

MARXIST

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Palestine: Endless Occupation, Permanent Crisis

I was asked to talk about the historical perspective of Palestine. Catching up with the last discussion and exchange I understand that some of the major facts were already raised and debated. I do apologize if some of what I'm going to say was already covered here and there. But, I hope to provide a more structural presentation.

It is important to begin with Palestine before the arrival of Zionism, in order to have a good perspective - a historical perspective – can even explain better what is going on today. Before the arrival of Zionism, Palestine, as you know, was part of the Ottoman Empire. And like many parts in the Eastern - what you would call Western Asia, and people from Europe would call the Eastern Mediterranean - like in many other parts of that part of the world, in the mid-19th century the society went through a process of modernization, the beginning of assuming national aspirations. And all know, about half a million to 600,000 people lived in what became Israel and the occupied territories later on, spoke Arabic, and had some characteristics that differentiated them from people in other neighbouring countries. It was mostly pastoral, rural society. But, it had a vibrant urban elite. And, it was on the way to develop like Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, into a modern state. It is important to say this because if you look at the website of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, for instance, they would tell you that Palestine was an empty land, before the

Zionists arrived in Palestine. And, that's a fabrication. That's a lie.

Which unfortunately was repeated recently by the President of the EU, who said that 'Zionism bloomed the desert'. Palestine was never a desert. It has a small desert in the south of the country, but it was a fertile, prospering, and thriving, both country and society.

Then, in order to understand what Zionism is doing in Palestine, we have to move geographically from Palestine to the Central and Eastern Europe, where Zionism appears as a movement that is motivated by two impulses. One is a response for rising of anti-semitism, the hatred against Jews because of their religion. And, also, the new ideal nationalism that catches up a lot of people in

Central-Eastern Europe. And that leads to these intellectuals to decide that maybe they should redefine Judaism not as a religion but as nationalism. To this I would just add very briefly that most people don't know that Zionism actually did not start as a Jewish project. Namely, the idea of having a Jewish state in Palestine

or instead of Palestine, was not something that was brought up for the first time by the Zionists or the early Zionists in Central-Eastern Europe, who were looking at this idea as a solution for anti-Semitism and as a springboard for the creation of a Jewish nation state. This was earlier already propagated by Evangelical Christians who believed that, many millions of them still believe

in this today, that the return of the Jews to Palestine is going to precipitate the second coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, the beginning of the end of time. And this was an idea that American Presidents, important policymakers in Britain, subscribed to. And it influenced also the Jewish intellectuals in the late 19th century that formed the Jewish Zionist movement.

For a while the Zionist movement was not entirely clear whether geographically it wants to build a modern, secular, Jewish nation-state necessarily in Palestine. As some of you may know, other options were seriously considered, like Uganda in Africa, the tip of South America, Azerbaijan in East Russia, and even some territories were looked at in North America. But eventually,

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around 1904-1905, the Zionist movement homed on Palestine as the only place where Jewish nationalism can re-emerge as they saw it. They looked at Palestine as a land that belonged to the Jewish people and therefore talked about redemption of the land. And, totally ignored the fact that someone else lived there for thousand years. It didn't bother them at all, which is quite surprising. Because they knew that there was another population there. They somehow still thought, and maybe they were right in their perspective at that time, that the idea of settling in a non-European land by force, or through colonization was still possible in the late 19th century as far as international public opinion was concerned, as long as you had an Empire on your side that would enable you to begin the colonization. And one of the main efforts of the Zionist leaders, before and during the WWI, was to persuade Britain that, first of all taking over Palestine from the Ottoman Empire is a British strategic interest, and that having in Palestine a Jewish State under British protection is also a British interest.

And it took some pressure on the British government and quite a lot of intensive lobbying that eventually in 1917, even before the WWI ended and even before Britain occupied Palestine, Britain promised to make Palestine a Jewish state. At that period between 1905 and 1917, Zionism transformed from a national movement, if you want, or a cultural movement, into a settler colonial movement. Settler colonial movements appeared elsewhere in the world - in North America, in South America, in Australia, in New Zealand. It is a similar story of European refugees who seek to rebuild Europe somewhere else, and their main problem is the presence of an indigenous population. And as the late great scholar of settler colonialism, Patrick Wolfe said, 'when settler colonial movements meet the indigenous people, they work according to the logic of the elimination of the native'. And, in North America elimination meant proper genocide. In Palestine, elimination meant the ethnic cleansing of the local Palestinians. Or, if you want, Zionism was and is a project of displacement

of Palestinians and replacing them with the Jewish people or as many people from the Jewish people as possible.

