



# Ethnopolitics

Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics

ISSN: 1744-9057 (Print) 1744-9065 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/reno20>

## A Common State in Israel–Palestine: Historical Origins and Lingering Challenges

Leila Farsakh

To cite this article: Leila Farsakh (2016) A Common State in Israel–Palestine: Historical Origins and Lingering Challenges, *Ethnopolitics*, 15:4, 380-392, DOI: [10.1080/17449057.2016.1210348](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2016.1210348)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2016.1210348>



Published online: 16 Aug 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 174



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=reno20>

# A Common State in Israel–Palestine: Historical Origins and Lingering Challenges

LEILA FARSAKH

University of Massachusetts, USA

**ABSTRACT** This paper investigates Palestinian and Zionist understanding of a common state in Palestine by examining two central historical texts that promoted a one state solution in Palestine. It explores the ways in which Palestinian and Zionist nationalisms tried to address the relationship between the state and the nation as well as offered ways to protect collective and individual rights in a single polity. It also examines how each side viewed the identity and needs of the other party, in order to understand how each party thought it (im)possible to accommodate them into a single polity. The paper shows that the Palestinians, while trying to come to terms with the Jewish presence in Palestine after 1970, have often failed to appreciate the complexity of Jewish national identity in a single polity. They accepted the two states solution as an attempt to reconcile with Jewish Nationalism only to find that their political rights were further eroded. The Zionists, on the other hand, has often justified the one state solution from a purely introspective dimension, namely with regards to its congruence with Jewish needs and notions of justice. Although they tried to take into consideration Palestinians claims, they maintained an orientalist tone in their approach to Palestinian claims and options. Moving forward a discourse of rights needs to supersede a reified understanding of self-determination and provide a new political formula that can protect the collective and individual rights of all those living on the land.

## Introduction

The latest elections in Israel in March 2015 seem to have put the final nail in the coffin of the two-state solution. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's declaration that there will be no Palestinian state during his term provided the latest declarative confirmation of Israel's physical, economic, political domination of the whole land of historic Palestine. Facts on the ground reveal that 23 years of the Oslo peace process have not paved the way for sovereign separation, but rather institutionalized a new apartheid reality marked by bypass roads, over 520,000 settlers in the West Bank, a separation barrier of 708 km—62% of which has been built—and a dire ten years of Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip (Pappe 2015; Davis, 2003; Farsakh, 2005; Farsakh, 2012). The continuous impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiation have led a growing number of activists, academics

---

*Correspondence Address:* Leila Farsakh, University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA, USA. Email: [leila.farsakh@umb.edu](mailto:leila.farsakh@umb.edu)

and politicians to call for the revival of a one state solution in Palestine, one that can provide equal political rights to Palestinians and Israelis (Abunimeh, 2006; Benvenisti, 2007; Faris, 2013; Farsakh, 2011, Makdisi, 2007; Tilley, 2005).

The content, contour and feasibility of an alternative to partition, though, is far from detailed or explained. As O’Leary’s piece in this volume argues, the difficulty of implementing a common state in Israel–Palestine might be as challenging, if not more, than trying to implement a two-state solution. Yet, as he argues, no solution can work if it is not also perceived to be just, however convoluted such a term can be. Power-sharing between Israeli and Palestinians is going to be necessary if we are to move forward, whether in a consociational or a two-state solution formula. The real challenge remains in how to get both parties to share and work together, given the power imbalances between the two national groups, and I would add, the continuing Israeli colonial reality on the ground (Farsakh, 2016).

My paper seeks to investigate historical Palestinian and Zionist understanding of a common state in Palestine. It focuses on two main historical documents that have been considered foundational to each party’s understanding of the One State solution. The first is Ihud’s *Palestine: A Bi-national state*, written by Martin Buber, Judas Magnus, and Moses Smilansky in 1946 and re-discussed in various articles in *Towards union in Palestine, essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab cooperation* published by Ihud in 1947. It represents Ihud’s explanation and defence of a bi-national state in Palestine. The second document is Fatah’s publication *Towards a democratic state in Palestine For Muslims, Christians and Jews*, published in 1970, which formed the basis of the Palestinian National Council’s declaration in 1971 of the Democratic State as the aim of the Palestinian revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this paper is to review how each of these documents rationalized the idea of a one state in Palestine and made the case for power-sharing, if at all. It investigates how far O’Leary’s concept of a common state applies to these two documents, a concept he did not clearly define, but by which I understand an attempt to bridge the gap between statehood and competing nationalisms, to protect collective and individual political right in a single territory and political configuration. In this regard, the paper focuses on how Palestinian and Zionist nationalisms tried to address the relationship between the state and the nation. It traces how each party viewed their respective national projects and the place of the ‘other’ within them. It also examines how each side views the identity and needs of the other party, in order to understand how each party thought it (im)possible to accommodate them into a single polity.

