential implications, I analyze the Israeli–Palestinian dispute. I shed light on the meaning and implications of the temporal dimension for each of the parties, without claiming to write their history or to establish a parallel or equal picture of both. On the contrary, this is a modest contribution to understanding one of the reasons behind the negative dialectics between these two movements, pinpointing the dissimilarity in their historical circumstances, while emphasizing the consequential resemblance in their exclusive, mutual, and temporal self-constructions. The rise of critical discourses of time on both sides of the conflict helps demonstrate the importance of transformative temporality for conflict resolution.

II. An Epistemological Framework

Time is a complex phenomenon. It is even more complex in situations of national conflict. The national categorization of time turns the *tempus* and *chronos* of nations into non-variable biological or cultural characteristics for categorizing diverse groups of people using a temporal hierarchy.¹ Control of time becomes a powerful resource, where time differentiations — historical and mythical, fast and slow, dynamic and static, sequential and ruptured, and linear and circular — are politically normalized.² Accordingly, perceptions of history, units of time, the locus of time, the movement of time and control over time are crucial elements of conflict and conflict resolution.

Based on the available literature on time it is possible to delineate two central dimensions of temporality that are crucial for our understanding of national conflict and conflict resolution. The first dimension focuses on the way parties in conflict develop different conceptions of historical time and put them to different uses in order to promote their interests and maintain control over their reality. The second dimension focuses on the flow of the present and control over the future. This dimension is reflected in the temporal strategies of dominant and subordinate parties in asymmetric conflicts. Whereas the first seeks to rob their “enemy” of control over its time in order to slow its movement and development, the second utilizes time as a mechanism of resistance.

The following analysis of Israeli–Palestinian temporal relations demonstrates that humans classify time

differently and attribute to it diverse meanings, reflecting the concept of the self and the relationship between the classifying subjects and their natural human environment.³ Parties in conflict can be characterized by their connection to patterns of time division in history, or personal and collective consciousness.⁴ Therefore, in conflictual settings the historical narrative of the nation becomes crucial to its existence. National groups divide time using a value system that organizes their natural and social reality and shapes political and ethical hierarchies vis-à-vis others.⁵ The consistency of the national narrative and the control of time flow are central to social cohesion and national sovereignty. Therefore, in conflict situations the conflicting parties compete to control the past and the present.⁶

The efforts made by nations in conflict to achieve temporal consistency leads to divergence over time with other nations.⁷ Since nations are memory entities that seek to maintain their continuity by organizing their time in coherent narratives, they seek to present themselves as historical agents and define their “others” and their strategies of interaction.⁸ Hegemonic national groups in asymmetric conflicts seek to impose their own temporal perceptions as “hegemonic time,” as the perspective through which they organize their ontological and epistemological presence, determining the time units and events that construct their self-perception, as individuals and groups, whether consciously or unconsciously, justifying superior and exclusive self-perceptions.⁹ Hegemonic nations in conflicts seek to empty or suspend the time flow of their enemies. The emptying of time relates to the erasure of events and occasions that substantiate the historical consciousness and the collective memory of their enemies and the suspension of the latter’s time relates to the halting of movement in space, reflected best by waiting. These two mechanisms are deeply related to the construction of the other as part of a temporal “state of exception,” thereby justifying one’s own control policies.¹⁰ While the legal state of exception establishes “internal externality” in the order of law, the suspension of time creates an internal externality in the order of life.¹¹ This suspension leads to anomie, in which hegemonic parties in conflictual reality act in the name of a temporal order by which they do not necessarily abide. The “emptying of time” or “suspension of time” thus become effective tools for depriving the dominated nation of its human attributes, undermining the meaning of its life.¹²

The yearning to fill time with content reflects the tendency to exploit it as a resource.¹³ This means that nations realize the centrality of time to their experience when the “natural” flow of their time is impeded.¹⁴ When nations in conflict feel that their time is jeopardized, enormous revolutionary energy and resistance are stimulated. These nations seek a “return to history” and

to renew the control of their temporality as a form of resistance.

In opposition to hegemonic temporal sovereignty, which imposes temporal coherency and which silences contending temporal orders, suppressed groups demand their return to history through the construction of an alternative awareness, which becomes a cornerstone for the struggle against subjugation. Mimicking the powerful becomes an important component of the identity construction of the controlled people.¹⁵ Thus, the struggle against the emptying or suspension of time represents an important strategy in the struggle to eliminate the basic rules, which maintain the order of time. In this way narration becomes a central tool for fighting the suspension of time.¹⁶ The establishment of a temporal time frame makes temporariness a major instrument of resistance, denying the hegemonic power legitimacy to naturalize and standardize its time frame.

Under these circumstances, examining avenues of shared temporal horizons becomes an indispensable factor in the resolution of any dispute involving conflicting temporalities. Recognition, as the acknowledgement and legitimacy of temporal schemes different from one’s own, becomes an important transformative step in overcoming the exclusive constructions of time embedded in the conflict. Transformative temporality, which is about recognizing the flexible construction of time flow, becomes an instrument of conflict transformation and reconciliation. Thus, it should be taken into consideration as part of the construction of a nation’s collective memory, history, and spatiality when engaging in efforts to resolve the conflict. The following pages demonstrate how such an avenue of transformative temporariness has become apparent on the margins of the self-narration and the perceptions of the two conflicting parties discussed below, leading to new forms of possible dialogue based on “conflictual consensus.”¹⁷

III. The Construction of the Zionist Temporal Model

Zionism is the dominant ideology in Israel/Palestine and has set the temporal tone since the early decades of the twentieth century. It is conceived as a collective Jewish effort to return to modern history and establish new temporal standards applicable to Jewish sovereign existence.¹⁸ According to Beit-Hallahmi:

The Zionist plan of action starts with two basic assumptions: the continuity of the Jewish people in time — the historical continuity between ancient and modern Jews, and the continuity of the Jewish people in space — and the unity of Jews all over the world.¹⁹

The temporal and spatial dimensions are interrelated and feed each other interchangeably.

