

Israel/Palestine: Roadblocks to negotiation

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Abstract

The article outlines aspects of psychoanalytic and group analytic thinking about conflict between large groups in relation to the tragic and violent Israel/Palestine impasse and to large-group dynamics involving Western onlookers, including the writer. As a Western observer, I declare my bias by describing the origin of my interest in the situation in Israel. Aspects of Palestinian and Israeli political culture that block the path to peace are discussed.

KEYWORDS

conflict, Israel, large group, matrix, negotiation, Palestine

1 | MY BIAS AND “OBSERVER” MATRIX

I am a secular Jewish psychotherapist living in New Zealand, born in England. As a youth in the 1960s I lived and worked for some years as a ploughman in a Kibbutz, and later served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Nahal Brigade. Over the years I have followed the bitter and intractable conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, and would like to see a peaceful resolution that respects the human rights of both Jews and Arabs.

Two peer reviewers of an early version of this paper differed about whether it merited publication. One reviewer considered that, although the paper did not address international political influences on the conflict and neglected to question why Hamas adopted an essentialist anti-Israel posture, it would serve as a starting point for discussion; this reviewer also commented that the psychoanalytic and group analytic thinking was blended well with the personal. The other reviewer thought that the paper, although well written, reasonably balanced, and nonpartisan, was psychologically naïve and pretentious, and would not contribute to *PPI*.

Initially, I wanted to scrap the paper. Later I came to think that the complexity of the topic, the passionate and conflicting sensitivities involved, as well as the wide and conflicting range of extant discourses, might defeat any writer who presumed to offer a comprehensive and definitive understanding of the conflict. I will not attempt to do this. I will also refrain from offering original psychological or group analytic insight, as this is beyond my ability and possibly irrelevant, given that the situation in Israel/Palestine changes daily and the conflict is over a century old. President Trump's recent pronouncement on the status of Jerusalem has proved incendiary, and conciliatory diplomacy seems everywhere absent. In this paper, I intend to review thinking from various disciplines about the conflict in the hope that those interested will join a conversation; I acknowledge my naïvety and hope to learn from concerned others.

2 | PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS HAVE CONFLICTING CLAIMS TO THE LAND

The Israeli novelist and professor of literature, Amos Oz, in his essay “How to Cure a Fanatic” (2012) noted that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is not a struggle between good and evil, but rather a “clash between one very powerful, deep and convincing claim and another very different but no less convincing, no less powerful, no less humane claim” (pp. 4–5). Oz, born in Israel to parents who had immigrated to mandatory Palestine from Poland and Lithuania, acknowledges that the Palestinians are in Palestine because it is their only homeland; and notes that “the Israeli Jews are in Israel because there is no other country in the world which the Jews, as a people, as a nation, could ever call home” (2012, p. 4). Like Oz, I am not religious so do not appeal to the Bible for justification of the presence of Jews in Israel, but I do resonate with the Jewish history of dispossession from the historical Israel, exile, and persecution; and I recognise the rights of both sides in the present conflict. I believe peace can come only from respectful negotiation, and not by continuing the current Israeli Jewish military domination, and ongoing violent resistance by the less powerful Palestinian Arabs. I outline below some (not all) of the factors preventing dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

3 | ISRAELI BLINDNESS TO PALESTINIAN SUFFERING

I suggest that, in present-day Israel, “society” shows itself in many individuals as a blindness to the brutal oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli army and bureaucracy. According to Kemp (2011) this not-seeing is a necessary defence against a guilt that Israelis would experience as crippling if they were to consciously acknowledge that they (or their government on their behalf) are responsible for the ongoing persecution of human beings like themselves. Many Israelis angrily dismiss those who criticise the occupation as traitors, self-hating Jews. Refusal of responsibility is striking in the Jewish culture, which was an early pioneer of “civil society,” defined by the historian Robert Landes (2016) as a culture that systematically substitutes a discourse of fairness for violence in dispute settlement. Landes commented that the self-criticism required for this kind of fairness has its roots in the empathic imperative of the Torah: Rabbi Hillel (110 BCE–10 CE) famously articulated it: “what is hateful to you, do not do unto others” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath, 31a): neither Israelis nor Palestinians (en masse) seem able to relate to one another in accord with Hillel’s dictum.

