

## Does Israel fear peace? Reflections on the failures of international law and human rights, and on sources of hope.

Raja Shehadeh

Fifty years ago- almost to the day- I sat with my father, Aziz Shehadeh, as he dictated and I typed on my manual typewriter a plan for ending the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The plan had at its core the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, following the lines of the 1947 Partition Scheme with East Jerusalem as its capitol. The refugees and refugee compensation to be resolved according to the principles laid down in UN resolution 194 regarding the right of return.

The plan had the support of some fifty Palestinian leaders in the West bank and the Gaza Strip. However it was neither accepted nor even considered by the Israeli government which had since the start of the occupation been dodging one peace offer by the Palestinians and the Arab states after another and in the words of historian Avi Raz practicing a policy of deception. The PLO which was just emerging and finding its feet did not respond to this initiative. As time passed most of the PLO supporters of the plan were assassinated by Israel, amongst whom were, my father, Issam Sartawi, Said Hamameh, Naim Khader and Izzidin Kalak. Now, fifty years later, it is what the PLO and most countries of the world are calling for.

How much suffering we would all have been spared had it gone through then.

A quarter of a century after my determined- if typo-strewn typing - of my father's proposal, there was a time of hope in the world and hope looked like it would pay us a visit. David Bowie sang at the Berlin Wall in the summer of 1987 and contributed to bringing it down.

Then, on November 9, 1989 as the Cold War began to thaw, the Wall finally fell and the citizens of the German Democratic Republic were free to cross the country's borders.

Meanwhile, in Apartheid South Africa, positive developments were taking place which culminated in elections being held on April 27 1994 where all citizens of whatever color were given the vote. The hateful apartheid regime of South Africa ended. The great demographic fear of the black majority if the vote is given to every citizen of the country, proved unfounded.

The question I want to pose here is: why didn't these two hopeful events that resulted in the resolution of long-lasting endemic injustices, inspire the Israeli government to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories, resolve outstanding issues between Palestinians and Israelis and usher in a lasting peace? After all in the midst of the Palestinian Intifada there was new thinking on the part of the PLO which declared its commitment to an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. And a related question that I want to ask is: why didn't the world put its weight to make this happen?

There might not be a single answer to these two questions but I shall try to propose some pointers.

When I asked Israeli leftist friends why wasn't the end of apartheid in South Africa an inspiring event to Israelis? I got two different responses. The first was that the whites in South Africa lost whereas we Israelis have not. The second, more convincing answer, was that the Israelis do not see their situation as akin in any way to apartheid and so they do not consider, it would have a similar resolution.

Some of you might already be wondering why I ask these questions when the answer is obvious. Did the world not make an effort to get the parties together in 1991 with the convening of the International Peace Conference in Madrid in the presence of Arab states and Israel and did this effort not eventually end in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords celebrated by the famous handshake at the White House Lawn by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat repeatedly shown on TV screens the world over? But before I elaborate why I believe these were illusory hopes, I want to go back to the second answer given by Israelis where they explain the lack of a positive inspiration by distinguishing between the apartheid regime in South Africa and the situation in Israel/Palestine.

To understand how Israelis see the history of their state and how different this is from the way Palestinians see it I want to go back to the formative event of 1948, the year of the establishment of Israel, and reflect on the word Nakba.

The Arabic word for defeat is Hazimeh. But this was not the word chosen to describe what happened to Palestinians in 1948. Why is that?

A defeat usually means that a society or nation is setback, its values put in question. It might take it many years to collect itself and rebuild what it lost and rise again. This is

what happened in 1945 to Germany and to Japan after the Second World War. To different extents both had either all or part of their territories occupied by the victorious nation (s). And both soon made it into first rate powerful nations. But the case of Palestine was different.

Palestinians experienced the utter dissolution of their nation which was forced out of its homeland and fragmented into parts, one part in the Gaza Strip under Egypt , another in the West Bank and East Jerusalem under Jordan and the rest scattered in refugee camps in surrounding countries. Yet they were not defined within the UN Refugee convention as refugees. Palestine/ ceased/ to exist./ To describe what befell the Palestinian nation a word stronger than defeat was needed. That word was Nakba. In Hebrew there is still no word for the greatest catastrophe that the establishment of Israel caused the Palestinians. And recently its commemoration was made illegal by law.