The paper shows that the Palestinians, while trying to come to terms with the Jewish presence in Palestine after 1970, often failed to appreciate the complexity of Jewish identity and voided it of any legitimate national dimension. The Zionist side, on the other hand, has often justified the one state solution from a purely introspective dimension, namely with regards to its congruence with Jewish needs and notions of justice. Although they tried to take into consideration Palestinians claims, they maintained an orientalist tone in their approach toward the ‘other’.

To do justice to these documents, however, it is important to note that they were written at a specific historical moment that its authors, interestingly enough, considered revolutionary. The Ihud document was written after the end of the Second World War and the Holocaust as well as at a time of major decolonization struggles in the Middle East and Third World. The Fatah document was published at the height of the Palestinian

revolution, with Fatah and leftist parties at its command as Third World liberation struggles garnering worldwide support. Moreover, these documents were largely written for an internal audience, to one's own national group, in order to convince them of the merit of their proposals, as well as for an international audience, who were considered key arbitrators, if not actors, in the conflict.

### **Historical Origins**

The one state idea as a solution to two people fighting over the same land is not new. It has been proposed both by Jewish Zionists as well as Palestinians, and was not unknown to the international community, this central third actor in this Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Its appeal stems from its promise to protect citizen rights over chauvinist national claims, to guarantee equal rights to all those wishing to live in Palestine, be they Jewish or Muslim, immigrant or native. Its problem has always been how to reconcile individual rights with national rights.

The genesis of the one state solution can be traced back to the British Mandate, specifically to the period between 1922 and 1928, when the colonial power treated the newly demarcated state of Palestine as a single political and administrative unit. Great Britain, while incorporating the Balfour declaration in its mandate, drafted a constitution for Palestine in 1922 that sought to include the different communities in one single polity. It created a single administrative unit, recognized Arabic, Hebrew and English as official languages, and provided for the creation of a legislative body that would consult with the High Commissioner, who held executive power of this new modern state. This legislative body was to represent the whole population and be the parliament of the single state. It was to be composed of 23 members, 12 of whom would be elected from the population in proportion to the size of the respective communities (8 Muslims, 2 Christians and 2 Jews) with the other 11 chosen by the High Commissioner (Smith, 2010, p. 110). The Zionist leaders gave this idea a lukewarm reception but, according to Ilan Pappé, they were not really interested in it, since they sought separation from, not integration with, the Arab population of Palestine (2008, pp. 151–164). The main Arab leadership opposed the plan mainly because of its opposition to the mandate and the Balfour Declaration, but by 1928 many leading Palestinian notables came round to it. The Nashashibi faction privately favoured it from the start and by 1928 the Arab Executive under Kazem al Husseini was also willing to endorse it. Both Palestinian factions began talks with the High Commissioner over the proposed legislative council in January 1929. However, the August Western Wall riots of 1929 made Britain abandon the idea of a single polity in Palestine and, from then on, they supported the creation of separate political institutions for the Zionists and the Palestinians (Smith, 2010, p. 110).

### **Zionist Rationale for a Bi-national State**

Among the Jewish Zionist community, the most vocal supporters of a One State solution in Palestine were members of Brit Shalom, formed in 1925 and of Ihud created in 1942. The latter included Jewish intellectuals such as Martin Buber and Judah Magnus, the first Chancellor of Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as businessmen such Moses Smilansky among others.<sup>2</sup> They sought to influence the main Zionist leadership with their ideas as well as reach out to Arab notables to convince them to join they plan for a bi-

national state in Palestine. Ihud's members tended to view Zionism as a quest for a spiritual and cultural Jewish redemption, one that required the creation of a nation but not necessarily that of a separate Jewish state. Magnus argued that the Jewish people does not 'need a Jewish state to maintain its very existence' and that the Jewish nation did not need to be conceptualized or guaranteed in territorial or sovereign terms (1930, p. 15).

Ihud's document, entitled *Palestine: A Bi-national state*, written by Martin Buber, Judas Magnus and Moses Smilansky in 1946, presents the clearest Zionist position in favour of the One State solution in Palestine, one that it clearly defines as a bi-national state. It is Zionist insofar as its writers define themselves as such; people committed to the right of the Jews to return to Palestine and establish a home there, maintaining that Jews formed a national, not simply religious, entity. As Martin Buber put it: 'Jewish settlement in Palestine was embarked upon in order to enable the Jewish people to survive as a national entity and which in its social economic and cultural aspects, constitutes an enterprise of universal significance' (Buber, 1947, p. 7). He was aware, though, a Jewish home in Palestine could not be successful without addressing what he defined as the 'Arab question', namely the presence of Arabs living in Palestine. 'This problem consists', he argued,

in the relation between Jewish settlement in Palestine and Arab life, of as it may be termed, the intra-national basis of Jewish settlement . . . one which starts out from the concrete relationships between neighbouring and inter-dependent nations, when considering the given economic and political facts. (Buber, 1947, p. 7)