Now, the idea of replacing an indigenous people with a group of settlers and immigrants needs capacity, needs alliances in the world, needs regional alliances, and so on. And the history of Israel when it comes into being and before that the Zionist Community, before 1948, is focused on these kind of alliances. And, as you probably know, the most important alliance was not with Britain, but eventually and still is today with the United States. Now, in order to implement this idea, in order to create a Jewish state you need as much of the new land, Palestine namely, as possible with as few people of the indigenous population in it as possible, namely the Palestinians, in order to implement a vision of a Palestine without Palestinians. You need also the right historical moment for trying and implementing such a vision. And that moment appeared in 1948. Why 1948? Because that is the year that Britain had enough of Palestine. It's also connected to India... the idea to leave India made few countries in West Asia less important strategically... And, Britain, let's face it, after the World War II ceased to be a real Empire anymore. And, Palestine had very little strategic value for Britain even as a weakened Empire. So the British decide to leave Palestine. And that creates a vacuum. And before the United Nation that replaces Britain, suggests a solution to partition Palestine into two states, there is a vacuum. There is a transition period.

And, one has to say, that the Palestinians, although they were the majority in 1948 – two-third of the population - and they had the support of the neighboring Arab states, were not fully prepared for that moment. Both because of dissent in the leadership, and also because Britain in the 1930s destroyed the Palestinian military and political leadership during a famous revolt that raged between 1936 and 1939. And more important than anything else, what the Palestinians could not confront properly was the fact that Europe and the United States decided three years after the

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Holocaust that the best compensation for the Jewish people was to allow the Zionist movement to colonize Palestine. And against such an alliance, against such an idea, the Palestinians who were a pastoral society, still with a traditional leadership, could not really constitute a real challenge to the idea of ethnically cleansing them and replacing them with a Jewish State.

Once Britain officially announced in February 1947 that it was about to leave Palestine, the preparation on the Zionist side to fully ethnically cleanse the Palestinians, to expel them massively from Palestine began seriously. The first act of ethnic cleansing began a year later, in February 1948, under the eyes of the British. Just a chronological moment here - Britain was still in Palestine responsible for Law and Order until May 1948. But the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, the first phase, began between February and May, under the noses and eyes of the British, but they did not interfere. But they were fully aware that Palestinians were massively expelled by the Zionist forces. It began in February, 1948 reached a certain peak in April, May, when most of the Palestinian towns had been de-Arabized, depopulated, from their indigenous population, according to a master plan of ethnic cleansing called Plan D or Plan Dalet. And on the 15th of May, 1948 Britain left Palestine altogether. Under pressure, the Arab governments decided to send some troops into Palestine on the 15th of May, because massive numbers of refugees had already arrived in Arab capitals. And quite reluctantly, the Arab states sent too little forces and too late... forces to try and stop the next phases of the ethnic cleansing. To a certain extent their effort was successful because half of the Palestinians still remained in Palestine at the end of 1948. But one has to say, half of Palestine's population became refugees. In the end of 1948, half of the Palestinian villages, 500 in number, were totally demolished. And on their ruins Israel built settlements and planted recreational forests. And most of the Palestinian towns had been de-Arabized, depopulated. All of this was within nine months. And the world

was watching. The world knew exactly what was going on. But the idea in the West, in particular, was that this is a small injustice to compensate for the big injustice – namely, the Palestinians have to pay for centuries of European anti-Semitism, and in particular for the Holocaust.

But half of the Palestinians remained in Palestine. And outside of Palestine, in the refugee camps, the Palestinian national movement reawakened and created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the struggle continued. We have another kind of turning point in 1967, when Israel occupies those parts of Palestine that it did not occupy in 1948 - namely the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And, maybe a word on the Gaza Strip here, because it's very much, and unfortunately for the wrong reasons, in the news nowadays. There was no Gaza Strip before 1948. There was also no West Bank before 1948. How did these two areas become a geopolitical reality? Well, Gaza was created... the Gaza Strip... was created by Israel during the 1948 ethnic cleansing as a big refugee camp and a receptor for the hundreds of thousands of refugees that Israel pushed from the Central and South of Palestine, and decided to leave Gaza not under Israeli control but as a huge refugee camp. The West Bank was created as part of an agreement between Israel and Jordan, in return for very limited Jordanian participation in the all-Arab attempt to stop the ethnic cleansing. Jordan was given by Israel the West Bank... they took it without a shot. Why Israel was willing to give up the West bank in 1948? Because, there were hardly any Jews there. But in 1967, under the circumstances of that war, Israel reoccupied, or occupied for the first time both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And like every settler colonial state you have this balance between geography and demography, or if you want space and population. If you take more space of the indigenous country then you get more indigenous people.