Israeli group analyst Hanni Biran (2014) described a severe split in Israeli society, a “culture of verbal violence and brutal attacks on anybody who expresses a moderate opinion about Palestinians” (p. 35), and offered the hypothesis that there is no leadership inside Israel that believes in peace and that rejects the violence inside Israeli society. She believes that both societies suffer a deep-rooted thinking disturbance. Biran earlier commented (2003) that “[Both] Israelis and Palestinians are currently experiencing a traumatic reality, saturated with violence” (p. 490), and asserted that, because of this ongoing state of terror and annihilation anxiety, both societies are in a fragile and unstable mental state. Biran invoked the thinking of Wilfred Bion to understand this. Although Bion was referring to individual psychology, Biran argued that his ideas can be applied to societal groups. Bion posited alpha type elements of thinking, which can be thought about and known, and beta elements, which are unthought but acted out: in this case in terror, violence, oppression, or revenge. This creates “a pathological reality where learning from experience (Bion, 1962) is prevented” (Biran, 2014, p. 492). Instead of the mutual recognition of another that would enable dialogue, a search for companionship and a willingness to make concessions (alpha function thinking), Israeli Jews (and arguably, Palestinians) live in a reality dominated by beta elements: terror, violence, oppression, and revenge are acted out. As the mother translates for the baby, the leadership must execute a successful translation from beta to alpha for the people. Jews registered a threat of complete annihilation in the Nazi Holocaust in the 1940s and, in the present, from fear of rockets fired at civilian centres, attack tunnels from Gaza, suicide bombers, and stabbing and shooting attacks. In a psychic atmosphere of ancestral and present fear, there are enormous obstacles to dialogue. Perhaps

this fear-laden atmosphere goes some way to explaining why Israelis continue to elect politicians who favour continued military domination of Palestinians rather than the negotiations and the painful concessions that dialogue might require.

4 | ISRAELI LEADERSHIP INHABITS A “SOLDIER’S MATRIX”

Israeli group analyst, Robi Friedman (2015) suggested that societies experiencing existential threat may develop a “soldier matrix” which influences not only soldiers, but all members of a society affected by conflict. When a soldier’s matrix appears, group members are influenced by schizoid-paranoid processes, and “murderous violence is not only legitimised, it also arouses collective unconscious strong defences against feelings of guilt, shame or empathy for the enemy’s suffering” (p. 243). Friedman went on to cite Voltaire (1694–1778) who said, “it is forbidden to kill; therefore murderers are punished, unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets!” (p. 244). Friedman also said that in Israel empathy for the Palestinians was not “politically correct,” because they had repeatedly attacked Israeli cities with rockets or suicide bombers and stabbing attacks; and there was a denial of shame and guilt about the army’s wrongdoing. It is as if all members of the society share the mindset of soldiers on combat duty.

Although the soldier’s matrix determines the thinking of every member of a society, it is not monolithic and does not preclude disagreement: Friedman (2015) believed that an “anti-soldier matrix” can also develop. In Israel this appears in human rights organisations (such as B’Tselem, Peace Now, Human Rights Watch, Rabbis for Human Rights, Breaking the Silence), the left-wing press (Haaretz), as well as academics, judges, and literary figures. As an example of how a society may emerge from a soldier’s matrix situation, Friedman cited the example of Germany between 1945 and 1965. After the war, Friedman believed, thinking was still determined by the matrix of the returned soldiers and the societal lived reality of the war. Society continued to deny shame and guilt. During the 1960s young Germans began the process of de-identifying with the soldier matrix, and the development of empathy for victims of World War II could begin; Friedman described this as “an enormous psychic achievement” (p. 253) which brought about an ability to mourn that which was lost and can never return, as well as the movement toward dialogue. An important factor in the ability of Germans to mourn was that they were safe, unafraid, and free of existential threat.