Zionist Jews are asked to give up their traditional forms of life, including time frames, as part of their national aspiration for self-determination. In contrast with their traditional indifference to time and history, the location in time and aspirations for change emerged as important elements in Jewish national thought in the late nineteenth and early the centuries.²⁰ Central Zionist thinkers create an explicit link between national awareness and existence in historical time.²¹ They develop a modern conception of time and a modern history that diverges from the theological worldview of the Bible and Jewish tradition, while utilizing them as a major source of inspiration and legitimization.²²

Secular Zionist theorists similarly attempt to institute a temporal revolution contrary to Jewish theological determinism. Zionist time is reconstructed as open time, immune to control by a sacred entity that is expected to redeem the “people of Israel.” The national Zionist narrative therefore addresses the neutralization of history, its release from celestial forces, and deterministic finiteness. Time is to be returned to the Jewish people who had lost it in response to historical events beyond their control. The return to history has become a core myth in Zionist political thought, rooted in several vital epistemological distinctions and practices, especially in the reconstruction of a continuous timeline between the kingdom of David and the new Israel through various means, central to which is the reunification of time and space through archeology and construction.²³ Thus, historicizing and categorizing time have become central to the meaning of Zionism and its practices.

III.1. *Historicizing and Categorization of Time*

Zionism is not a unitary national ideology. It exhibits internal differences on several topics, one of which concerns the nature of Jewish sovereignty in ancient Israel and its justification of the contemporary Jewish state. Mainstream Zionism conceives itself as the Jewish national reawakening within the framework of modern, progressive time, deeply connected to profound Jewish aspirations to return “home.” Although one can speak of other streams of Zionist thought that do not adhere to this concept of time, practical Zionism, which dominates large segments of Israeli Jewish society, employs biblical history to rationalize the Jewish attachment to the “Land of Israel,” while eschewing orthodox theological discourse and introducing new interpretations of the biblical story.²⁴ This Zionist historiography transforms history into the primary component of its effort to construct Jewish historical subjects and reconnect them to statehood and to national sovereignty in fixed and exclusive terms. Following Ben-Zion Dinur, Morgenstern speaks of messianic motivations influenced by the conception of time apparent in tradition, linking divine creation and the history of the universe,²⁵ and linking

the Jewish people and the “Land of Israel” with a trans-historical temporal framework.²⁶

The construction of Zionist time according to biblical history, even by secular Zionist thinkers, such as Tzvi (Heinrich) Graetz, Simon Dubnov, Ben-Zion Dinur, and Raphael Mahler, implies that Jewish biblical history provides a time frame of the “people of Israel” and the “Land of Israel.”²⁷ Despite its “secularization,” a deep connection remains between messianic Judaism and modern national thinking, establishing messianic time as the temporal infrastructure of mainstream “secular” Zionist ideology. Ben-Gurion, who is considered a secular leader, claims:

The realization of Zionism is now on the agenda. . . . History does not wait. Non-Jewish Palestine waited 1800 years without Jews. . . . During the next 20 years we have to create a Jewish majority in the Land of Israel. This is the essence of the new historical situation.²⁸

This same frame of thinking was behind the settlement project in the 1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) since the early 1970s,²⁹ seeking to blur the differences established between the 1948 and 1967 time frames. Students of current mainstream Zionism demonstrate how the latter’s understanding of biblical history does not differentiate between these two time frames, thereby emptying competing time frames of any meaning.³⁰

The immediate implication of this blurred time frame is a closed and fixed self-perception that is intolerant of any flexibility, on the one hand and the suspension or emptying of Palestinian time and self, leading to greater divisiveness, on the other. In the dominant messianic conception of time, the “non-modern” Palestinian is therefore banished from the Jewish Enlightenment’s shrine of universal history.³¹ In this context, the return of Jews to their homeland is interpreted as regaining land from “despotic strangers,” and rationalizing the Palestinians’ status as inferior when compared to the eternally superior “chosen people.”³²

This perception framed Palestinians’ physical presence as either temporary protectors of the land or as stumbling blocks to the realization of the Jews’ return to history. According to mainstream Zionist narrative, Palestine was “neglected and dirty,” far from being “the land of milk and honey,” as reflected in Herzl’s skepticism in his *Altneuland*.³³ Israeli historians have demonstrated that the hegemony of the biblical narrative sanctioned the expulsion or repression of the Palestinians since they did not submit to their demands.³⁴ As Schweid put it, according to the Zionist narrative:

[In the Land of Israel no alternative national entity that relies on this land was established. The foreign occupation [by Arabs] was not turned into a national settlement. . . . No national settlement, on the economic,

social or cultural-spiritual level was established. On the contrary, the Land of Israel was turned into desert and . . . destroyed.³⁵