But, Israel did not repeat the ethnic cleansing with 1967. Although, one should say Israel expelled almost 350,000 Palestinians

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during the 1967 war, from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But most of the people in the West Bank or the Gaza strip were, as you know, were not expelled. Instead, Israel created what I called in my book 'The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of Gaza and the Occupied Territories' ... a big prison... I mean open prison... in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. It's still the idea to my mind of the elimination of the native, because if you cannot expel millions of people, you can enclave them, you can imprison them. Millions of Palestinians have no civil rights and human rights. They cannot vote, they cannot be elected, they have no say in their future. And Israel has been policing them and controlling them from 1967 until today. And basically I argue in my book, 'The Biggest Prison on Earth', that Israel used two models of prison. One was an open prison. If the Palestinians behaved well, so to speak, they can have autonomy, they can even work in Israel. Of course, they have no right to participate in Israeli politics or decide about the future of the economy or security or sovereignty, but they have some autonomy in domestic issues. And that's the 'open prison' model. In many ways I think the Oslo Accords was trying to make official the open prison as a peace process. And that's why it totally failed, because it was not a peace process. And then there is the maximum security model - a punishing prison model that the Palestinians are getting whenever they try to uprising, to revolt, as they did in 1987, in 2000. And then we come, and with this I really want to leave time for your comments and questions, we come to Gaza.

In 2005, when the Hamas won the elections in both Gaza and in the West Bank in the democratic elections, Israel reacted by imposing a siege on Gaza. And this siege has been going on for 17 years. It was a punishment for the decision of the people of Gaza to elect a political leadership that Israel didn't like. Now this political leadership, the Hamas movement, reacted with its own guerilla warfare that included launching missiles into Israeli civilian population. You probably are familiar with these missiles;

they were called the Qassam missiles. And, Israel reacted, always retaliated. And four times the people of Gaza, since the beginning of the siege, four times, they were bombarded heavily from the air, the land, and sea. I don't know how many of you have experienced being in a house bombarded by an F16 or F35. It traumatizes you for life, even if you are not wounded or anyone you know has been killed by such an attack. And these people were exposed to such attacks four times. Why do I say this? Because, I think we need some historical context to what happened on the 7th of October.

There are two contexts here, which are important. And with this, I will end and open it up to you. One is a longer historical context and I already hinted to this when I said that there was no Gaza Strip before 1948. So, half of the people in Gaza are a third generation of the people who became refugees in 1948. Many of them are also refugees from the Palestinian villages that were destroyed near Gaza and (on) whose ruins the Jewish settlements at the Hamas attack on the 7th of October were built. So, they have kind of a more intimate connection with the places that the Hamas attacked on the 7th of October. I'm not justifying it, of course...not everything that was done there, but I'm just giving the explanation what was the importance of these particular places that were attacked on the 7th of October.

And, more importantly, I think, in many ways is the fact that the population of Gaza is very young, which means that most of the people who live in Gaza only know the experience of 17 years of siege. And these are the kind of people who were part of the operation that attacked those Jewish settlements and military bases on the 7th of October. Again, this does not justify everything was done. But it explains the motivation, it explains the conflict. It also explains that as long as ethnic cleansing is an ideology of a state, then it's likely to continue. Because I mentioned... with this I would end... I mentioned already the late scholar Patrick Wolfe, unfortunately who's not with us... He said few interesting things

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about settler colonial projects like Zionism in Israel. He said the elimination of the Native, or settler colonialism in this respect is not an event, it's a structure. It's an ideological structure.

And, as an Israeli Jew, unfortunately, I say that my society, its political elite, its academic leadership, its cultural leadership are still persuaded that they have the moral right, the power and the ability to complete the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and turn an Arab country, mostly a Muslim country, in the midst of the Arab world, in the midst of the Muslim world, into a European Jewish state. I warn my compatriots in Israel - not only this is not going to work, it's not going to succeed. Zionism is not going to succeed. Zionism is going to fail. But the question is how it's going to fail? Will it fail through more bloodshed, more violence, which is terrible for everyone. Or, and there's still time for this despite everything that happened, we will start a new future, a new road towards creating a one democratic state for all between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean. A democratic state in Western Asia that I think will have a positive influence on the countries around it, and would have a positive influence on the world at large, as a model for coexistence and a different kind of normal life that was denied from the Palestinians, and in many ways from the Jews in Israel as well for more than a century. Thank you!