Israel describes the war in 1948 as its war of independence and this was long before the culture of post truth had emerged. By doing so the country is claiming that it got its independence from the British. Yet it was the British who in the Balfour declaration of 1917, one hundred years ago, promised the land that had a majority of Palestinian Arabs to the Jews. And it was the British who worked throughout the British Mandate over Palestine from 1922 to 1948 to facilitate the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine in accordance with the terms of the mandate. The real reason why Israel makes this claim, I propose, is because the new country wanted to position itself within the group of decolonized nations.

Without delay, the newly established country proceeded to re-invent a history that excluded any recognition of the presence of the indigenous non-Jewish inhabitants of the country forcing out most of them and erasing any sign of their former presence and history in the land. As has often been noted the conceit goes that prior to the “return” of the exiled Jews there was nothing there- the Palestinians who happened to be on the land had only come when the first Zionist colonization began because it created economic opportunities for them, otherwise the land was fallow, empty, desert waiting, for 3000 years for the return of its original and true owners, the Jews, to arrive and populate it. It is no coincidence that this *terra nullis* is the exact justification given by colonialists throughout history, the world over.

In other words, in 1948 there was an attempt at re-writing the entire history of Palestine- it was akin to year zero after which a new history begins with the in-gathering of Jews into their historic homeland, Israel.

The conceit of an empty land did not only apply to 1948. Consider the words of the famous song “Jerusalem of Gold” written by the Israeli national poet Naomi Shemer shortly before the “liberation” of East Jerusalem where she describes East Jerusalem in June 1967 as an empty place without residents. “The water wells ran dry / the market square is empty.” In her eyes the Arabs were merely transparent figures.

But this view is not exclusive to Israel. Many in the world go along with the belief that Israel is not a historical country established 69 years ago by a UN resolution but rather a biblical state that was not established by historical or legal events rooted in the modern 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Much derives from this ahistorical view of Israel. If it is 3000 years old then it has not taken anyone’s land, it did not need to empty the land of its Palestinian inhabitants and take over their place.

The destruction of the landscape and memories of a whole nation after 1948 in Israel is well documented. I did not experience it first hand as did my parents and their generation. But I see it happening now in the West Bank where public land and places with significance and meaning to those of us living there –hills, springs, and wadis, as well as archeological sites that do not show any evidence of Jewish settlement- are being systematically destroyed and re-named because our memories and attachment to the place is not recognized by the Jewish settlers who are intent on transforming the land to reflect only their own. It all derives from the refusal to recognize the Nakba. That is why in a more protracted manner the Nakba continues until today driven by the same attitude and ideology.

Sometimes the refusal to recognize Palestine is so outrageous, it is almost funny, as when Member of Knesset Anat Berko said: Palestine does not exist because there is no letter, P, in Arabic forgetting that the Arabic name is Filistin.

The Israeli version of what happened in 1948 is the dominant narrative of the events of that year. It was against this story: supported by the most popular of books, the bible, and with the sympathy from one of the worst atrocities in modern history, the Holocaust,

that the Palestinians had to tell the world their version of what befell them in 1948 and to this day (alas) we are still not successful in getting this across.

This first Nakba was a most central and formative experience of my life. I was born after it occurred in Ramallah to which my family was exiled from their coastal home in Jaffa. All the talk as I grew up was of the lost land and the shock and horror of what happened to them. As I was growing up evidence of the impoverishment and suffering was all around me.

The second Palestinian Nakba started soon after 1967 with the occupation by Israel of the rest of Palestine. From the early eighties when I began following what Israel was doing with the establishment of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and bringing its people to live there, I could not imagine that it could end in any other way than as apartheid. I was not alone in thinking this.

In 1976 Yitzhak Rabin [who served as Israel's Defense minister during the first Intifada and as its Prime Minister during the negotiations and signing of the Oslo Accords] gave an interview in which he compared the 60 settlements in existence at that time, as "a cancer in the social and democratic tissue of the state of Israel..." He was critical of the Israeli settler organization, Gush Emunim [Bloc of the Faithful who initially spearheaded the settlement movement in Israel] describing it as "a group that takes the law into its own hands."

"Because of the [Arab] population, he said, I don't think it will be possible to [settle] over time, unless we want to get to apartheid, with a million-and-a-half Arabs inside the state of Israel..."

Israel's Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon appointed in 1981 by Prime Minister Menahim Begin had other thoughts, and a very different attitude to settlements than Rabin. He was not worried about the presence of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and was planning to deal with us similarly to how the Apartheid regime dealt with the black majority. Indeed, that year Sharon secretly visited South Africa. While he was being briefed about the country, he told his aide that what he most wanted to know about was the Bantustans, how they are structured and administered. He was obviously planning

for a similar fate for the Palestinians, those of us who were living in the West Bank and Gaza.