An example of Friedman’s “soldier matrix” in action might be the public debate in Israel around the killing in March 2016 of the Palestinian Abdel Fattah al-Sharif, one of two men who stabbed an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint. Israeli soldiers shot and killed one attacker, and wounded Sharif, aged 21. Some minutes later as Sharif was lying helpless on the ground, Sergeant Elor Azaria, aged 19, arrived on the scene, loaded his rifle and killed him. Azaria was arrested and put on trial for murder, and found guilty of manslaughter in January 2017. Before the verdict the killer became a hero, lauded as “everyone’s son” (Ravid, 2017). His parents received supportive telephone calls from the Prime Minister who, together with the ministers of the interior and of culture, stated he would apply for a pardon for Azaria before the verdict was announced. The military judge and the IDF chief of staff received death threats, presumably for upholding normal morality and the rule of law. In Haaretz (a left-leaning Israeli newspaper) Barak Ravid (2017) commented

Norms are being inverted one after the other: A person convicted of manslaughter is a hero; the chief of staff of the occupation army is a teacher of morality; cabinet ministers are subverting the justice system and the military. And the opposition is nonexistent.

This seems to reveal Israeli society in crisis, where fear of Arab aggression rules out any conciliatory conversation with the Palestinians; it appears that the current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is committed to supporting the occupation and the settlements, which present the Palestinians as enemies who oppose the Jewish return to the homeland and prevent any possibility of peaceful compromise. A messianic group of Jewish settlers *Gush Emunim* (bloc of the faithful) view the return of the “biblical lands” in 1967 as supportive of their religious separatist worldview and nationalistic agenda, which encourages settling and annexation of the occupied Palestinian

territories. This group attracts support from other groups of ultraorthodox Jews and right-wing political parties, creating a strong political coalition not inclined to seek peace and equality with the Palestinians, and recognition of them as negotiating partners.

5 | PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP'S IRREDENTISM AND REFUSAL TO ACCEPT ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE

Irredentism is defined as a popular or political movement intended to reclaim or reoccupy a lost area. Gaza is in 2017 governed by Hamas, which views Jews as diabolical and deserving of slaughter. In the "Hamas Charter" (online) "World Zionism" is cast as controlling all the puppet governments of the world and responsible for every war throughout history. To quote some representative passages from a Hamas leaflet (cited by Landes, 2016): "The Jews stood behind the French and the Communist revolutions," "the Jews stood behind World War II where they collected immense benefits from trading war materials," "the Jews inspired the establishment of the United Nations and the Security Council in order to rule the world by their intermediary," "there was no war that broke out anywhere without their fingerprints on it." These allegations are laid out in the (notoriously fraudulent) "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which is quoted in the Hamas Charter (Article 32) and is popular throughout the Arab world. The charter also quotes the words of the prophet Muhammad:

the hour of judgement shall not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them, so that the Jews hide behind trees and stones, and each tree and stone will say: 'oh Muslim, oh servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him'. (Hamas Charter, 7, cited in Landes, 2016)

Clearly the present Palestinian leadership is unwilling to enter dialogue or negotiation, and in this toxic atmosphere Palestinian mothers of "successful" suicide bombers claim that they do not mourn the deaths of their children, who have died killing the children of the satanic Zionist enemy (Landes, 2016). I feel skeptical of this claim; I would speculate that bereaved parents defend against grief by intensifying their hatred of the Israeli enemy.

To understand something of the mental world of suicide bombers, Biran (2003) cited Earl Hopper (2003) who defined such extreme social processes as:

massification, being a part of a mass and losing personal identity. Massification is a defense against the fear of annihilation. The terror organization supplies its members with a narcissistic value. They deny being mere mortals. Their death is not experienced as a loss, but as an ideological mission, which will bring redemption. (p. 497)

Biran (2003) believed that the suicide bomber before an attack "loses himself or herself to the point of losing contact with his own body" (p. 497), his own individuality is totally erased and so is the individuality of the victims; the bomber experiences "an acute and ecstatic fusion with the ideology" (p. 497). Biran is describing two societies in the grip of redemption fantasies and delusions of unilateral and omnipotent solutions, where the enemy is to be annihilated. The solution, she believes, might be found by a working group of people from both sides, able to transcend their paranoia and imagined omnipotence (p. 498).