Q & A

Q: Thank you very much for a fascinating expose. I have two questions. You made a very interesting comment, Professor, when you said that Oslo was an attempt to formalize these Palestinian enclaves or 'open air prisons' - the phrase that you have rendered, you know people unforgettable as it were. And, you said that it was not a peace process and that is why it was bound to fail. Now, does that mean that the people who were, I mean the liberal Israelis, as distinct from the current regime - ideologically speaking - they were also committed to this notion of Palestinian enclaves.

So, is there by that token no democratic liberal Israeli? And if that be so, then how do you visualize a one democratic state? I'm practically speaking.

A: Thank you. A very good question. First of all, yes. I think you understood me very well. I thought that the Oslo Accords was an attempt to create this 'open prison' model as a final settlement calling it a state. But if you look at the Oslo agreement, it is not a state. The economy is in the hands of Israel, security is in the hands of Israel. If you remember Oslo B, which is more important than Oslo A, Oslo 2, that the real Oslo agreement divided the West Bank into areas A, B, and C. So in essence, 16% of the West Bank, which is nothing, were to be under the direct control of the Palestinian Authority. But even that 16% were open to Israeli security intervention whenever Israel deemed it necessary. So, this is not sovereignty, this is not a state, this is not self-determination, this is not a solution at all. Now, yes. I have to admit that your conclusion from that is one... the conclusion you suggest... I don't know if it's your right view... but you rightly suggest a logical conclusion out of that is that what we call the liberal left or the Zionist left or call it... I think we know what we're talking about. What people used to call the peace camp in Israel. I think that it's not a genuine peace camp. It never was. I think it was... a liberal Zionism is an attempt to square the circle between continuing to create...to maintain a racist Jewish state with occupation; while at the same time remain a democracy. This is impossible.

Put differently, sir, I would say it's impossible to be a liberal occupier. It's impossible to be a progressive ethnic cleanser. It's impossible to be a leftist genocider. It's impossible. And, therefore I think all these attempts, which were by the way genuine attempts to say, 'Yes, we have to oppress the Palestinians but we are also liberal people', it doesn't work. It doesn't work. You lie to yourself. You lie to the world. I don't think therefore... By the way, this is the reason that there is no Left left in Israel. You know. If you know of anyone who's a leftist Zionist, keep an eye on them.

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Because, they are distinct creatures. They don't exist anymore. The whole Israeli system moved to the right in 2000. Because, rightly the electorate said either we are an ethnic, racist, Jewish state or we are a democratic non-Jewish state. There's nothing in between. Unfortunately for them. But it doesn't. You either have to be that or that.

Now, the last piece of your question is important. How do you create one state solution if the majority of the settler communities are against it? Well, we had some cases like this in the past. The majority of the whites in South Africa wanted to maintain apartheid. And, nonetheless, the apartheid fell. In other words, it's an important moment of sobriety, to say, the change in Palestine would not come from within the Israeli Jewish society. You have to realize that. But that doesn't mean that there are no other models of changing the reality. Among them sanctions, pressure... you know, making sure that either the region or the world sends this tough message to Israel that this cannot continue. And when this happens, I think, you can hope for a change within the dominant settler society. But I don't think that the fact that the vast majority of Israelis reject any kind of genuine reconciliation with the Palestinians, would mean that those of us who believe that reconciliation is the right way forward, and those of us who believe that the oppression of the Palestinian should stop should not continue their efforts. Both to persuade the people from within, which I'm trying to do, and build a strong pressure very much on the model that eventually helped to bring down the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Q: Thank you, sir, for your insightful historical perspective. I have two quick questions. The first question is - do you find any similarity between the Zionist movement and the Hindu nationalist movement that is the Hindutva movement in India. Of course, I think both of them didn't have any connection to the British political strategy as you have mentioned. My second question is - is there an exemplary model in history where Jews and Muslims

and even Christians lived peacefully. So, to be more specific, was the Ottoman Caliphate an exemplary model? And even before that there were many Jewish historians who have commented on this. So I would love to hear your comments as well.

A: You know I have enough enemies in Israel. You want me to open a front with the Indian government. Yes. But I have to admit. I think that there are similarities. I do think so that Hindutva or the whole idea that Hinduism is nationalism and not a faith, not a religion, and one that defines a community not only in a positive way but also in a negative way - namely you don't know only who you are, you know who isn't you, who doesn't belong to you. And in this case someone who is not part of your faith, mostly Muslims, are not part of the collective, you know, the collective good as we would call it in Republican terms. And what happens is, and I think Kashmir is a good example, is that the moment you think that you want to create, or at least to narrow the gap between who you think is the right collective nation - in this case based on religion, not on nationalism - you are bound to be using unsavory methods to purify the nation, so to speak. I think it's very dangerous. Although in the case of India, of course, this is not settlers and native population. Although, I think in Kashmir there's something that is, and I have few students working on this... I think there is a settler colonial model in Kashmir itself. But I think that in India as a whole it's a bit different because we're not talking about you know Hindu settlers coming to settle in a Muslim country. But there are similarities and it's not surprising that the BJP is very pro-Israeli and the Israelis are very pro-BJP. I hope for the sake of both Zionism and this kind and the BJP that the idea of human rights and civil rights would trump the ideas of collective rights that are achieved in such a way.