He invited one of the Bantustan Presidents to visit Israel where he was met with great pomp and ceremony. This president also visited one of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in his speech called this a historic day. It was then that I realized that Israel was learning from the apartheid regime and that the future they planned for us was similar to the homelands which Apartheid South Africa designated for the black population. In time I was proven right.

When Israel's ally, the South African regime of racial discrimination, fell, Israel did not get the more optimistic message: that it was possible for Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews to live together as the blacks and whites now do in a democratic regime whatever its problems. Instead it learned to avoid the mistakes of the white regime that they figured had led to the failure of the system of Apartheid: i.e. the dependence of the economy on black labor. Thus in the early 90s Israel proceeded to reduce the country's dependence on Palestinian labor by closing the border between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza for Palestinians and importing workers from abroad even though it was more expensive for them to do so.

Through the Oslo Accords Israel managed to further the implementation of the Apartheid model. This it did by re-packaging the occupation without ending it, transferring civilian matters to a newly created Palestinian Authority while keeping the majority of the land under Israeli de facto sovereignty, controlling the borders and creating Bantustans for the Palestinians with a security force, sub-contracting certain powers to leaders it did not choose and yet in some way it did by assassinating those whom it did not like.

But why was Israel so unprepared for peace and why did it not use the opportunity of negotiations with the PLO to arrive at a real peace with its neighbors who at that time were willing to make peace with it?

After Israel's victory in the 1967 war, the Israeli minister of defense, Moshe Dayan, declared: we are now an empire and proceeded to act with imperious arrogance. Some might say Israel is still drunk with victory. Rather than use the Oslo negotiations to make real peace with its enemy, the PLO, Israel prepared and managed to get its adversary to

sign a surrender document. The PLO on its part was ill –prepared for the negotiations, was feeling vulnerable and was determined to reestablish itself in Palestine whatever the cost.

An Israeli professor of law and a friend pointed out to me that the Israeli legal advisor to Rabin conducted these negotiations as if he was a lawyer doing a real estate deal when after the land is sold and the deal completed the two sides are unlikely to ever meet. How inappropriate this approach was to Israel and Palestine who are fated to live side by side.

The failure to seek a real peace in Oslo is not the only reason why Israel was not and remains unprepared to make peace.

Peace would mean a re-structuring of the myth on which the Israeli state has been established and possibly large amounts in compensation for the dispossessed Palestinians. And, of course, sharing the land with them. There is also the possible loss, in the event of peace, of some of their most lucrative export of weapons and weapon systems. Beyond this commercial consideration there is another matter. The war footing that Israel is continuously fostering, perpetuates the fear that acts as a glue that holds the various contradictory strands of Israeli society together. In this, Israel is different from Apartheid South Africa. Where in South Africa the master race was homogeneous, in Israel it is polarized politically, economically and socially.

On August 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 the former Mossad [Israel's external security service] chief Tamir Pardo said that the greatest danger Israel faces isn't external, but rather the divisions within Israeli society.

"If a divided society crosses a certain threshold you can reach phenomena such as civil war, in extreme cases." The distance between the present-day situation in Israel and a civil war is growing smaller, he said.

Uri Avneri, the veteran journalist and former member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament), commented on this statement by explaining that "In Israel, we have a lot of socio-economic problems. But the division between "left" and "right" almost solely concerns peace and the occupation. If one wants an end of the occupation and peace with the Palestinians, one is a "leftist". If one wants the annexation of the occupied territories and the enlargement of the settlements, one is a "rightist".

He then added: A lot of Israelis have begun to talk of “two Jewish societies” in Israel. Some even talk about “two Jewish peoples” within the Israeli Jewish nation.

What holds them together, he believes, is the conflict. The occupation. The perpetual state of war.

Others have pointed out that it is not that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been forced on Israel. Rather, it's the other way around: Israel keeps up the conflict, because it needs the conflict for its very existence.<sup>1</sup>

I tried to show why the end of apartheid in South Africa and the fall of the Berlin Wall did not inspire the Israelis. The second question I want to try to answer is why did the world not put pressure on the country to make peace such as by imposing sanctions on Israel?