Based on this understanding, the rights of Palestinians to their homeland are annulled when confronted by Jewish transhistorical time, determined not by physical presence, but established via divine promise and collective religious yearning.³⁶

Mainstream Zionists also theorized Jewish time in dynamic terms, as embodied by the pioneer; the national hero, resurrected from the wellsprings of history to lead the Jews on their historically modern journey.³⁷ This time frame is depicted as open and progressive, set by nation-building pioneers in their ancient homeland, including in Hebron, in Jerusalem, and in Ariel of today.³⁸ The practical translation of such self-perception is the construction of Palestinian time as static and primitive. These two presumably discrete time frames legitimize the construction of a set of values for positioning the two peoples in a distinct hierarchy in which Palestinians are duty-bound to permit Zionism, as an act of self-emancipation, to realize itself in their homeland.³⁹

One of the temporal policy outlines reflecting mainstream Zionist thought is the categorization of Palestinians by their location in time and space after 1948.⁴⁰ The first constitutive document in this regard is the Israeli Declaration of Independence, which established an eternal and exclusive bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Second was the Absentees' Property Law, which reflects the intertwined philosophy of time and space paramount in both the philosophy as well as the practical policy of Zionist thinkers and policymakers. This law defines absentees as all those located beyond the control of the Israeli army from November 29, 1947 to September 1948, and influenced the status of Palestinians, as did the Citizenship Law passed 2 years later — promoting the largest possible takeover of Arab lands, and shrinking Arab presence in space.⁴¹ The latter, passed in 1952, stipulated additional criteria for Israeli citizenship: eligibility according to the Law of Return, residence, birth, and naturalization. Accordingly, all Jews are entitled to Israeli citizenship irrespective of their place or period of residence, while Palestinians were required to meet temporal-spatial criteria when it came to residency. This policy resulted in hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living as internal refugees in Israel, whereas Jewish citizens are eligible to live on state lands, based on the historical right to reconstruct Jewish sovereignty.⁴² Such law-making, reiterated in the recent amendment of the Citizenship Law, the "Admission Committee" Law and the "Nakba Law," reflects the perception of fluid Jewish time with no boundaries in space, whereas for Palestinians, time is

delimited, and determines not only their spatial rights, but also their lack of historical ties to their homeland.⁴³ Thus, the law transforms time into a thread separating two types of people, each moving along different chronological timelines.⁴⁴ One group, the Jews, moves freely along their historical axis and remains connected to the homeland while Palestinians are fragmented into citizens of the state or "Israeli Arabs," whose history begins in 1948, Palestinians who are physically present but legally absent, and Palestinian refugees, suspended from the history of their homeland. The refugees' suffering is presented as their own fault, since they are accused of having frozen their own time, based on their aspiration to return to their homeland.⁴⁵

The dominant perception of Zionist time has not only been reflected in the politics of the past, but it has also been translated into daily practices with clear existential implications. It is to the meaning and implications of these policies on the conflict that we turn now.

III.2. The Control of Time-space Relations

Since the beginning of Jewish immigration to Palestine, segregation between Jews and Palestinians has been effectuated by delineating time by means of physical and cultural barriers. These barriers augmented the flow of Israeli time while diminishing that of Palestinians. Efforts at Jewish normalization are thus translated into temporal distinctions ensuring fast Jewish time and slow Palestinian time. This process required an initial geographical segregation between Jews and Arabs so as to preserve the Judaization of the land. The engine of Israeli planning has, accordingly, replanted national physical space from the Arab-Palestinian onto the Jewish time frame and thus produced a physical and temporal hierarchy to separate the two peoples.⁴⁶

The first expression of these practices was the occupation of space by a clear settlement policy, which aimed at locating Jewish immigrants in separate residential areas that retain their affinity with biblical time. The 283 Jewish cities and agricultural towns that were established before 1948 were located near Arab cities and towns on lands that were acquired by Jewish national institutions before 1948. After 1948 an intensive process of settlement was fostered, based on historical and strategic grounds, and this led to the establishment of over 800 settlements of various forms; that is, kibbutzim, moshavim, settlements, towns, and cities.⁴⁷ Not only were all these settlements purely Jewish; many of them were located in evacuated Arab areas that were presumed to have a Jewish past. The naming policies of today reflect Israel's intended strategy to remold space in accordance with ancient Jewish time.⁴⁸

A sophisticated planning and construction policy ensured a Jewish spatial hegemony in tandem with

contiguous living spaces, dotted minimally with Arab enclaves that Jews could skirt.⁴⁹ Separate planning jurisdictions and subsequent highway construction guaranteed Jewish continuity of territory and time, solidifying the fragmentation of Arab regions.⁵⁰ Highways, built mainly on Arab open spaces, connected Jewish metropolitan areas with outlying Jewish towns. The fact that Arab citizens benefit from the road infrastructure as a facilitator of time flow cannot be ignored, but neither can one ignore the fact that Arabs win time in exchange for space, since most of these roads are built either on confiscated Arab lands or on the outskirts of Arab villages, limiting their future development.⁵¹ The bypass road policy adopted most fully in the OPTs is a telling illustration of the complex relationship between space and time flow, which are indicative of the one-state condition prevalent since 1967.⁵²

An important policy reflecting the impediment and suspension of Palestinian time is the establishment of checkpoints. To promote the Jewish flow of time in space, checkpoints were placed in Arab areas, slowing the flow and speed of Arab movement. The checkpoint policy produced serious consequences in Arab areas in the State of Israel, which were felt on both physical and psychological levels. Since 1967, it has affected Palestinian life in the OPTs.