At risk of giving offense in a culturally sensitive area, I suggest that some aspects of Arab and Israeli political culture make peace difficult to achieve: here I discuss the Arab side of the equation. Western liberal thinkers often assume that people belonging to other cultures, and specifically Arabs, must be treated as being similar and equal to Westerners, and equally motivated by notions of fairness, reciprocity, and universalism. The publication by Edward Said, Palestinian by ethnicity but domiciled in the United States, of *Orientalism* (1978), shaped Western discussion of the Arab world. Said noted Western commentators' Eurocentric prejudice in crude, essentialised caricatures of the Arab world, in the service of a racist colonial domination of subject "others" by a culturally superior West. Said was an articulate and very visible advocate of the Palestinian cause; the wholesale adoption of his postcolonial and anti-

imperialist viewpoint by Western intelligentsia ruled out of bounds any criticism of Arab culture in the name of respect for the other and individual freedom. In Said's view Israelis are another example of Western imperialism that does to the Palestinians what the French did to the Algerians and the English to the Indians: the Israelis are seen as colonial oppressors. Terrorism, especially suicide terrorism, is seen as a "tactic" against "the occupation," (ignoring the terrorism that is endemic throughout the Islamic world).

Postcolonial political correctness as formulated by Edward Said and his admirers rules out discussion of the stated goal of triumphalist Jihadi Muslims, to impose "Dar al Islam" (the house of Islam) on non-Muslim countries, the "Dar al harb" (the house of the sword, or war). Postcolonialists refrain from mentioning the dictum that no land that has been ruled by Islam, such as Israel, may be ruled by non-Muslims, and it is the duty of Muslims to engage in holy war to reconquer it. However, this idea is deeply embedded in the thinking of fundamentalist groups, specifically Hamas, which was democratically elected in Gaza in 2006, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the PLO, which rules in the occupied West Bank. An illustration of this attitude is the behaviour of the late Yasser Arafat, chairman of the PLO until his death in 2004, leader of the Fatah party, and a renowned Palestinian freedom fighter. In 1994 Arafat received the Nobel peace prize for his negotiations with Israel that resulted in the 1993 Oslo Accords, but was denounced by Islamists and political rivals for accepting UN resolution 242, which acknowledges Israel's right to exist, rather than insisting on the term "the Zionist entity" which denies the existence of the Jewish state and which Arafat had previously used. In 1994 Arafat spoke in a mosque in Johannesburg and explained the Oslo accords in this way:

This agreement, I am not considering it more than the agreement which had been signed between our Prophet Muhammad and Quraish, and you remember the Caliph Omar had refused this agreement and considered it "Sulha Dania" [a despicable truce]. But Muhammad had accepted it and we are accepting now this [Oslo] peace accord. (Palestinian Media Watch, n.d.)

In other words, Arafat compared the Oslo Accords with the "despicable" Hudaibiyyah peace treaty—a 10-year truce agreed between Islam's Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the Quraish Tribe of Mecca. However, two years later Muhammad attacked and conquered Mecca. He had signed the treaty from a position of weakness in order to conquer later from strength. Here Arafat clearly implies the Palestinians will do the same regarding Israel, Nobel peace prize notwithstanding. On the Israeli side, the success of peace negotiations was compromised by many factors, including the intransigence and reluctance to compromise of successive Israeli Prime Ministers, and, it is sometimes claimed, their lack of social skills—for a full account of the failed Palestinian-Israeli peace process 1993 to 2011, see Cohen-Almagor (2012).