I have been involved in the struggle for Palestinian human rights since 1979 and have witnessed a change to the worst in the reporting of the Palestinian reality. The ‘establishment media’ seems to favor a distorted view of balance rather than pursue a search for truth and exploration of the facts that could illuminate the situation. I will give only one example: During the Gaza War of 2014 I was interviewed by the BBC Today program. I noted that Gaza is still occupied by Israel which is an incontrovertible fact under International law. Instead of asking what are the implications of this, the program brought in Dore Gold whose words in denial of this fact concluded the program. Rather than expose the deception, the BBC was propagating it, and in my naiveté, I thought its mission was to educate the public

As a consequence after ten years of blockade there is hardly any international pressure on Israel to lift its siege on the Gaza Strip. Here is how one recent visitor to the Strip describes conditions there: Gaza is cloaked in desperation. You feel it the minute you cross the border. It's like traveling to another world. Already at the crossing you see seriously ill people, mainly cancer patients, waiting in line in a hall. They are hoping for some compassion and permission to cross the border and receive some treatment. You go by car and see ruins, thousands of destroyed houses, factories in ruin, sewage flowing through the streets. More than 60 percent of the inhabitants are unemployed. There's terrible poverty. There is simply no money. Not for food or for medication and not for warm clothes for children. People light fires in order to stay warm. It's quite

---

<sup>1</sup> *'Israel's Impending Civil War'* was published in the London Review of Books blog, on 6 September 2016



common in Gaza to see a fire outside a tent standing next to a ruined house. Water sources are contaminated. Gaza is on the brink of a humanitarian disaster.”

This failure by the establishment media to educate the public about the prevailing situation in Palestine is unlikely to change. Nor is the government’s bias, or even infatuation, with Israel, whether in the United Kingdom or the United States.

The present Palestinian Authority’s strategy is to abandon the armed struggle in favor of international diplomacy including suing Israel for war crimes at the International Criminal Court. Instead of encouraging this, the US has warned Palestinian leaders that suing Israel in the international court would trigger severe steps by the U.S. administration, including the closure of PLO offices in the American capital and an end to economic aid to the Palestinian Authority. During his meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu, US president Donald Trump ditched decades of diplomacy and solid principles of International Law when he told his guest: I’d like to see you hold back on settlements for a little bit."

And yet, despite the power of the Israeli Empire and its fifty-year-old attempt at impressing on the world that its status in the Occupied Territories is not that of occupier but the fulfillment of the wish of the Almighty, the world continues to refer to it by its correct name: occupation. UNSC resolution 2334 reaffirmed “that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.”<sup>2</sup>

The resolution also called “upon all States... to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.”

A most bizarre situation has arisen, whereby, the gulf between the reality on the ground (with more creeping annexation into the West Bank and East Jerusalem) and the global recognition of the Palestinian state (which has 90 embassies around the world), and denunciation of settlements as illegal, is forever growing wider.

---

<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (23 December 2016), para. 1.

(Those who claim that realities on the ground are making the Palestinian state unviable are not taking into consideration that, as time passes, the state of Palestine - legally speaking - is becoming a reality.)

How will these two parallel realities be reconciled? Could Israel be betting on the collapse of international law ?

It might well be so.

Daniel Reisner, who served as head of the Israeli army's international law department, proposed that: "If you do something for long enough, the world will accept it...An action that is forbidden today becomes permissible if executed by enough countries."

As proof, Reisner cited the "targeted killings" Israel conducted continually until the practice was, in his words, "in the centre of the bounds of legitimacy." The Israeli government's latest attempt at legitimisation takes the form of a new law passed by the Knesset. The law retroactively legalises government expropriation of privately owned Palestinian land on which settlements or outposts were built "in good faith or at the state's instruction." In effect, it makes the illegal legal.

This situation interests, and, worries me greatly as a lawyer and a believer in the role of international law in helping preserve peace in the world.

As a writer what engages me is the extent to which the present reality brings the worst in all of us and turns us, Israelis and Palestinians, into racists and killers. The disparity in the power of both sides makes Israel the greater violator by a magnitude. The majority of these violations are well reported. What I find most unpalatable is the extent of the meanness and utter Kafkaesque absurdity that is so often displayed by Israel. Here are some examples:

-The Israeli authorities refuse to allow children from Gaza, however young they are, to come for cancer treatment at the hospital accompanied by their mother or any other relative unless they are over 55 years of age. These children are in a particularly difficult condition and desperately need their mothers. It is so tragic one pediatric nurse told me,

and so sad. A 55 year old cannot possibly be a mother of a young child and they need their mother.