The Ihud document was presented to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1946, which was commissioned to visit the Holy Land and recommend a political solution to competing Palestinian and Zionist nationalist demands in the wake of the Jewish refugee crisis at the end of the Holocaust and the quest of over 100,000 Jewish refugees to enter Palestine in 1946. Buber, Magnes, and Smilansky sought to make the case for 'the union of Jews and Arabs in a bi-national Palestine based on parity of the two peoples; and for the union of the bi-national Palestine with neighbouring countries' (1946, p. 7). They define the bi-national country as one in which

the two nations have equal freedom and independence, equal participation in government and equality of representation and one people shall not be stronger than the other . . . they must make the country into *a country of nationalities*. This is altogether *different from a nationalist country*. (Buber, Magnes, and Smilansky, 1946, pp. 8–9, italics added)

The Ihud document thus emphasizes three notions that are central to the rationale for a bi-national state in Palestine. The first is the notion of equality. This applies to equality in basic rights, such as freedom, as well as political rights, such as representation and governance. The authors also acknowledge the 'natural rights of the Arabs in Palestine', by virtue of having been the country's inhabitants and 'tilled its soil', which they juxtapose with the '*historical rights of Jews in Palestine (italic added)*'. They thus equate two kinds of entitlements, both related to the land, but one created through labour and actual presence, and the other through a historical connection, which has often been defined as mythical, albeit meaningful (Gans, 2008, p. 7).

We regard the historical rights of the Jews and the natural rights of the Arabs as, under all the circumstances, of equal validity, and it is the task of statesmanship to find ways of adjustment between these contending claims. Neither people can get in Palestine all its wants, and both people will have to make concessions. (Buber, Magnes, and Smilansky, 1946, p. 11)

There is some equality of claims made here, one that has more to do with comparability than sameness; it seems more like an equality of concession, of what each party needs to give up, if equality of the two people and peace is to be achieved within a single polity.

The second rationale for the bi-national state relates to the right to self-determination and self-government. Buber and Magnus were well aware of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and independence, which they attributed to the rise in ‘their political maturity’ in the wake of the anti-colonial struggles worldwide at the end of Second World War. However, they wanted to make the case that this right was compatible with the Jewish struggle for self-determination. They maintained that Jewish and Palestinian self-determination could be accommodated within a single political space by respecting the national claims of each party and separating these from notions of sovereignty and statehood. The authors use the concepts of state and country interchangeably throughout the document, reflecting an interest in defending the nation rather than being fixated with the issue of state sovereignty. Nationalism, in their view, need not be *nationalistic*, that is, chauvinistic or separatist, and can be accommodated within larger political entities, be it such as the EU we know today, or the Habsburg Empire’s reform attempts, from which the authors may have drawn inspiration. As the document puts it:

We contend that the sovereign independence of tiny Palestine, whether it be Jewish sovereignty or Arab sovereignty is a questionable good in this post war period when even great states must relinquish something of their sovereignty and seek union, if the world is not to perish. We content that for this holy land the ideal of a bi-national Palestine is at least as inspiring as that of an Arab sovereign Palestine or Jewish sovereign Palestine. (Buber, Magnes, and Smilansky, 1946, p. 19)

The third rationale the authors make for the bi-national state lies in the fact that it prevents the domination of one group over another. The authors were concerned about the tyranny of majority rule over the minority, a likely outcome in 1947, given that the Jews in Palestine comprised approximately one-third of the population at that time. Ihud was opposed to the creation of a Jewish state that Magnus warned could only happen through violence, a concept he abhorred, and would have led to domination, if not expulsion, of one group by the other (Magnus, 1947, pp. 15–17). In a bi-national state, the Ihud document insists, Jews should have a right to immigrate until demographic parity is reached, after which a Board would be formed of Jews and Arabs to decide who is entitled to enter the new bi-national state. Ihud members drew on the example of Switzerland, considered to be the ‘most relevant to Palestine’ despite its differences in level of economic development. They argued that:

[a] federal multi-national state, based on the parity of nationalities is a most hopeful way of enabling [the people] to retain their national identity and yet of coalescing in

a larger political framework. It results in separate nationalities yet a single citizenship. (Buber, Magnes, and Smilansky, 1946, pp. 20–21)

In this respect, the 1946 document laid the foundation for future calls, put forward most vocally by Azmi Bishara in the 1990s, for Israel to become a state of its citizens (Bishara, 2005). Yet, then as much as now, the identity of this bi-national state was not defined, or maybe they did not want to give it one, no more than has Switzerland. Ihud members envisaged this bi-national state to be part of the Arab world, in a regional union so long as this union acknowledged Jewish historical right to Palestine. The implications of this integration into the Arab world are not discussed, leaving the impression that the author perhaps envisaged a multicultural state, a concept that that was not too common in the 1940s.