The temporal consequences of checkpoints are most blatant in the imposition of curfews and border closures during Jewish holidays. This policy ensures the continuous flow of normal Jewish time in space at the cost of Palestinian time, which is fully suspended. Suspending Palestinian time is considered as an existential necessity for Israelis and is therefore morally justified.

The West Bank is thus divided into two living spheres, distinguished by nationality. The Jewish settlement sphere is connected to Israel's major cities by highways on which only Jews may travel. Time flows, people plan their days and their lives, and interpersonal communication is maintained. In contrast, Palestinian villages remain isolated, with a separate road network to prevent the free movement of traffic and time. The two spheres, though physically proximate, have a completely parallel existence in terms of temporal order.⁵³

The sovereign's full control over the flow of time engenders the uncertainty that distinguishes abnormal — or exceptional — states of being. Self-confidence is disrupted, planning capacity is thwarted and communication is hindered. Such environments foster Palestinian existential anxieties. At the checkpoints, Palestinians cannot foresee either the duration or the outcome of waiting. Time has stopped, robbing them of their individuality. Their lives are thus open to manipulation and caprice, completely beyond their control. This reality exemplifies a state of anomie or "no man's land."⁵⁴ "At these sites," writes Adi Ophir,

it is possible to ascertain who is a friend and who is foe according to whose blood is let, whose life mingles with that flowing blood and whose life is treated with impeccable legality.⁵⁵

Here, Palestinian existence is presented with the full weight of its infinite vulnerability and even its mortality. Once deprived of protection, they become subject to the whims of soldiers, for whom checkpoints represent battlefields, legitimizing brutal behavior.⁵⁶

Recently, some military checkpoints in the occupied territories, especially those separating Israeli territories from the West Bank, have been upgraded to "transfer points" and handed over to private security operators. The resemblance of the transfer points to international terminals between neighboring states has reinvigorated the debate over the temporariness of the occupation by embodying in glass and concrete Israel's desire to achieve true separation between Israel and Palestine. The location of the transfer terminals and the separation wall that connects them are determined solely by the Israeli security forces and are imposed in areas that make Palestinian life most fragmented and render Palestinian towns ghettoized. The time span of short trips, such as traveling from home to school, has been fundamentally extended, since a large number of people must travel along special roads to reach basic facilities that were less than a few minutes' walk prior to the "separation wall."

At the terminals, sterile spaces physically separate Palestinians and soldiers. Using sophisticated electronic surveillance devices, soldiers in air-conditioned, glass-enclosed booths coolly observe Palestinians passing through granite conduits.⁵⁷ The Palestinians cannot communicate their distress; the soldiers in their glass booths escape the burden of moral reflection consequent on direct physical contact with suffering people: in phenomenological terms, constituting a bifurcation of a shared experience.

Palestinians and post-national Israelis challenge the dominant Zionist conceptions of time. These challenges are different and not always interrelated. Nonetheless, they open avenues of fusion that render them transformative. Before we address these avenues it is important to address mainstream Palestinian construction of time.

IV. The Construction of Palestinian Temporal Model

Research on post-Nakba Palestinian reality tends to stress the spatial dimension of displacement and refuge.⁵⁸ Hundreds of thousands who had lived comfortably suddenly found themselves destitute and dispossessed. Yet the literature rarely deals with the temporal dimension of expulsion and the emptying of Palestinian

time of any substantial meaning. Only recently have innovative interdisciplinary approaches motivated historiographic, literary, psychological, sociological, and political writings, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the events and their outcomes.⁵⁹ Our understanding of the Palestinian response to their removal from time and history requires a more in-depth investigation of the evolution of the dominant Palestinian perception of time, history, and memory, just as it requires confrontation with the hegemonic Zionist perception of time. Understanding Palestinian temporality and its engagement with time requires us to deal with the construction of a counter-national narrative before and after Palestinians' dispersal in 1948, dismantling their existential meaning, their control of time, and their psychological resistance thereto.

Not surprisingly, Palestinians have not remained apathetic to their territorial and temporal dispossession. Their protest is expressed, inter alia, by the adoption of gradually developing alternate time frames. Memory, yearning, nostalgia, and historical writing are employed in the Palestinian struggle, insisting that they are a historical subject. The formation of temporariness has thus become a major instrument in their confrontation with their exclusion from time and history. Accordingly, the Nakba is not conceived as an event that simply occurred in 1948, but as a continuous series of awareness-arousing events, viewing Zionism as the main source of colonial "evil" that has to be transformed or deconstructed for any reconciliation between Palestinians and Jews to be possible.⁶⁰

Palestinian history, memory, and the repercussions of Zionism on Palestinian historical existence have been a focus for Palestinian researchers and thinkers since the 1960s. Many have stressed — and continue to stress — how the Zionist narrative has expunged Palestinians from history and subordinated Palestinian identity to the needs of the Zionist agenda.⁶¹ Aref al-Aref constructed Palestine as a lost paradise and established an unquestionable bond between Palestinians and their Palestine in his writings during the 1950s (1956–1962). Years later, Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine* was a groundbreaking work in this area.⁶² It was followed by Walid Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora*, documenting the Palestinian villages depopulated in the 1948 war.⁶³ This Palestinian historiography, albeit an initial work, countered the Zionist narrative and depicted it as a racial colonial venture.