6 | LARGE GROUP DYNAMICS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Vamik Volkan, a Turkish-Cypriot psychoanalyst, provides useful conceptual tools for understanding large groups in conflict. Volkan (2004) observed:

Political, economic, legal, military and historical factors usually figure prominently in any attempt to manage and solve large group conflicts, but it is also necessary to consider the profound effect of human psychology, especially large group processes that evolve under stress or after massive trauma, and are manipulated by leaders. (p. 262)

To summarise some of Volkan's ideas, the term "large group" refers to tens or hundreds of thousands, if not millions of individuals, most of whom will never meet during their lifetimes. Paraphrasing Erik Erikson's (1968) statement about personal identity, Volkan used the term "large-group identity" to refer to a large group (ethnic, religious, national or ideological) that shares a permanent sense of sameness while also sharing certain similar characteristics with other large groups.

As part of the process of normal childhood development, Volkan, Ast, and Greer (2002) believe we receive “deposited representations” (p. 36) of what it means to be part of our large group, ideas of ethnicity, religion, and minor differences from members of other groups, and we need “suitable targets for externalization” (p. 36), others who receive our projections of psychic contents we consider undesirable in ourselves and our group, including “bad” aggressive and hostile impulses that we need to disavow. This construction of large group identity is maintained by what Volkan et al. refer to metaphorically as the community’s large group tent, a container that provides safety and cohesion, defines values, and differentiates us from other groups.

This large group identity becomes part of our individual core self-identity, and damage to the tent is experienced as a threat causing profound anxiety and terror, giving rise to attempts to repair the damage. In this situation the group may regress, with members losing individuality and rallying blindly around a leader. There may be severe splitting, massive shared introjections and projections, magical thinking and blurring of reality, and reactivation of what Volkan called “chosen traumas” and “chosen glories”:

A chosen trauma is the shared mental representation of an event in the large group's history in which the group suffered a catastrophic loss, humiliation and helplessness at the hand of enemies. When members of the victim group are unable to mourn such losses and reverse their humiliation and helplessness, they pass on to their offspring the images of their injured selves and the psychological tasks that need to be completed. This process is known as the “transgenerational transmission of trauma.” (2001, p. 4)

A leader may reactivate chosen traumas in order to manipulate the group: Volkan (2001) gave the example of Slobodan Milosevic who, with the help of some Serbian academics and Church people used the mental representation of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the death of the Serbian leader Prince Lazar at the hands of Turkish Muslims, in order to incite violent “revenge” against Muslim Bosnians in the present. This was an example of “time collapse,” in which a past trauma was experienced as if it were happening in the present. In that regressed large group situation, Volkan (1985) averred, there was a splitting between “us” and “them” which appeared to justify dehumanisation of the “others” and extreme cruelty towards them—a shared sense of victimization followed by a shared sense of entitlement to revenge.

Volkan (2001) believed that the Holocaust, because it was relatively recent, was a “hot trauma” on the way to becoming a “chosen trauma.” However, the Holocaust is central to the identity of Israelis, young or old. Regarding Israelis’ shame-based denial of victimhood evident in the oath “Masada shall never fall again,” according to Israeli historian and journalist Tom Segev:

There was a big silence surrounding the Holocaust and that has changed over the years. I think it is a growing-up process that led Israelis to become able to identify with the victims. That was a very difficult thing for us to do. Very early on in our history, when we had this heroic self-image we actually felt ashamed of the Holocaust. We no longer do. The Holocaust is very much part of all of us. (Plett, 2005, para. 6)

Segev experienced Israelis collectively acknowledging the Holocaust, no longer needing to deny their victimhood. This may indicate a progression in the processing of beta elements into alpha elements that can be thought rather than acted out. Perhaps the Shoah or Holocaust has moved closer to becoming a “chosen trauma” in Volkan’s sense of the term; but the case could be made that the history of the Jews can be viewed as a very long series of exiles (Babylonian captivity, 1446 BCE; Egyptian exodus, 597 BCE), hostility, pogroms and mass murders, the Holocaust, and that these delimit the Jewish cultural matrix in complex ways, (perhaps analogous to the way people of British ancestry may identify emotionally with Vikings or Celts).