Ihud's justification for the bi-national state was thus enshrined in a concept of justice based on notions of equality of rights. It was premised on some practical considerations. Martin Buber and his colleagues were very much concerned with proving that their proposal was not idealistic but rather realistic, even mundane. Magnus argued that the creation of a Jewish state, given the demographic reality of Palestine in 1947, *threatens*, rather than protects, the survival of the Jewish people—both in the Middle East and worldwide. Most importantly, perhaps, especially in addressing a Zionist or Jewish audience, Ihud justified its call for the bi-national state from a sense of self-preservation and an attachment to Jewish nationalism in an international system that was changing and had long persecuted the Jews. As Martin Buber put it:

[W]e aim at a social structure based on the reality of two peoples living together. The foundation of this structure cannot be the traditional ones of majority and minority but must be different . . . i.e. a bi-national state which embodies in its basic principles a *Magna Charta Reservationum*, the indispensable postulate of the rescue of the Jewish people. This is what we need and not a 'Jewish State'; for any national state in vast hostile surroundings would mean pre-meditated national suicide and an unstable international basis can never make up for the missing intra-national one. (1947, p. 10)

In this definition of Jewish nationalism, however, the Arab is absent. S/he is not incorporated as an interacting or defining element of Jewish nation formation. Palestinian nationalism is *juxtaposed* to Jewish nationalism; it is outside it, beside it, but not engaged *with* it. While the Ihud 1946 document bestows on the Palestinians the same rights it gives to the Jews, acknowledges Arab nationalism, and refrains from addressing them as a solely religious group, it does not seem to know either the Arabs or the Palestinians, two terms that it uses interchangeably. The authors conceive of Palestinians as a 'backward Arab population' who would benefit from economic cooperation and integration with the Jewish nation. They maintain that tighter economic links between the Jewish and Arab economies would help build the trust of the Arabs and topple 'the political discourse of separation' that the Zionist leadership had officially declared in the Biltmore conference in 1942 (Buber, 1947, p. 9). There is still a sense of Orientalism, of 'mission civilisatrice' in their message, typical of the era they were writing in. It reflects both an ignorance of the complexity of Palestinian society in 1940s, and a certain elitism as much as a lack of interest in discussing or noting any Arab dimension to Jewish nationalism. This is

largely because members of Ihud, as with so much of mainstream Zionism, were involved in an essentially Ashkenazi and Western enterprise, addressing a largely Ashkenazi population and a Western-dominated world system. The Arab as much as the Arab Jew are not part, or in conversation, with what Jewish nationalism is about.

### **The Palestinian Vision of a One State**

The Palestinian vision of the one state solution is most clearly presented in the Fatah's pamphlet *Towards a Democratic State in Palestine for Moslems, Christians and Jews*, published in 1970 most probably by Nabeel Shaath, senior Fatah and later Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) official, under the pseudonym of Mohammad Rasheed. The very fact that the pamphlet was written under a pseudonym reflects the risk that Fatah thought it was taking by bringing forward an idea that many Palestinians and Arabs considered unacceptable.

Indeed, the preface to the pamphlet, which is not always translated into English, is entirely devoted to dispelling any accusation of treason by calling for a democratic state inclusive of Jews. It describes those who refuse to conceive of a 'Palestinian state comprising of Jews in its midst' as a 'chauvinistic minority' or as those who are ignorant of the 'true revolutionary content' of the proposal. In the authors' view, 'the concept of a democratic state represents a militant standpoint for the Palestinian cause, and not an emblem of political surrender' (Rasheed, 1970, pp. 7–8). From the outset, then, the document was written for a Palestinian Arab audience. However, it was focused specifically on addressing the 'Jewish question', defined in this case as the Jewish presence and political claim to Palestine.