Having focused on elites, Palestinian historiography began recently to give greater attention to micro-historical dimensions of Palestinian displacement and detemporalization. The voice of ordinary Palestinians emerged more conspicuously, thanks to the emergence of Palestinian oral histories transmitted by refugees and displaced persons.⁶⁴ The adoption of the

historiographical approach to tracing a gradual historical awareness of time has greatly helped to clarify the multidimensionality of the Palestinian struggle to return to history and time, as well as Palestinian teleology and its components.

Palestinian historiography has made significant gains recently, especially following Israel's new historical discourse concerning the birth of the State of Israel.⁶⁵ This historiography bases the existence of Palestinian life in Palestine on an historical continuum over hundreds if not thousands of years. Although unsuccessful in providing foundations for a coherent and rigid national narrative, these studies have demonstrated the implausibility of the "land without a people for a people without a land" theory that has buttressed Zionist ideology and mythology.⁶⁶

Palestinian and Arab historical and historiographical studies have catalyzed an intense debate over the exclusion of Palestinians from history, their silencing and the suspension of their time. The new Palestinian historiography has examined the degree to which the formation of Palestinian identity was indeed dependent on the emergence of the Zionist Movement, refuting dependency and Zionist "stimulus" arguments.⁶⁷ This historiography debated Zakariya Mohammad's warning that Palestinians' involvement in their own history reflects or echoes the Zionist narrative, by its mere assumption that Palestinian national time begins in the early twentieth century.⁶⁸

The burgeoning oral history of displaced Palestinians sought to provide living evidence of the spiritual crises afflicting numerous Palestinians since their loss of locality and home.⁶⁹ Oral historians attempted to reveal that the demographic upheaval and the loss of homes was an unanticipated catastrophe. It is claimed that many victims lost their emotional balance and experienced a protracted trauma.⁷⁰

Nostalgia and the pain of loss regarding the presence of Palestinians in history have also found expression since the Nakba in the literature, art, and poetry of the major Palestinian artists active in their homeland and abroad.⁷¹ Poetry and prose reconstruct the past in sublime images purified by time and memory, arousing the pain that echoes in the awareness of Palestinians who, forced to leave their homes in the dead of night, continue to dream of reconnecting with their imagined past.

Several autobiographical works express the depth of the displacement crisis that continues to resonate even after decades of life elsewhere, long after the financial predicaments accompanying displacement have ended. They express the spiritual bereavement beyond the initial displacement, encompassing the changes the original home has witnessed, and the inability to return to, or connect with this home after return.⁷² Other well-known

Palestinian authors, such as Murid Barghouti and Fawaz Turki have also documented their return following the Oslo Accord, together with the emotional crisis they experienced after renewing contact with their homeland, so radically altered. Others have shared their sense of alienation. These include exiled authors and poets like Ihsaan Abas and Zakariya Mohammad, others like Taha Muhammad Ali and Raja Shehadeh who remained living as internal refugees, and still others who lived as strangers in their homeland, such as Emile Habibi.

Noteworthy, then, are the similarities in the construction of the experience of loss and estrangement shared by Palestinians wherever they are, including in Israel.⁷³ This experience is reflected in the shared Palestinian collective imagination that crosses 1948 borders and in the creation of a continuous imagined community that functions on a level of cultural awareness and political solidarity. A shared crossing Palestinian time is constructed, countering the fragmentation of temporality imposed by the Zionist narrative and Israeli estrangement policies. Historiographical evidence demonstrates that Palestinian communities are divided between the desire to normalize their own lives and those of future generations and the desire to reject the current situation and thereby relinquish a return to their original home.⁷⁴ Suspension in time is therefore a crisis-ridden experience, suggesting powerlessness with respect to time as well as with respect to the possibility of self-expression, whereas normalization implies a parting from one's original existence.

The growing gap between the reality in which Palestinians formerly lived and their lives in borrowed time has become universal, even among Palestinians who remained in their homes. Palestinian sociologists demonstrate that the destruction of the pre-1948 Palestinian reality created new, temporary existential conditions that deprived them of the ability to live time.⁷⁵ Palestinian existence since the Nakba has therefore been rooted in repeated efforts to return to a "normal," "authentic" existence, to surmount the loss of the forfeited time dimensions and return to uniform, simultaneous time inherently related to the homeland. The parallel existence of different dimensions for different Palestinian communities overshadows the temporariness common to all Palestinians. As a result, different political projects have emerged to deal with Palestinian return to history.

The political and intellectual elite associated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) began stressing the urgency of arriving at a solution to the Palestinian problem in light of the continued crumbling of the existential foundations of locality and time. This elite expressed its aspiration for a standardized Palestinian time and a synchronized existence despite the divisive demographic and geographic reality. A focus on

control over time and its frequency, consistency, synchronization, and division has become a key attribute of the Palestinian struggle, merging with defiance of the Zionist and Israeli control over Palestinian time. The control over time became a central element of the Palestinian existential experience and being, seeking to make itself present within historical, human, and national time. This self-presencing reveals the centrality of the Palestinian perception of time as an existential dimension questioning Zionist time and deconstructing its narrative of the biblical bond between the Jewish people and the land of Palestine.