Now, for the second question. Yes. It's important to remember that both in the Muslim world under the Ottoman rule, and in Palestine in particular, there was a genuine coexistence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. There is one interesting indication

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for this. People lived – Christians, Muslims, and Jews - lived in the same villages and in the same towns until 1948. After 1948, in a ‘divide and rule’ kind of strategy they are now living in different communities. But they used to be, you know, celebrating each other’s festivities, mourning each other’s moment of catastrophes, and so on. So, I think there is a model there. Is it the Caliphate? I’m not sure. Because I think there were a lot of negative things about the Ottoman Empire. But we should take from the Ottoman legacy the good things. And two things have to be said about it. One - most of the efforts to, even the genuine efforts to, bring peace between Israel and Palestine were all built on European models, European political models. I think the future relies actually in studying the Ottoman past, the West Asian past, not the European past. Like, if you want to have a solution that is fitting the region, the history, the culture, the civilization you’re in, you go to the history of that civilization. You’re not looking to it in the supermarket in the West. And the second thing is that you can find there. And that was very unique to the Ottomans. The Ottomans really respected the notion of ‘Live and Let Live’. And that is what... not only Palestine, look at Syria, look at Lebanon... look what happened in Syria. Syria is a disintegrated state. Look at Iraq. The Iraqis can hardly, you know, keep the state together. Lebanon is on the danger of being disintegrated. Because the very basic idea of the Ottomans that people are entitled to have collective identities, but the collective identities should not be the state identities. The state should have the space for people, respect their collective identities, serve the people rather than serve one collective identity at the expense of other collective identities. And I believe this is the model for the future. And that is something that would be important not only for Palestine, but for the whole *mashra*, as they call it in Arabic which is the Eastern Mediterranean or from your perspective West Asia.

Q: I have a couple of questions. The first is the use of the word anti-Semitism. Now, when the Arabs are equally Semite, and so

when a Palestinian is called anti-Semitic is that just an imposition of self-loathing? My second question deals with the original land of Israel, which again involved, apparently under divine mandate, the displacement of people that lived there in the first place - the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Hittites and the like. Now, you talk about, I mean the previous session before yours dealt with the theopolitics of the region, this comes in there... I'm curious because again we talk about the children of Abraham, but frankly at that point in time it is Jacob and his children, Esau who is the direct lineal descendant of Abraham, is out as Edom and not part of that particular legacy. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, or half of it anyway, that are on the other side Jordan. So, if there were in many ways settler colonists in the first place then shouldn't that also be brought into the discussion as well?

A: First of all, you know, anti-Semitism became a common phrase, even if you are absolutely right that it's a very distorted idea. Because the Arab are also Semites and nobody... when one talks about anti-Semitism, one doesn't think about racism towards Arab, but only towards Jews, who are actually, most of them, are probably not Semites - Europeans and Americans and so on. So, yes. It's academically, scholarly-wise, it's a very distorted frame. However, it became such common usage that I don't think we have much chance of dealing with it properly, apart from a far more important, I think, mission that we have and to make sure that the attempt to weaponize anti-Semitism in order to silence criticism on Israel, and in order to suppress the Palestinians is not going to be successful - namely, the equation of anti-Semitism with criticism on Israel is something we should challenge. And, it's not easy to challenge because many people still believe, especially in the global North, that if you criticize Israel it means that you show hatred to Jews wherever they are. Which, of course, is totally nonsense. But that's how people understand it and that's why Israel weaponizes it. Because, it's quite easy to intimidate people by accusing them of being anti-Semites. And they

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need to be true to themselves to know that they are not racist and not be intimidated by such accusation. But as we know sometimes it works. Well, it brought down the leader of the Labor party in Britain, Jeremy Corbin, so we should not underestimate the power of such slander and accusation.