The Palestinian version of the one state solution is a democratic, non-sectarian state in Palestine. The revolutionary element in the proposal, as far as the author sees it, is its acceptance of the Jews, both those living in it and those wishing to come to it, as part of this new state; they are citizens enjoying full equal rights with other citizens, be they Muslim or Christian. This might sound trivial today, but written only 22 years after the Nakba, when 2/3 of the Palestinian population were expelled from their original homes, and three years after the Arab defeat in the 1967 Six Days war, the proposal represents a significant attempt at historical reconciliation. As the document sees it:

[A]democratic non-sectarian state, expressed by the Palestinian revolution, represents the only progressive humane solution that has appeared on the Palestinian stage since Zionism started its racist and colonial conquest. This solution seeks to deal with the problem from its inception, permanently, equitably and progressively. (Rasheed, 1970, p. 7)

In this respect, one can argue that the Fatah proposal is seeking to repair the injustice that the creation of State of Israel created and which Ihud had predicted. The democratic state it is proposing, though, is neither a bi-national nor clearly secular state in the true sense of either term. The word secular never even figures in the document, unless we take the term 'non-sectarian' to mean secular. This is largely because the document is not interested in spelling out the relation between state and religion. The constitutional shape of the state is not discussed either, as it is considered premature, but the right to have Hebrew and Arabic taught in public schools is acknowledged. Bi-nationalism is rejected because, the author



argues, ‘religious and ethnic lines clearly cross in Palestine so as to make the term bi-national and the Arab-Jewish dichotomy meaningless or at best quite dubious’ (Rasheed, 1970, p. 38).

The Fatah document argues that the Jews do not and cannot form a nation. It also refuses to deal with them as a religious group either. It considers them rather a diverse group of people, of different nationalities, holding ‘never a truly monolithic Jewish opinion’, all the while acknowledging the persecution they suffered as a people (Rasheed, 1970, pp.16, 29–31). It considers that ‘the majority of Jews in Palestine today are Arab Jews’ (Rasheed, 1970, p. 38) and thus assumed to have an Arab nationality. The author thereby introduces the notion of the Arab Jew, a concept completely absent from the Zionist documents reviewed and often looked upon derogatorily in Zionist thinking.

Central to the document is the separation it clearly makes between the broader Jewish people and Zionists. The democratic state cannot be Zionist or include Zionists, but it is and can contain Jews, even Israelis born after 1948, so long as they give up Zionism. The document thus marks a shift in the 1964 PLO position which maintained that only Jews born before 1914 are entitled to be in Palestine. It states:

All Jews, Muslims and Christians living in Palestine or forcibly exiled from it will have the right to Palestinian citizenship . . . Equally this means that all Jewish Palestinians—at the present Israelis—have the same right provided of course they *reject Zionist racist chauvinism and fully accept to live as Palestinian in the New Palestine*. (Rasheed, 1970, p. 35, added italics)

The nationality of the state is thus Palestinian, but the content of Palestinian identity is not explained, apart from asserting that ‘the liberated Palestine will be part of the Arab Homeland’ (Rasheed, 1970, p. 34). It does not exclude Jews from participating in this state so long as they are not Zionists. From Fatah’s point of view, the democratic state provides the basis on which reconciliation with the Jewish people is seen as possible. As it puts it:

The call for an open new tolerant Palestine for Jews and non-Jews is a dramatic change in the Palestinian struggle, but it is hardly a new idea . . . what is new, is the fact that the non-Jewish Arab exiles who have been deprived of their homes and displaced by the Jews in Palestine can still . . . . call for a new country that combines the ex-aggressor and the persecutor. (Rasheed, 1970, p. 13)

What will allow this state to materialize are two important developments that, in the author’s view, must take place, both of which relate to the Jewish presence in Palestine and to questions of reconciliation. The first development concerns Palestinian perception of the Jews. Here the author stresses the importance of acknowledging the suffering of the Nakba, a recognition necessary for any attempt to reconcile with and accept the aggressor, as is often stipulated in most discussions on transitional justice. Interestingly in this regard, the author gives tribute to the ‘Palestinian revolution’ for having provided the Palestinian refugees with a new sense of empowerment and dignity, which in turn enabled them to abandon the quest for revenge (Rasheed, 1970, pp. 15–16). The revolution also enabled the Palestinians to learn about Jewish history, to understand and appreciate their suffering and persecution as much as their diversity, and above all their humanity. ‘The Jews are not monsters, supermen or pygmies. A new human image of the Jews was being formed’

(Rasheed, 1970, p. 16) one in which s/he can be a settler but not a Zionist. ‘The long exiled and persecuted Palestinians are redefining their objectives and are finding the goal of creating a new Palestine that encompasses them and the present *Jewish settler* a very desirable one’ (Rasheed, 1970, p. 17, italics added).