The partial normalization of Palestinian life clashes with a rising view claiming that time works to the benefit of Palestinians while sabotaging the realization of Zionism's main objective — establishing a Jewish political entity sans Palestinians.⁷⁶ Palestinians espousing this view, especially those from an Islamist worldview, believe that the continued Palestinian presence negates Zionism's foundations and implies the suspension of Jewish time. Islamist thinkers criticize the PLO elite for recognizing the Jewish narrative and emphasize the Islamic view of Palestine as a holy site. This view does not tolerate the presence of alternative narratives and demands an exclusive bond with the land of the Al-Aqsa mosque.

These differences reflected a deeper existential development related to structures of time and forms of being, something we address in the next section.

IV.1. Temporariness and the Ascendance of Protraction

Oral testimonies collected from elderly refugees demonstrate that many initially believed that the displacement would end when the fighting ended; the current Palestinian perception of the Nakba was a later development. That perception eased the experience of displacement for hundreds of thousands and helped them cope with the cognitive dissonance induced by their perceptions of home and their refugee status.⁷⁷

This perception marked the rise of temporariness as a mechanism for bridging the gap between the hope to return home and the shock of pain and displacement. This sense of temporariness, even if it meant a loss of control over the temporal order, became a constructive factor in the awareness of refugees and displaced persons who, unable to accept the loss of home, were left hoping for and anticipating return as an inherent aspect of their temporary status. Conspicuous in such contexts are expectations, essential for the human perception of time, as well as aspirations that the gap between the "horizon of expectation" and "the space of experience," in Koselleck's terms, will be bridged.⁷⁸

Replaced by yearnings for the past, expectations became the heart of the Palestinian experience,

especially among those residing in the refugee camps, where temporariness and divergence from the “natural” order of human existence continue to predominate.⁷⁹ Nostalgia has come to function as a link between time, coping and loss, an instrument for presenting the past in the present and addressing the pain of loss on the basis of a subconscious recognition that the past can never return.

Temporariness has therefore permeated Palestinians’ actions in their new, post-Nakba localities, where the search for solutions to the crisis of displacement is likewise considered temporary. Numerous refugees, together with Palestinians who remained in the State of Israel, have explored temporary solutions. They sought temporary shelter without entertaining any thought that those lodgings could be permanent.⁸⁰ The perception of temporariness has thus acquired the attributes of a powerful psychological defense mechanism, sustaining the continuity of the awareness to which Palestinians sought to cling, as they confronted the unbearable physical and spiritual burdens of defeat, humiliation, displacement, and helplessness. The sense of temporariness eased the agonizing existential shock that shattered the fundamental properties of being.

Gradually, as the end of displacement appeared far from imminent, Palestinians began evolving a sense of protracted temporariness. At this second stage, the existential crisis intensified, but in new dress. Because temporariness eased the existential dissonance, “non-temporary” temporariness, together with waiting and expectation, eventually became enduring characteristics of Palestinian awareness.⁸¹ This characterization of exile as a temporary means to an end countered the normalization of Zionist time in the homeland, thereby delegitimizing its rigidity and exclusivity.

Endless waiting has had two important effects on Palestinian reality. The first is an arousal of an intense sense of crisis. Such feelings allegedly represent an acceptance of reality and an existential state created by loss. Significant differences related to locality also become mechanisms for differentiating between Palestinians, especially regarding the causes underlying their waiting. Refugees in exile were prevented from utilizing violence to overcome the crisis of waiting; yet Palestinians living in the homeland have also been subject to a repression that precludes any possibility of open rebellion. The Nakba events in May 2011 may mark a change in this respect, where young people, who never experienced living in Palestine tired of waiting and initiated change on their own.

The second effect pertains to the materialization of a common Palestinian awareness despite — or perhaps because of — differences in locality. Palestinians’ connections to new locations since the Nakba have been sidelined and replaced by the experience of

displacement, loss, refugee status, and the forced, deformed connectedness to Palestine as major sources of consciousness. This process reflects the transition of the homeland from a physical space to a spiritual goal. The homeland therefore underwent a process of “purification,” struggling to “rescue time from the reign of contemporaneity” and transforming the homeland into a common myth that transcends the limits of immediate time, thereby posing a counter-narrative to the Zionist one. The ceremonies commemorating Land Day, celebrated annually on March 30, and Nakba Day on May 15 in Palestinian communities worldwide bear witness to the unity that arises from suspended time. This unity is evidence of the Palestinians’ attempts to fight against the normalization of protracted time by invoking temporariness as a mind-set incorporating an eventual homecoming.

Lengthy waiting and expectations have become universal Palestinian characteristics. However, the protracted temporariness has stimulated the formation of a new awareness incorporating temporariness and normality, not as stability-shattering contradictions but as features to be implemented by means of a unique type of integration. This lengthy process maybe viewed as *the creation of temporary normality*. In other words, temporariness as an abnormal state is replaced by the concept of normality as temporary, disappearing upon return to the homeland. Temporary normality thus transforms the homeland into a “lost paradise,” justifying every sacrifice. Mahmoud Darwish writes: “The homeland was born in exile. Heaven was born out of the hell of absence.”⁸² Such a normalization of temporariness collides with the conception of temporariness attributed to the Israeli control of Palestinian life since 1967, but opens new horizons for an alternative cross-national temporal perception.