The second point that you make, you know, but that's my own problem probably. I don't deal too much and I must admit I don't know that much about things that happened 2,000 or 3,000 years ago. So, I would say two things about it. One, I never thought that there was much validity to the Zionist claim that they have a right to the land because they used to live there 2,000 years ago. I mean I always say to my Israeli friends, 'Can you imagine someone knocking on your door and says, 'Excuse me, sir. I used to live in your house 2,000 years ago. You should at least give me half of the house.' I think what you will do you will call the police and say, 'You know, there's a nut case here who wants my house and he claims that he lived here 2,000 years ago'. And to your great surprise, the police would come back and say the man has a case and you should give him half of the house. And that's what happened in Palestine. I think that what is important is academically we should, and I think you're right... By the way, I agree with what you say and there's a great work by someone called Thomas L. Thompson on this (*The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*). There's a whole school of thought in biblical studies called the 'minimal biblical', centered in the Department of Theology in the University of Copenhagen. And they're doing an excellent job and some of what you say is substantiated by their archaeological work. But I think what is important is to me in the case of an ongoing conflict, is not the validity of a narrative, which is for academics to look at, but what you do in the name of the narrative. I mean I don't care if people would say, you know, my great great grandparents were the people who lived here 2,000 years ago. Okay. You can say that. Maybe you're right, maybe you're not. That doesn't matter. But if in the

name of that narrative you dispossess, you displace, you expel, then there is a problem with the narrative. Far more important than the validity or invalidity. And, therefore I think this whole discussion is important, but I think it's far more important to ask what is being done in the name of narratives, rather than then whether these narratives are valid or not.

Q: I have two questions. One is, I believe you're a veteran of the 1973 war as well. So, in my interactions with lots of Israeli military, as well as the average people in the 90s and early 2000s... I thought the majority were moderate and looked at peace as a future. But looking at what's happening now and particularly the governments having radicalized to the Right so much, and Netanyahu is a bad example of that, some of the actions that the Israeli military does now... Has the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) been radicalized completely and is that a big danger for Israel as a state in its viability in the future? That is one question. The second one is - you did make a mention on the Ottoman Empire - while many things may have been bad we should take the good things. And I think that's absolutely right. So, these are multinational empires - Ottoman Empire, the Hapsburg Empire - and they had multiple ethnic communities living together. There was a lot more cohesion and I sincerely believe the concept of the Westphalian nation state is anachronistic to Asian and Eastern civilizations particularly, and they are the cause of much of conflict over the last 300 years. And they continue to remain the conflict for many areas of the world. And the West promotes this continuously because they believe in that idea. So, we are trapped because that has been set to the norm in the 1945, when two-thirds of the world were being decolonized but they were actually being imposed with Westphalian ideas of territoriality and a certain idea of Eurocentric nation state system. And that's incongruous in civilizational states like India and China as well. Conflict is continuing to abound as well. So, where's the solution? Palestine is a clear example of that as well.

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A: First of all, about the IDF - I'm afraid you're right. In one of the articles I wrote recently I said that the state of Israel is being taken by the state of Judea. What did I mean by that? I meant that in the settlements that Israel built in the occupied West Bank, a new kind of Zionism emerged - a Messianic one. What you would rightly call an extreme right-wing version of Zionism that believes that Israel anyway should be a Jewish theocracy, believes in far more brutal and ruthless policies towards the Palestinians. And, when you were there in the 1970s or 1980s, indeed people like that used to be thought as being on the ideological margins of the political system. But they have moved to the center, they are now an important part of the government - meaning they are an important part of the policy makers. And yes, they have made the way up through the various echelons to the top of the Israeli Army, the top two of the Israeli Security Service, and they are beginning to have an impact on the policy. What is interesting is that there are not very capable military men. One of the reasons that the 7th of October was such a great surprise is exactly the presence of these people in positions that before were manned by people who came from the more Socialist side of Zionism - you know, the *kibbutzim* and so on. So, they're not very competent, militarily-wise, and we have seen it in the 7th of October. And, imagine what would have happened if at the same time that the Hamas attacked South of Israel, Hezbollah in the North would have attacked the North of Israel. How would Israel have dealt with that when it hardly was able to deal with an attack of a small guerilla army in the South? Israelis have to ask themselves very important questions - both about what you're saying here - the radicalization of the IDF leadership but also about the incompetence of the IDF. Is really the IDF something, an organization that will be able to maintain the occupation and defend the state at the same time? I don't think people are asking these questions in Israel. But I do hope that maybe in the later stage they will ask it and that could also be a positive outcome of a very unfortunate chapter, a very

tragic chapter and catastrophic chapter in the history of Palestine.