The second step towards establishing a democratic One State hinges on Jewish recognition of the Palestinians. The author devotes nearly half of his pamphlet to analysing Jewish perception of the Palestinians as manufactured by the ‘Zionist propaganda’ and how these can and must change. He traces themes all too well known still today, be they the negation of Palestinian presence in the country, blaming the victim for the refugee problem, or orientalizing the Palestinian as backward, unfit to govern, disorganized, terrorist and/or uncivilized (Rasheed, 1970, pp. 19–31). What is revolutionary in this document is how it argues that engaging the Jews, rather than ignoring them can only change these images. This is done by highlighting the ‘Dilemma’ that the author argues Israel has created for the Jews, and which consists of having turned ‘The people of the Book, the men of light, the victims of Russian pogroms, of Nazi genocide, of Dachau . . . from oppressed to oppressors’ (Rasheed, 1970, pp. 25–26). In the author’s view ‘Israel is creating a kind of moral schizophrenia in world Jewry. In the outside world, the welfare of Jewry depends on maintenance of secular, non-racial pluralistic societies. In Israel . . . the ideal is racial and exclusionary’ (Rasheed, 1970, p. 28).

In this respect, the author is in direct dialogue with the Jewish presence in Palestine; it is seeking to engage with the Jewish question, albeit on his own terms. He enters into and uses Jewish debates about Zionism, seeking legitimation and validation from Jewish writers opposing Zionism, very much like what is happening today among supporters of the One State solution (Faris, 2013). The emphasis is on notions of recognition and equality of rights. These rights, though, are defined as individual political rights to a state of its citizens, one that is fundamentally Arab, not bi-national. Self-determination is thus recognized for the Arabs since, in the author’s view, the Jews cannot be a national group. If they were, they would create a racist colonial state, just as Israel, the author argues, has demonstrated itself to be. This, however, does not mean that the Jews will be dominated or their immigration into Palestine hindered, so long as it is regulated along lines not dissimilar from those proposed by Martin Buber and Judas Magnes. The Palestinian

revolution should not—and in fact will not—pass any opportunity to prove to world Jewry and to Palestinian Jews that it will stand by them if persecuted and is determined to live and create with them a new Palestine not based on bias, racism or discrimination, but on cooperation and tolerance. (Rasheed, 1970, p. 33)

Yet, while it acknowledges Jewish suffering, and invites them to create a new polity, the Palestinian version of the one state solution does not explain how the Jews can participate in defining the content and shape of this new state. In other words, are they guests, dhimmis’, residents or partners? And can they be partners without being Arabs? The document does not enter into this debate, for it seems more concerned with reconciling with Jewish presence in Palestine and proving the justice of its Palestinian *state* project, rather than explaining the nationality of this state.

## **Moving Forward**

This review of these two historical documents reveals a number of issues that are central to any discussion for how to move forward, whether in terms of establishing a common state, which would be bi-national, a single democratic state, or a viable two states solution. First, is the question of self-determination and sovereignty. The twentieth century notion of self-determination tied the nation to the state, considering the latter the political fulfilment of the former. This is undoubtedly still the position of mainstream Zionism, which insists on having Israel, recognized as the Jewish state, but this is a position being challenged by many Jews outside Israel (Silberstein, 2008).

Self-determination remains tied to the people, but its fulfilment in the twenty-first century does not need to be by means of the creation of a distinctive nation-state, especially if such a state risks compromising democracy. Moreover, sovereignty is a concept that is historically contingent and continuously evolving. It defines a relationship between the ruler and the ruled, but this relationship does not have to be territorially confined, especially when globalization has contested state power at more than one level. The state today is not the only or supreme locus of power, as MNCs, private sector companies, international law, international migration and even terrorist organizations have challenged and constrained state territorial, legal and economic control. Remaining fixated with state power often allows a certain strata of society to usurp power in the name of national unity. It has shown to compromise citizens' right in the name of national struggle. The state needs to protect the individual and collective rights of all of its citizens and residents, if it is to be democratic.

Most recently some authors have proposed a parallel states structure in historic Palestine, one that will allow joint sovereignty of the whole land by Palestinians and Israelis (LeVine & Mossberg, 2014). This proposal represents a reformulation of the bi-national idea by acknowledging present state structures rather than seeking to dismantle them. It acknowledges that two people can be sovereign over the same piece of land, just as Ihud argued in the 1940s. Such parallel states structure would recognize the presence of Israelis settlements as well as the rights of Palestinian refugees to return. Such a solution would allow for power-sharing between the two national groups, give each local autonomy, acknowledge the existence of what it calls 'territorial heartlands' for each group, and create joint Israeli-Palestinian sovereignty over Jerusalem. It would also allow for a common defence and foreign policy, not different from a confederated or federated structure as bi-nationalists proposed.

The Ihud Bi-National document focuses on the issue of equality of rights of Jews and Palestinians, the Democratic non-Sectarian State concentrates of the question of recognition and how to embrace the 'other' in an attempt to achieve justice. This raises the question of historical reconciliation, which is central to any discussion on power-sharing and justice in the present and the future. Addressing this issue is not easy, though, for it requires addressing foundational myths and assumptions held by each national group.