-A new Israeli regulation now allows visitors to security prisoners to bring in five photographs to give to relatives in prison. One of the photos that one relative brought was of five relatives. Upon inspection the visitor was told he could only take in that one. Asked why? he was told because it counts for five photos since it shows five figures.

-A 32-year-old Palestinian who lived with his ailing mother in a West Bank refugee camp wakes up in the middle of the night as soldiers burst into the house. They shoot him 11 times, claiming he threatened them with a knife and lock his mother, Fawziya, in the bedroom.

Fawziya asks: "Imagine what you would feel like if soldiers entered your house and killed your son before your eyes. You wake up and see that your son is gone."

-The head of the Finance Ministry department that enforces planning and construction laws, Avi Cohen, lives in an illegal West Bank settlement outpost. Cohen's job includes issuing demolition orders for illegal construction inside Israel.

-The recently appointed Israeli High Court Judge, British born, David Mintz, lives nearby Ramallah, in the illegal settlement of Dolev.

While Palestinians in Israel have to build illegally, in one sweep on 22 January 2017 the Jerusalem municipality approved permits for 566 homes for the settlements of Pisgat Ze'ev, Ramot and Ramot Shlomo on Palestinian land. About half a million Arab citizens in Israel live in about 100,000 buildings erected without permits in Arab locales throughout the country.

But then there is method in that- if Palestinians live in unlicensed homes, the family will constantly live in fear that its home will be demolished. This is how Israel rules: by keeping people feeling they're in violation of the law and so feeling guilty and under threat. This way we Palestinians are easier to manipulate and govern.

These are but few examples of the inhumanity Palestinians living under occupation and in Israel experience. I can attest that after living for fifty years under Israeli occupation the level of anger, frustration and anxiety has only been on the increase. And this is how I, an older man with plenty of occupation experience, feels. How would it be for the

young and vulnerable? I could go on and on giving many more examples of much worse atrocities, cruelty and violence - but what is the point?

Suffice it to say that the situation we live under brings the worst in all of us.

The sad fact is that Israel did not want peace, not in 67, not in 78 at the time of Sadat's visit, not in 93 at the time of Oslo and not in 2016 when (as revealed last month) Secretary of State John Kerry presented a plan for a regional peace initiative including recognition of Israel as a Jewish state that had the support of the Arab countries, because Israel does not want to give up the territories it occupied in 1967 or recognize Palestine as a nation.

This continuation of the conflict has brought the worst elements in their society and ours to be in control. A heavy price to pay.

Had Israel wanted to live with its neighbors in peace, they would have used the occasion of their control over a significant segment of Palestinian society that extended for fifty years, to show, how it could have been between the two sides, how they could live together and benefit from each other and prosper. Had Israel wanted peace it could have taught its own people Arabic, the language of the people in the region to which it ostensibly wants to belong. Rather than hone its expertise in recruiting collaborators who helped it kill more Palestinians, or assassinate Palestinians inside and outside the territories who called for peace with Israel, it could have encouraged those calling for peace and coexistence. Instead it was greedy for land and its leaders were full of hubris. Their policies ended up encouraging violence and ever more extreme violence. As Amos Gilad, the director of the political- military affairs Bureau at Israel's defense ministry, once told American officials, "we don't do Gandhi very well."

When I was close to the end of writing my new book, *Where the Line is Drawn, Crossing Boundaries in Occupied Palestine*, I came upon what the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, said: "In the end, in the State of Israel, as I see it, there will be a fence that spans it all. I'll be told, 'this is what you want, to protect the villa?' The answer is yes. Will we surround all of the State of Israel with fences and barriers? The answer is yes. In the area that we live in, we must defend ourselves against the wild beasts."

After I read this and was confronted with the recent events of the ever more common killings and brutality, I went into despair about our future in Palestine-Israel. But as a writer I felt I should not allow myself to be swept by the worst emotions and instead look to the future and hope to influence it. I asked myself the question, how should I react? Should I succumb to anger and despair at being compared to a wild beast and respond by thrusting similarly disparaging epitaphs at my enemy?

I decided against all this. I recalled what Raymond Williams has said that “to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing.” I also found myself in agreement with what Rebecca Solnit wrote that “the time when you don’t need hope is when your hopes have been fulfilled.” And ours, alas, haven’t been. We are in desperate need of hope.