These developments in Palestinian perceptions of time open new temporal horizons that enable new avenues of reconceptualization. They are not mutually exclusive but nonetheless sequential. This means that there is a growing Palestinian acknowledgment of the notion that there is no fixed direction of time, neither is there a rigid ahistorical and apolitical starting point that orders events and developments following it, granting them natural legitimacy or historical factuality. This acknowledgment not only refers to self-perceptions, but also generalizes to the entire Israeli and Palestinian temporal dynamics. It deconstructs rigid and fixed time frames and schemes and introduces more flexible and fluid constructions that invite mutual recognition and understanding. This shift demonstrates that neither side possessed a coherent self-identity prior to the start of the conflict, and assumes that the dominant self-perceptions of both sides may be overcome if such notion is mutually admitted.

V. Transformative Temporariness and the Opening of New Horizons

Temporariness is not only intrinsic to being but also a condition for sustained existence as a historical subject. Palestinians, mainly refugees and displaced people, portray their subjectivity as long as they exist in time. Acquiescence to the normalization of their existence in their present locations is viewed as a threat that destroys the existential basis of their arguments as products of the Nakba and as autonomous, historical subjects possessing historic rights demanding realization. Refugees express their temporariness until the past recapitulates itself in the future. As a result, the fluidity of the temporal order and the disappearance of rigid time frames built on clear distinctions between past, present, and future undergo a transformation into salient attributes for numerous Palestinians. Murid Barghouti described this fluidity and temporariness within the search for existential solutions, stating that permanent temporariness is one of the dimensions characterizing Palestinian life.⁸³ Protracted temporariness, however problematic, thus contains the revolutionary potential for returning the past to the future and for overcoming the obstacles of Palestinians' return to history.

This revolutionary potential is also reflected in Edward Said's groundbreaking description of exile as a source of power and normal existence in space.⁸⁴ The experience of exile as a feature of Palestinian self-awareness should not be considered a detriment. Exile creates opportunities to acknowledge the homeland's value and beauty. In an era of globalization and in which human migration is commonplace, the homeland can be experienced as exile, on one hand, and, on the other, an encouragement for the Palestinians' conception of temporariness as a source of inspiration and strength. Mahmoud Darwish also argues that obsession with "permanent" time can become a delusion that time is not realistic, and is in fact impossible because of the temporariness of the temporary, and since the routinization of the temporary does not necessarily mean steadiness.⁸⁵ Darwish describes this stage of Palestinian awareness as pondering the danger reflected in the past's invasion by the present and the danger to intact memories of the past posed by delusions about the present. He mulls over the relationship of self-identity to memory and time, phrased as "Are you what you were or what you are now?"⁸⁶ His observation collapses an entire system of binary concepts: temporariness–permanence, homeland–exile, continuity–truncation, rapidity–sluggishness, dynamic–static, and so forth.

This form of thinking proposes a temporal horizon that contradicts the closed time frames entailed in traditional national narratives of Jews and Palestinians. It traverses the rigid and closed temporal boundaries

of national identity while aiming toward a fluid space of awareness, where past events are not exclusive facts that through their presence determine the present. When the holiness of past events and experiences are disenchanting and are viewed as at least partially constructed by present realities, new possibilities open for reordering the future, thereby making the reconciliation of contradictory narratives feasible. This acknowledgment of time's fluidity as a source of strength and inspiration halts both Palestinian exclusion from history and the emptying and suspension of their time.

In the view of the three prominent Palestinian thinkers mentioned above, only release from these feelings will allow the transformation of weakness into strength while facilitating the transition from slavery to freedom. Free peoples are capable of overcoming loss, anger, and vengefulness, of passing through the gates of nostalgia to once again board time as free and legitimate passengers. To those holding fast to the reins of time, they propose a new world of concepts built on shared existential spheres that recognize difference and fluidity as the marks of reality. Globalization, displacement, and refugee status have assigned new meanings to protracted Palestinian temporariness and opened the doors to new patterns of reflective intersubjectivity. This, accordingly, can be accomplished not only through the strength of a new self-identity, but also by engaging with those responsible for the loss of normality and the Palestinians' exclusion from history, the homeland and time. Exilic consciousness agonizes but also opens new communication channels with those who were forced to be the ultimate exilic nation, despite the fact that in Palestinian eyes, the latter became suppressors.

Many Palestinians have internalized the traps of waiting to find a solution to the crisis of displacement and exile. Many others have normalized their time by traversing the Nakba's boundaries and limitations, without renouncing their demands for repatriation. In this respect, the concept of temporariness is transformed from an awareness derived from inhumane conditions and suffering in the realms of displacement to an awareness derived from the revitalization of memory and its physical relics as a mechanism of awareness. Transformative temporariness thus allows reconciliation with the immediate needs of daily life without renouncing the obligations of the past, but only as fluid constructions. The past loses neither its value nor its force from the renunciation of its continued existence in physical space, but simultaneously remains unfixed and fluid, legitimating the reconstruction of the future. The past presents itself consistently in the Palestinian collective imagination, possibly strengthened by its very conversion into nostalgia. However, longing for the past has become a reflective factor capable of influencing attempts to shape the future without persisting in the past. This

perception of time opens new horizons of restructuring and reconciling, not only narratives, but also realities.

This stage in the development of the Palestinian time has yet to be fully legitimated. It requires rephrasing in formats other than Darwish's poetry or popular Palestinian visual arts, both of which have successfully freed themselves from the chains of the tangible and are tied to the pain of displacement and exile. It requires the metaphysical contemplation of exile, of human existence, and of the Palestinian sense of being. Palestinian literature and art do not praise the normality of temporariness; rather, they are still partially confined to articulating temporariness and constructing an awareness deeply rooted in the pain of displacement. Some of the cultural activity, nonetheless, succeeded in hovering above the physical being of displacement to critically observe the twists and turns entailed in crossing boundaries.