The two states solution model sought a historical reconciliation through territorial separation. It acknowledged the collective rights of Israelis and Palestinians in two separate political entities. It thus avoided addressing the fundamental injustices created in 1948 by focusing on the post 1967 reality. However, the very fact that Israel refused to abide even by this paradigm, despite the Oslo peace agreements, by continuing to build settlements and insisting on the Jewishness of the state, meant that reconciliation could not be achieved without addressing core issues to the conflict. These include not simply historical

grievances of both peoples, such as the Nakba, fear of anti-Semitism and historical or religious attachment to the land, but also basic questions such as freedom of movement and equality in front of the law for all, irrespectively of one's nationality or ethnic group.

Any attempt at reconciliation and moving forward necessitates that Israel recognizes its responsibility for the Nakba and affirming the Palestinian Right of Return. It also requires Palestinian acknowledgement of Jewish attachment to Palestine, or grappling with the question of the rights of the Jews (Shenhav, 2012), as a community—and not as a religion or individuals—in Palestine are. In so far as Israel is concerned, the challenge is how to acknowledge the collective rights of the Palestinians in a polity that does not ensure Jewish supremacy. Both of these questions are very difficult to address by present Zionist and Palestinian nationalisms, especially in view of the gross power inequalities between the two sides.

The third issue raised here is the relation of multiculturalism versus colonialism. The Ihud group seems to have envisaged a multicultural polity, one of nationalities not nationalistic, a state of its citizens that is protective of collective rights. What it has been oblivious to is the reality of power in this state; the inequality not just of physical and numerical power but also of ideological and economic power and how this will play itself out in the new state. Israel today has an economy that is 30 times larger than the Palestinian one, a per capita income of over \$36,000 compared with \$2100 in the West Bank and Gaza. The Ihud members then were not critical of their own Western identity, even if they abhorred their colonialist compatriots. They wanted to treat the Oriental as an equal, but they did not see the Oriental as participating in defining their own identity. The Arabs are separate from them, not in a conversation with them. The idea of the Arab Jew, which the Palestinian document talks about, is not a category they recognize or consider.

The Palestinian One Democratic State proposal on the other hand, while well aware of the colonial dimension of Zionism, is unable to grapple with the complexity of Jewish nationalism and or see any place for it in its new polity. Its concern is not multiculturalism, but ending Zionist colonialism. Any alternative to partition thus cannot materialize before each side recognizing the rights of the 'other' in Palestine. In this regard, the Palestinian national movement needs to address what can be defined as the Jewish question, namely Jewish attachment to Palestine and Jewish claims to a home in Palestine. This does not mean that Palestinians should accept Zionism or give up on dismantling Israel's colonial structure. The question for the one state supporters to explain how it is possible to decolonize Israel without negating the national culture and heritage it created over the past 70 years, to accommodate the rights of the Jews to live and continue to migrate to Palestine, to continue to speak Hebrew and have political autonomy, to remain linked to the West through their Ashkenazi lineage as much as to the Arab world from which the majority of Israelis today originate. The PLO's 1971 slogan of a democratic one state needs thus to be reworked to take into consideration the reality on the ground. It needs to explain how the Jew or Israeli can be part of it without necessarily being a rehabilitated Arab citizen or otherwise only a resident, not full equal citizen on his/her own term.

Israelis, for their part, need to address what can be defined as the Arab question. This implies Israelis giving up their privileges and acknowledging Palestinian collective and individual rights in all the land under its control. This is not an easy matter for Israelis to face, for it would force them to admit the colonial dimension of their emancipatory project of nation building. Just as challenging, facing the Arab question implies that Israelis have to confront the fact that they live in an Arab world, that their over 50% of its

Jewish population is of Arab descent, and that the future one state will also be part of the Arab world, not Europe. At a fundamental level, it implies that Jews in Israel needs to confront the Arab dimension of their Jewishness. Zionism cannot deal with such a reality, since it is based on the premise that it is a western civilizing enterprise seeking to universalize the Jew, including the Arab Jew, and turn him into an enlightened, that is, western Ashkenazi Jew who has his own home like all civilized nations. The level of negation of the Arab Jew, already noted by Ella Shohat, among others, is still profound in Israeli society that still frowns upon and considers derogatory (2008). Yet it is a term that is central to this new state: the Arab Jew is as much part of the Jewish identity as it is part of the Arab world, both negated and yet in need of rehabilitation in today's historical context. The Arab Jew is a category that is both romanticized and under-researched but which can become a vehicle for reconciliation and unlock the conflict.

### **Conclusion**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been at an impasse for some time, with no issue in sight. The only political solution on the table is a two states solution, one that is buttressed with international support since 1947 and most recently the Road Map to peace in 2002. However reality on the ground reveals the impossibility of viable sovereign partition in a context of entrenching Israeli apartheid structure.

