

Israël-Palestine : Mondialisation et micro-nationalismes" (Palestine: Globalisation and Micro-Nationalisms) was published in 1998 (Éditions Acratie). ↩

It is largely the result of the experience I gained during seven years as a presenter on Radio Libertaire's programme "Les Chroniques du nouvel ordre mondial" (Chronicles of the New World Order) from 1990 to 1997.

However, this book would not have been possible without the friendship of Moïse Saltiel, our long conversations, the documents he provided me with and his thesis, which he shared with me : *Sur la Palestine, terre nourricière, Israël, base militaire* (Paris, May 1988).

This book also owes a great deal to Arna Meir-Khamis, whom I interviewed on Radio Libertaire in 1991 during the Gulf War.

I would also like to add that the friendship of Wallid Attallah and Issa Wachil, two Palestinian friends, was invaluable to me in writing my book, not to mention Raouf Raïssi, Tunisian publisher and humanist.

The text presented here is the conclusion to my book.

Conclusion of Israël-Palestine: Mondialisation et micro-nationalismes (1998)

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Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State, made her first visit to the Middle East on 9 September 1997, after several months of deadlock in peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Netanyahu's election to the Israeli government triggered a wave of conflict with the Palestinians, with the construction of a new settlement in the Arab part of Jerusalem, the 'tunnel affair', the resumption of Jewish settlement in Gaza and the West Bank, land confiscations, the demolition of Palestinian homes, etc.

US diplomacy is running at half speed. Albright is trying to prevent tensions from escalating in a region that is strategic for US interests. But at the same time, Washington is systematically preventing any condemnation of Netanyahu's policy; never putting pressure on Israel to change its policy.

If Albright fails, says Hemi Shalev in Yedioth Ahronoth, 'it is likely that the next attack will lead to a violent and widespread confrontation with the Palestinians, and even possibly to a regional war.' This opinion is not marginal; it is shared by almost all Israeli observers.

In the wake of the Oslo Accords and Arafat's return to Gaza, an Economic Conference for the Middle East and North Africa was set up with a view to creating a kind of prosperity zone stretching from the Atlantic (Morocco) to the Gulf. A dozen heads of state, hundreds of politicians and a host of businessmen were enthusiastic about the project. Qatar was the organiser of the last conference, held from 16 to 18 November 1997 in Doha, the capital of the emirate. This conference, sponsored by the United States, was intended to legitimise Israel's existence and role. The summit was also important for the United States, as it was meant to show that American diplomacy had not failed with the peace process.

However, the heads of state of almost all Arab countries announced well in advance that they would not attend the summit: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Syria and Lebanon. Those who did attend were represented only by senior officials: Tunisia, Yemen and even Kuwait, despite being a US 'protectorate'.

This is a major blow to American diplomacy.

The main thrust of Israel's official argument in defence of its policy is based on security concerns. The Jewish state needs sufficient '*strategic depth*'. The Iraqi Scud missiles, albeit short-range, that fell on Israel have

reduced this argument to nothing. Israel has many atomic weapons, but their use, due to the short distances involved, would inevitably harm the Israeli population. The balance of power makes any attack on Syria virtually impossible, as it would be met with severe reprisals. In 1985, Israel was forced to withdraw from occupied Lebanon due to the losses inflicted by Hezbollah, and is now effectively on the defensive in the part of southern Lebanon that it still occupies. There is no longer a military solution.

Despite the peace process initiated by the Madrid Accords, peace does not seem to be a close prospect. Even during the negotiations, the Israeli authorities continued to colonise the occupied territories.

The creation of a Palestinian state would mean, in the best but most unlikely case, the creation of a state of 5,900 km² without territorial continuity, two-thirds of which would be occupied by Jewish settlements, with roads for the exclusive use of Israelis bypassing Palestinian towns and dividing the country into separate portions, military land, and no agricultural land or water resources. Today, the Palestinian Authority controls 6% of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the Netanyahu government does not seem willing to give back any more.

The two options currently emerging in Israel are well-founded:

- One based on permanent political pressure against the Palestinians, an endless spiral of oppression that can only end in violence, because the population of the occupied territories will not give up the land and its demographic growth can only lead to an explosion;
- The other on the economic integration of Israel into a Middle East dominated by the Jewish state, which at first glance seems more 'reasonable', but in which the Palestinians will have little place. A fringe of the Israeli bourgeoisie, less concerned with territorial conquest than with conquering markets, seems attracted to this option.

These are, as one might guess, the main orientations of the Likud and the Labour Party.

The paradox of the State of Israel is that Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, wanted to rid the Jewish state of the 'theocratic tendencies' of religious leaders, even though its only legitimacy is religious, to the point that even secular Zionists borrow his themes. The secularisation of Israeli society is a danger to the state: if it ceases to be the state of the Jews and becomes the state of its citizens, the Zionist project will lose all validity. For the time being, the failure of Zionism as a construct of collective identity is manifested in the population's retreat into its religious and immigrant communities. Baruch Kimmerling believes that if civil war breaks out in

Israel, it will not come from the opposition between supporters of withdrawal from the occupied territories and opponents, or from the opposition between the left and the right: 'The main issue on which civil war could break out concerns the rules of the game that define our collective identity.' (*Haaretz*, 21 January 1994.)

The debates over the percentage of Palestinian territory that Israel should withdraw from are somewhat pathetic. Six to nine per cent according to the Israeli authorities, 15 per cent according to the Americans. The Palestinian Authority, for its part, has been reduced to demanding the evacuation of 30 per cent of Palestinian territory. Can one imagine General Giap asking the Americans to withdraw from 30 per cent of Vietnam?

In the long term, the Israeli authorities' frenzy to occupy and create an irreversible situation – which they have largely succeeded in doing – may provide the key to long-term developments in the region, because irreversibility can be a double-edged sword.

Today, the problem for the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is one of national aspirations, which are understandable in context but somewhat obsolete when the major trends of our time are towards the formation of large blocs in which states are reduced to the role of regions.

The Zionist project is based on the *separate* existence of Jews and Arabs. It involves two precisely defined territories in which the two communities must live without contact. *The condition for the separate existence of Jews is the existence of a space in which the separate existence of Palestinians can be realised* – a coherent space. Netanyahu's policy amounts to denying the Palestinians this space and confining them to Bantustans. This is clear from his statements during his meeting with Bill Clinton on 20 January 1998. The 'vital and national interests in Judea and Samaria' set out in a preparatory document imply that Israel will retain two-thirds of the West Bank. The details of the territories that Israel intends to keep are staggering:

- a strip several kilometres wide in the west of the West Bank;
- a strip 10 to 20 km wide, depending on the location, in the west, along the Jordan River;
- an area surrounding the *region* of Jerusalem;
- the areas occupied by the 140 Jewish settlements (areas that are constantly expanding);
- infrastructure, roads, water sources, electrical installations;
- military sites;
- areas around roads necessary for general security and the security of the settlements;
- historical sites.

The Israeli right does not realise that its frenzy for territory inevitably leads to a form of coexistence that can only create – on a historical scale – the seeds of dissolution for Israeli society as it exists today. By refusing to grant the Palestinians a coherent and defined space, it condemns itself to living with them.

It will not be possible to confine the Palestinian population to 6%, 10% or 20% of the West Bank. As in South Africa, the Bantustans will explode. Given that the Palestinians will not give up the land, the forced coexistence of two populations on the same territory, one of which has an inferior status, will inevitably arise one day in terms of demands for equal rights, i.e. *citizenship*.