As for your second comment – I fully agree with you and I hope you and I are not the only ones. I totally agree. I think the whole model of the Westphalian state from the 17th century that was imposed on the Eastern Mediterranean, after the WWI through the Sykes-Picot agreements and so on, is inept. It does not fit the realities, the civilizations, the legacies, the aspirations of the people. And, as long as this is the political model it will perpetuate conflict rather than help to solve them. I have to tell you that we are not actually alone. I know because I communicate daily with a lot of Palestinians and Arab intellectuals. Most of my books have been translated to Arabic. I've published 23 books to date and most of them were translated to Arabic. So, I'm within... we have this intellectual network in the Arab world. Also in North Africa, by the way, we do think that also North Africa does not benefit, as we can see in the case of Libya, from the Westphalian model of state. I'm very impressed by the younger generation of people, both in Palestine and the rest of the Arab world, who are thinking, I think, in a similar way and trying to translate fluid ideas into more strategic political programs. It's not easy because as you can imagine, the regime themselves, and that includes Israel, want to keep the Westphalian model because it keeps them in power. So, they're doing everything possible not to allow even for these discussions to develop. But I think they will and it will be very interesting to see whether these, what I and you probably would think are better models for the future would emerge as proper political programs with a push forward by proper political movements.

Q: In your many sided, profound critique, you also offer the critique of the peace movement. But in equating the peace movement as an apology of Zionist occupation, are you being fair to the many dedications and sacrifice of the peace movement, both from Israel and Palestine. Particularly people like David Schulman, who is also a scholar of Tamil - you might know him and

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his own personal story and many Holocaust victims going and resisting. But, also the peace movement from Palestine. The other thing is that there are also groups like Neve Shalom, and I had met people constituting a very interesting group called 'Roots' which brings Palestinians and Jews together. If you are proposing for a one-state kind of frame, it requires movements like this. This is my first query. Second quick query is that to do this work in the contemporary, it requires many-sided historical work. Think of the way during the Vietnam war many academics took part in 'teach in' programs. So, similarly there should be 'teach in' programs both for the Palestinians and the Israelis. And that requires a certain atmosphere. In current Israel, is there a space for dissent? There is increasing securitization, especially after October 7. So, is there a threat for scholars like you, to be arrested? So, what is the space for freedom in current Israel?

A: Yes, of course there are individuals and as you say there are even communities here and there, and also organizations in the civil society on the Israeli side that believe in reconciliation. I don't think that they don't exist. I just don't think that they have the power to impact the reality, unfortunately. And, many of the leading figures who were, let's call them, dissenting voices, unfortunately, have left the country despairing about the future. There's always hope and as I said, despite my sober analysis that there is very little chance for a change from within the Israeli Jewish society, I continue my own work to try and persuade the Israeli Jews that there is another way forward from the one that their government and most of their compatriots are choosing. So, yes. There is a group to work with. I just think that in order to enhance the influence of that group you need to have a different international and regional reaction to the state of Israel. I think more pressure from the outside actually would enhance the groups that are unhappy with the state's ideology, its policies, and its strategies. So that's what I meant. And, of course, the people you mentioned, David Schulman, the places you mention like Neve Shalom are

worth mentioning and commending. I don't think there is much need to talk about a Palestinian peace camp. I don't think that in a situation of a colonizer and a colonized, you're looking for the peace camp of the colonized. I think that's the wrong framework to my mind. What you are looking is - and Nelson Mandela was very good in pointing out to this - what you are looking in the community of the colonized, of the oppressed, is not for a peace camp. You are looking for an ideology of restorative justice rather than retribution. The difference between, in many ways, between what happened in Zimbabwe and South Africa, after the end of apartheid in both countries, you know. Not looking for retribution. You hope that the main impulse within the colonized people, if you want to talk about the decolonized future, is restorative justice and not retributive justice. And I think most Palestinians are still very much loyal to restorative justice, namely they want normal, natural life rather than seeking retribution or revenge.

As for your second one, it's very interesting what you say. First, before I would comment whether there is a space now, let me say two interesting anecdotes that goes along with this. I was part of a group of 10 Palestinian historians and 10 Israeli historians that worked on bridging the historical narrative. Trying to create a narrative both sides could agree on. And I published it as a book with my dear Palestinian friend Jamil Hilal. It's called 'Across the Wall: Narratives of Israeli-Palestinian History'. It's a very interesting exercise on how history books would look like, if there is reconciliation. So I think the historians are involved in this. The second anecdote is, I don't know if you aware of this, but in 2006 I was forced to leave Israeli academia. I was actually expelled because of my views, because of my books, because of my courses. I was forced to leave my University - the University of Haifa. And I had to go to exile in Britain, where I'm now, teaching. So, you pay a price if you challenge the Zionist narrative in Israel. You pay the price when I challenged it in the early 21st century. I think the price you pay now is even higher. So, not