The conception of time as temporary, which nullifies rigid, messianic time, has been invoked in the work of several Israeli intellectuals and scholars. The discursive origins of transformative temporariness exists as a possible horizon of co-existence spans many fields, such as archeology, Israel Finkelstein; in history, Shlomo Sand and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin; in cultural studies and literature, Sami Michael, David Grossman, Hanan Hever, and Yitzhak Laor; in philosophy, Adi Ophir and Ilan Gur-Ze'ev; in sociology, Yehouda Shenhav; in geography, Miron Benvenisti and Oren Yiftachel; and in art, Ariella Azoulay. This trend communicates with the writings of Said and Darwish, making the fusion of horizons a real possibility. They open new horizons of refugeeness, transcending the tragedies of closed national perceptions of rigid temporality as well as spatiality. This trend unveils the non-temporary nature of the Israeli colonial project and warns against and warns against turning temporariness into a manipulative tool to create an endless colonial reality. It enables a mutual Israel-Palestinian conformity as to the danger of being locked into "normal" nationalistic time, assuming the existence of pre-conflict a coherent and timeless identity that grants legitimacy to the exclusive mutual view of both sides. The critique of the Zionist narrative concerning exilic Jewish life establishes new common ground with normalizing Palestinian temporariness. One cannot speak of wide support for this trend, neither can one speak of a looming agreement over the institutional translation of the transformative temporariness on both sides of the conflict. The mere positive engagement with temporariness as a constructive existential experience, where the past is conceived in neither holy nor committing terms, raises the hope that this consensus could be a step towards reconciling Israeli and Palestinian narratives.

VI. Summary and Conclusions

This discussion demonstrated that time is undertheorized in conflict theory and its inclusion may potentially augment one's understanding of the dimensions of conflict and facilitate its resolution. Temporality, as a historical narrative, collective memory, and the existential flow of movement is deeply embedded in conflictual situations and is especially rooted in the self-perception of nations. When it is constructed in rigid and exclusive terms, which is the common case in national narratives, it instigates conflict. It is necessary to facilitate its transformation for conflict resolution to take place. The analysis of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict highlights the need to emphasize temporality as a central human dimension that can kindle or exacerbate conflict and intensify conflict-related apprehensions.

Herein, we described the tragic symbiosis between Jewish and Palestinian national time and its mutually exclusive construction. Mutual, albeit not equal, displacement and detemporalization contribute considerably to the tragic dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian symbiotic reality. Discarding exclusive time frames is a prerequisite for reconciliation between the two sides. Mutual recognition of both time frames demands transforming the existing hegemonic standardization of time and relinquishing messianic as well as exclusive romantic temporalities.

There is a deeply rooted identitarian dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that must be addressed in order to solve it. It is true that the conflict takes a clear material form, translated into conquering lands, building settlements and violent resistance. However, such material dimensions are based on deeply rooted perceptual constructions that legitimate them and enable their materialization. The transformation of such perceptual constructions is indispensable for mutual recognition as an avenue towards reconciliation between Palestinian and Jewish existence.

The simple theological treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian reality based on forgiveness cannot lead to realistic solutions. Palestinians are not able to recognize mainstream Zionist narrative, since it excludes them from the history of their homeland and ignores the harm its policies have inflicted on Palestinians' bond with their homeland. The dominant Zionist narrative empties Palestinian history of meaning, suspending the Palestinian flow of time, ghettoizing their presence, and still expecting the Palestinians to recognize the Zionist narrative as legitimate. On the other hand, prevailing Palestinian time frames ignore Jewish reality and the centrality of the "land of Israel" in the construction of their identity. They also minimize recent Jewish history, especially the burdens of the Holocaust and the need for a safe haven for Israeli Jews. Palestinian longing for

the homeland will have to consider the incorporation of at least some of the reality that has been constructed since 1948.

The persistence of mutually exclusive perceptions of time and history render reconciliation based on consensual deliberation unlikely, since it does not integrate the self-perceptions of both parties in the conflict. It does not amalgamate restorative dimensions of justice, but instead plays down the powerful influence of subjugation through consensus politics. It seems that agonistic forms of politics, based on what has been called by Iris Marion Young "asymmetric reciprocity," where opponents are bound together, accommodating the mutual temporalities and spatial implications necessary in order to promote reconciliation.

Transformative temporariness, as the deconstruction of mutually exclusive modernist national narratives, is a constructive existential temporal frame. It enables both sides to accept institutional political solutions and addresses basic needs and mutual desires to be a part of history. Temporariness, as the dominant time frame, speaks to conflictual parties, explaining that insistence on an exclusive return to history implies a continuation of the common tragedy. Without ignoring past injustices or current injuries, this framework proposes a way to overcome the national temporal narcissism that reaches for eternity by emptying or suspending the others' time. It shows that to achieve the infinite, we must renounce exclusivity, closure, and repression and replace it with more thorough self-observation, designed to release the autonomous self from its unconscious chains. Transformative temporariness, as the deconstruction of a rigid, fixed, and holy past that legitimate a particularistic present may become a guide to reconciliation; one that would allow mutual, non-exclusive existence in history, time, and homeland.

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