In bringing about change and hope, writers and thinkers surely have a role to play. Not only by analyzing what is taking place as I just did, but also by imagining how it could be different. In this way writers can ultimately tilt the balance and encourage the victory of those with positive, creative, energy rather than the negative energy of terror, violence and hatred. In my book I write about a long term friendship with Henry, a Canadian Jewish immigrant to Israel, a friendship that despite many trying times of anger and alienation, continues to be a source of pride for me.

Our friendship has extended over forty years. In its course were many ups and downs: anger, / expectations that were not met, / jealousies, and disappointments. But despite all these, our friendship held up. In the book it isn’t put forth as a model nor as representative. Yet the description of the challenges and travails that we went through in the course of our long relationship that extended over most of the occupation might help bring out the varied phases that the occupation itself went through and negate the belief that the way it now is, between the two nations, is how it always has been and will be. The truth is that it has not always been so bad between Jews and Arabs in Palestine/Israel nor has it always seemed so hopeless.

When the prospect of Arabs and Jews ever living together in peace is discussed, many despair that after all what has happened between the two sides they can never come to renounce their hatred of each other. Others point out to the time before Zionism when

Arabs and Jews did live together in peace in Palestine. Yet it is not as though a time will ever come when there will be no prejudice or that there ever was such a time. There needn't be love and there will always be prejudice. We do not have to follow President Trump who says we will only allow into our country 'those who love us.' Even when two religious communities, like the Palestinian Christians and Muslims, live together as we do in Palestine today, there is prejudice. But this does not mean that we cannot live together, and live very well together, with mutual benefit and excellent co-existence. Likewise there is prejudice between Jews and Christians in the UK and between the Mormons and other Christians in the US and between the blacks and whites in South Africa. And yet these different religious communities and races live together and their coexistence is not premised or conditional upon the removal of the prejudice. Life simply has to be organized around it. The problem arises when there is fear of the other, which is what we have in Palestine/Israel between Jews and Arabs. It is this feeling of insecurity that causes tensions and eruptions but people are capable of learning to live together while keeping their prejudice under control. This leads me to think that the belief that the two sides can never live together in Palestine and Israel and therefore solutions of exclusion and high walls as proposed by Mr. Netanyahu are the only answer, is total rubbish.

What we do need is to find practical arrangements for Palestine, Israel and Jordan to cooperate as mini-states in a region that should not be geographically divided. Israeli Jews are adept and skilled at devising practical arrangements to organize society (They've long had to deal with this in their own fractured society). The options are many but only if there is a will to find them. At present there is no incentive. The occupation is beneficial to Israel and the country continues to be unconditionally accepted throughout the world even while it oppresses another nation. The continuation of the occupation has to become a liability before this can change. That is why the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions strategy is a source of hope.

At the end of my book I wrote that "In our small way, the friendship between Henry and me exposed the lie peddled by Netanyahu and his followers to Israeli people and the world—that the Arab is the fundamental and eternal enemy of the Jew, that the conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews cannot be resolved diplomatically, and that the Israeli people have to live forever by the sword."

As if to confirm that writers can indeed play a role in ushering change, I received the following letter, while I was writing the book, from an Israeli high school teacher in Tel Aviv. I want to end by reading to you from this letter:

*I read all your books that are available in Hebrew. A strong feeling of loss awakened in me while reading them. I believe that not only the Palestinians lost their homes, lands and collective life and culture during the 1948 but also us, the Jews, lost partners for a better life and most of all, our humanity. The 1967 War was a second disaster on both of us - 49 years of despicable occupation. You are, of course, the main victims of it, but we are also paying the price of violating your basic human rights – we have lost our humanity once more.*

*This is why I teach the history of the Nakba and about the occupation. I believe we, the Israelis, must take responsibility on what we have done and continue doing. We must find a just solution and to do that, we must acknowledge our wrong doings.*

*As you probably imagine, it is not an easy task to achieve in Israel, but it is possible. For me, the most effective way to do so is to work with youth. Most of them keep an open mind, because they still haven't been drafted to the army. For an Israeli soldier acknowledging our crimes might mean a total breakdown of his identity. After all, looking at the mirror and recognizing a perpetrator can bring an identity crisis. But the effect of this acknowledgment on high school students, is different. They are free of personal guilt, although they do feel collective guilt, because they never served in the army and they never expropriated land. They blame the older generations, us, the grownups, for lying and deceiving them, for sentencing them to hatred and war and for turning them into perpetrators. It is pretty amazing to watch how it's possible to open their eyes to reality and help them deal with this process courageously.*

All the best,

Adva

Thank you Adva, and thank you all for listening