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only is there no space, there is even less space for dissent after the 7th of October. It created a very unified kind of revengeful, racist approach to Palestinians, wherever they are. It's the first reaction, it's the immediate reaction to 7th of October. Some would even say understandable on a certain level. I hope that the more distant reaction would be a bit more realistic, a bit more conciliatory. But for the time being it's very difficult to voice any dissent in Israel. I mean it depends who you are. If you are a Jewish dissenter, you won't be sent to prison, although we have few cases of that as well. But if you are a Palestinian citizen of Israel, and you know 20% of the Israelis are Palestinian citizens. And if they voice a dissent they find themselves immediately in prison. You know we have...I am now trying to defend a case where a Palestinian student... all she said in the WhatsApp was, 'I don't fully agree to everything the spokesperson of the Israeli IDF is saying'. That was enough to send her to jail. So, that's the atmosphere now in Israel. It's important to understand that. So, people are very careful. I'm 70 years old, so I stopped being careful. But people who are younger than 70 years are a bit more careful and rightly so.

Q: My question is a little different from the previous ones. What's your impression of Western media coverage of what's going on in Gaza? And I want to just add that some experimenters going to ChatGPT-4 and so on have found that if the prompt is in English, you get one kind of narrative. If it's in Arabic, it's quite different. I don't know about Hebrew. Any comments on that? But basically what you read in the Western press and watch on television.

A: It's a very good question. I think that we have to distinguish between the mainstream media and the alternative media. The mainstream media in the West is very much loyal to the line taken by the governments of the West. And the governments of the West, by and large, I'm generalizing, but by and large take the American lead on the situation now in Gaza. Namely, they want to give Israel more time to so-called complete its military

objectives. While quite a lot of readers, listeners, and viewers of that media would probably think that this is not a license to complete a military operation but it's rather a license to continue a genocidal policy on the ground. I do think that listening to the major television satellite channels of the West in Arabic like Sky News in Arabic, BBC in Arabic, the Arabic speaking satellite networks that are being funded by the Americans in the Middle East, in the West Asia... I think you're right. They are trying to bring more voices of dissent, at least challenge some of these policies. But in the local languages in the Western countries, the message that the mainstream media gives is that Israel is doing an action of self-defense. Yes, it should be more careful of, you know, of the way that it operates, but all in all it is justified in what it is doing. However, if you go to the global South, if you go to the alternative media, you can see a clear understanding and what goes on. Sheer horror at the Israeli brutality and ruthlessness on the ground. Total disbelief in the way that Western governments are not, at least, demanding a ceasefire. A lot of respect to South Africa for going to the International Court of Justice in the act to try to bring... And, remember what the South Africans want is to stop the genocide. They're not saying, you know, Israel should not exist. They're not saying, let's have one Democratic state. All they're saying is, because the Western governments are not doing it - 'Stop The Killing'. 'Stop the carnage. It's 100 days... Today (14 January, 2024), by the way, is the 100th day of the carnage. More than three months and 10 days of genocide. 23,000 dead. Which is just the number we know. We don't know how many people are still buried under the ruins of the 70% of the houses that were demolished by Israel. More TNT has been dropped on Gaza Strip in the last three months than they were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. I mean this is something that is unbelievable that the Western media follows so faithfully, supposedly democratic societies - the line of the governments. But the alternative media is there, it's not easy to control it. It brings the real facts, the truth,

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and I think a lot of people have today alternative ways of getting the news and do not have to rely only on mainstream media. And the result is the hundreds and thousands and millions of people demonstrating on the streets. I would put it this way, with this I would end. There is a huge gap between what most people, and that includes the West, and by the way that includes even the Jewish community in the United States... There's a huge gap between what these societies think should be the government's policies towards Palestine and Israel, and the policies themselves. There's a huge gap. If there were a genuine democratic vote among people in the United States, in Britain, in France, even in Germany, on what should be the policy towards Israel and Palestine, it would be a demand for a very different policy from the one the governments are pursuing at this very moment. Definitely there would be a demand from the government to demand right now a cease-fire before everything else. To stop the killing. So, it's quite incredible that when it comes to Palestine, a liberal open-minded press behaves in a very different way. We used to call it people who are PEOPs - they are Progressive Except On Palestine. And this lack of progressiveness on Palestine is one of the reasons Israel still has the international immunity for its impunity on the ground. But I'm an optimist. And I do believe that these things will change in the future, hopefully. Thank you very much. It was a great pleasure to spend the afternoon with you. Thank you.

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