The two historical documents reviewed here have thought of alternatives to partition that would prove more moral and realistic from their advocates' point of view. The Zionist document favoured a bi-national state while the Palestinian document wanted a democratic one that would embrace the Jew, albeit on its own term. The value of these two documents lies not in their historical accuracy as much as in their attempts to grapple with the difficult questions that are still facing both Palestinians and Israelis: namely how to share power over the same land, how to reconcile collective and individual rights, and how to decolonize without negating the past.

At present there is no political party in either Israel or the Palestinian national movement is willing to take on these difficult questions. The Palestinian national movement is more caught up in reconciling with Hamas and integrating it into the PLO and Palestinian National Authority (PNA) than in thinking of an alternative to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel's political system is still concerned with the Jewishness of the state than with protecting the collective rights of its Palestinians citizens. Yet, political activists in favour of a one state solution have been growing in number both inside Israel–Palestine and outside it. The BDS campaign that many have advocated is framing the struggle in terms of a quest for equal political rights rather than in term of statehood. The success that it has been achieving in less than 10 years of its inception is proving the viability of non-violent resistance that puts rights, not the nation, at the centre of the struggle for freedom and security for all. Time will only tell how far this struggle will translate into the official political discourse and induce a new political project for power-sharing in the land of Israel–Palestine.

### **Notes**

1. The eighth Palestinian National Council adopted the idea of a democratic state in all of Palestine inclusive of Jews, Muslims and Christians as the aim of the Palestinian struggle.

2. Although mainstream Zionist parties such as Labor Zionists and Revisionists opposed the bi-national idea, Mapai and Hashomer Hatzair, were inclined towards it.

## References

- Abunimeh, A. (2006). *One country: A bold proposal to end the Israeli-Palestinian impasse*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.
- Benvenisti, M. (2007). The case for shared sovereignty. *The Nation*, 18 June, 11–16.
- Bishara, A. (2005). Min yahudiyat al-dawla hata Sharon [From the Jewishness of the state to Sharon]. In A. Bishara (Series ed.), *The elements of democracy series* (Arabic, 12). Ramallah: Muwatin.
- Buber, M. (1947). The bi-national approach to Zionism. In M. Buber, J. L. Magnes, & E. Simon, (Eds.), *Toward union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab cooperation* (p. 7). Jerusalem: Ihud (Union) Association.
- Buber, M., Magnes, J. L., & Smilansky, M. (1946). *Palestine, a bi-national state*. Jerusalem: Ihud.
- Davis, U. (2003). *Apartheid Israel*. London: Zed Books.
- Faris, H. (Ed.). (2013). *The failure of the two states solution: The prospects of one state in the Israel-Palestine conflict*. London: IB Tauris.
- Farsakh, L. (2005). Independence, cantons or Bantustans: Whither the Palestinian State? *Middle East Journal*, 59(2), 230–245.
- Farsakh, L. (2011). The one state solution and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Palestinian challenges and prospects. *Middle East Journal*, 64(1), 20–45.
- Farsakh, L. (2012). *Palestinian labor flows to Israel and the Palestinian state project, 1967–2007* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Farsakh, L. (2016). Palestinian economic development: Paradigm shifts since the first Intifada. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45(2), 55–71.
- Gans, C. (2008). *Just Zionism: On the morality of the Jewish state*. Oxford: OUP.
- LeVine, M., & Mossberg, M. (2014). *One land, two states: Israel and Palestine as parallel states*.
- Magnus, J. (1930). *Like all nations*. Jerusalem: Weiss Press.
- Magnus, J. (1947). A solution through force? In M. Buber, J. L. Magnes, & E. Simon, (Eds.), *Toward union in Palestine: Essays on Zionism and Jewish-Arab cooperation* (pp. 15–17). Jerusalem: Ihud (Union) Association.
- Makdisi, S. (2007). *Palestine inside out: An everyday occupation*. New York, NY: W.W Norton & Company.
- Pappe, I. (2008). The birth, demise and future prospective of one Palestine complete. *Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*, 8, 151–164.
- Pappe, I. (2015). *Israel and South Africa: The many faces of Apartheid*. London: Zed Books.
- Rasheed, M. (1970). *Towards a democratic state in Palestine for Moslems, Christians and Jews* (pp. 7–8). Beirut: PLO Research Center.
- Shenhav, Y. (2012). *Beyond the two states solution: A Jewish political essay*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Shohat, E. (2008). Rapture and return: Zionist discourse and the study of the Arab Jew. In L. Silberstein, (Ed.), *Post-Zionism: A reader* (pp. 233–256). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Silberstein, L. (Ed.). (2008). *Post Zionism: A reader*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Smith, C. (2010). *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Tilley, V. (2005). *The one-state solution: A breakthrough for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.