Uri Hadar (2011) poignantly connected a number of the unconscious dynamic underpinnings of a Jewish sense of victimhood with the paradigmatic biblical story of Abraham and the binding of Isaac, and the sacrificial lamb. Hadar believed that, in the Israeli unconscious, the Palestinians occupy the position of sacrificial victim, who has no voice and no subjectivity. The “Holocaust,” understood in its literal meaning of a sacrifice that is completely consumed in flames, is invoked as a recurring theme with the Jews sacrificed “by the nations on the altar of ethnic power” (Hadar,

2011, p. 20). But in Israel, Hadar believed, the Jews have changed positions: they are no longer the victims, that role is occupied by the Palestinians. The Koran also has this story of Ibrahim and Isaac (or possibly Ishmael) and a sacrifice, so it would not be surprising if Palestinians too carried a sense of sacrifice and victimhood, reinforced by the enormous power differential between them and the Israeli Jews. Hadar honoured both Israelis and Palestinians who, like him, are able to break free of the unconscious dynamisms that reinforce the victim/oppressor binary, and to accept the subjectivity and selfhood of the “other.”

It seems that in both populations some people have taken tentative steps towards creating what Arab intellectuals Sheehi and Sheehi (2016) called psychological “third spaces,” where (using Martin Buber’s’s, 1923 terminology) they could relate to one another as “I–you,” rather than as “I–it” or in other words recognise one another’s subjectivity. Sheehi and Sheehi (2016) said that, while Palestinian identity does, of course, exist outside the matrix of Palestine–Israel, within the context of “the political and psychosocial realities of Palestine–Israel and occupation (it) is fundamentally disadvantaged by its subjugation into a structural position of “it,” not I–you” (p. 97). In this context, political acts of violence become comprehensible as one of the few available means of expression.

Relations between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis are presently predicated firstly on the Palestinian Naqba of 1948. “Naqba” is the Arabic for catastrophe, and it is the term used by Palestinians to refer to their expulsion from ancestral lands during the war that followed the Israeli declaration of independence, when the nascent state was attacked by the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Other factors are the cruel Israeli Occupation, and the dominance within Gaza and the West Bank of the professedly anti-Zionist PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) and Hamas. Within Israel the nationalistic and belligerent government of Benjamin Netanyahu seems more concerned with expanding Jewish settlement in Gaza and the West Bank than with working for peace. Dominant discourses in Palestine and Israel are pessimistic about the possibility of dialogue and coexistence. However, Sheehi (2004) notes that in the Islamic world Christian and Jewish Arab intellectuals in the past contributed to cultural life and the introduction of humanistic values: it is to be hoped that one day such harmony will return. It is my belief that this can only happen when the Israeli occupation is ended, when Palestinians are given full civil rights and a Palestinian state, and when neither side fears violence.

7 | DIALOGUE AND PEACE-BUILDING ACTIVISTS

I have described examples of hatred, fear, and paranoia in both Israeli and Palestinian ethnic groups, but on both “sides” of the split there are those who understand that Israelis and Palestinians are interdependent, those who are somehow able to transcend the matrix or conditioning of their own group and achieve what psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin (2004) called “recognition” of the otherness of the other. Biran (2003) cited the late Eyad El-Sarraj, a Palestinian psychiatrist, head of mental health services in Gaza, who worked with Benjamin on Palestine/Israel dialogue in “The Acknowledgement Project.” This peace-building work continues in an informative and nonpartisan pedagogical website (<http://www.movingbeyondviolence.org>). El-Sarraj blamed Palestinian political and religious leaders for lacking vision and trapping the Palestinians in a culture of violence, while also excoriating Israelis for their continued occupation and ill treatment of the Palestinians. Among his many other distinctions, he was jailed by both Israel and Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian authority; apparently, refusing to adopt an essentialist position “we are good, they are bad” made El-Sarraj unpopular with both sides of the conflict.

Hundreds of male and female veteran soldiers of the Israel Defence Forces have provided written testimony that sheds light on Israel’s brutal operational methods in the territories and encourages debate about the true nature of the Occupation. The publication of the testimonies in a book entitled *Our Harsh Logic* (Manekin, Sharon, Israeli, Naaman, & Spectre, 2012) led to the formation of the organisation “Breaking the Silence” (www.breakingthesilence.org.il). The testimonies show that, although the military and government bodies refer to “four components of Israeli policy: prevention of terrorism, prevention of hostile terrorist activity, separation, and enforcing the law in the territories” (p. 2) the actions that these soldiers in fact carried out demonstrated that the words of the often-quoted policies

were coded references to conceal de facto intimidation, abuse of Palestinians at checkpoints, confiscating property, imposing collective punishment, changing and obstructing access to free movement, dispossession and annexation of land, and arbitrary and punitive bureaucratic harassment. It seems these soldiers were moved by moral considerations and responded to the Palestinians as human beings rather than, to use postcolonial anti-imperialist jargon, "subaltern populations," less-than-us "others" whom they had a right to dominate. Sadly, many in Israel brand these soldiers as traitors, disregarding Hillel's injunction (above) "what is hateful to you, do not do unto others." According to Hani Biran (2003) fear for the survival of one's own group overrides moral considerations, for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Many Palestinian and Israeli activists are engaged in dialogue in a number of different forums. A member of the Bereaved Families Forum, Palestinian Ali Abu Awwad, a convicted "terrorist" spent four years in an Israeli prison for resistance activities. He said this:

I saw Israeli people crying in our home. I haven't seen the tears of Israelis before. I saw the checkpoints, I saw bullets, I saw many things, but I didn't see the pain or suffering of the other side. My mother started talking and she also cried. At the end all the people had tears in their eyes. (cited by Kleinot, 2011, p. 105)

An Israeli, Rami Alhanan, whose grandparents were killed in Auschwitz, and whose 14-year-old daughter was killed by a suicide bomber said this:

I never saw many Arabs in my life. I remember seeing an old Arab lady in a long black dress with a picture of a six-year-old kid on her chest. I went crazy. I can't explain what happened but I know this: from that moment on I have devoted my life to go from person-to-person, anyway, anyway, everywhere, to convey a very basic and simple truth: we are not doomed. It is not our destiny to keep on dying here forever in this holy land. We can change it. We can break once and for all this endless cycle of violence. If the two sides dig into their sins, they have both earned the right to sit on the bench of war criminals in The Hague. (Kleinot, 2011, p. 106)

These forum members have been able to transcend their own cultural matrix or soldier matrix after traumatic losses of loved ones, but many Israelis and Palestinians have been able to come to the realisation of the necessity for dialogue and coexistence in other ways. It would be interesting to research the factors that predispose individuals to make this emotional and intellectual leap.

Cynics point to the fact that dialogue has been happening for many years without bringing peace. One of those who retains faith in the possibility of building peace through dialogue is Fadi Rabieh, who writes in the online *Palestine-Israel Journal*. Rabieh believes that Palestinians do not appreciate the collective fear experienced by Jews; and Jews fail to understand the Palestinians' sense of loss and pain as a result of the Naqba. Both sides, he believes, are stuck in a narrative of victimhood and righteousness that dehumanises the other: "We are the good people, they are the bad ones; we seek peace, they seek war; we are the victims and only defend ourselves against their aggression; we stand alone and the entire world supports them" (2013, p. 1).

Rabieh said that even in the absence of a political framework for dialogue it is essential for both sides to persist in efforts to make personal contact with the other, even when violent events (such as the Israeli 2008 Operation Cast Lead invasion of Gaza in response to rocket attacks from Gaza on Israeli civilians) bring a halt to any communication.

8 | CONCLUSION AND CALL FOR ACTION

This article is a brief and incomplete survey of some of the psychological and political factors preventing constructive peace building action between Palestinians and Israelis. It does not examine the wide historical and international

political dimensions of the conflict that date from the nineteenth century and earlier. Nor does it consider that the state of Israel is predicated on the basis of the Jewish religion, nor that the proposed state of Palestine is to be Islamic.

I believe that further use of force by either side is useless and destructive, and that ending the Israeli occupation without preconditions is the single event most likely to contribute to peace-building dialogue in the region. I wish both Israelis and Palestinians of good will success in overcoming the formidable obstacles to dialogue that this article has discussed.

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