

Dream and Reality

In the seventh decade of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, is there anything left to say, think, or do? Although many feel the possibilities for a solution to the crisis are exhausted, diplomacy continues. Yet diplomatic missions come and go. The Arab Spring has come and gone or, more to the point, has morphed into an almost fascist dictatorship in Egypt and mind-boggling violence in Syria. Israel-Palestine remains more or less the same. Or worse.

When we think that the situation cannot get any worse, it does. Even when peace is “necessary,” “urgent,” and “right around the corner,” the plight of the Palestinians worsens. For years now, Palestinians on the West Bank have been refused entry into Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s Palestinian population continues to be evicted as Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem increase. Ostensibly temporary, the Apartheid Wall encircles the Palestinian population of the West Bank as a permanent boundary. Even the Palestinian Authority has offered a continuing Israeli military presence in Palestine’s Jordan Valley, along with a permanent stationing of American-led NATO military throughout the West Bank—all in hopes of gaining some limited autonomy. Hamas-led Gaza is often referred to as a vast prison camp. It is absent from the peace process. Gaza’s borders are rigorously controlled by Israel and Egypt. Even international aid has difficulty being delivered there.

Israel is triumphant, almost defiant, yet continues to fear for its safety and security. Israel lives crisis to crisis. Some believe that the crisis atmosphere benefits Israel’s plans to continue its expansionist policies at the expense of Palestinian sovereignty. Others believe that Israel would hardly know how to live if its borders were settled and peace reigned with its neighbors.

Israel is one of the strongest nations in the world, yet continues to depend on the United States to guarantee its security. With this guarantee, Israel stands strong. Yet beneath this exterior, dependence breeds anxiety. What if the United States commitment to Israel turned in another direction?

The Israel-Lebanon war in 2006 demonstrated Israel's vulnerability. Lebanon was burning, as was Israel. Israel's 2008 invasion of Gaza hardly made Israel more secure. Though a nuclear power, Israel threatens Iran because of its nuclear program. Iran threatens Israel—so Israel claims. Israel lives on the edge.

Fundamental issues lie at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Yet the foundational issue of the conflict, the 1948 war that founded Israel and dispossessed the Palestinians, remains outside the parameters of Jewish thinkable thought. At the same time, binational and homeland alternatives to state Zionism, exemplified in the work of Jewish luminaries such as Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, Hannah Arendt, and Albert Einstein, are buried. The silence surrounding the founding of Israel is connected with the silence on the historic alternatives offered to state Zionism.¹

The past is the path to the present. The past may also open us to an alternative future. What options were there in the founding of the state of Israel? What choices were made during that time period? If the past related to Israel's founding is virtually unknown to many Jews and non-Jews alike and the present is an emergency situation with dangers on all sides, a sense of fate pervades. The future unfolds with a logic that makes choices about the future seem naïve, even foolhardy.

To approach this subject of Israel is challenging. Every issue is fraught. Emotion and suffering color the pages of Jewish history. The passage of time limits haunts us. On 2013's sixty-fifth anniversary of Israel's birth and the ensuing Palestinian catastrophe, the lay of land and the political and intellectual discourse that survives was so different from what it was decades before that appeals to memory appeared out of place. In some quarters, such appeals were deemed irresponsible. On the seventieth anniversary, the passage of time will be acute.

Time passed is time lost. Still, in lost time there are messages for the present. Thinking through the past brings us back to the origins. The origins signal choice for the future. In the Middle East it is time to begin again. How can we break through the stalemate, anger, violence, and numbness that envelop Israel and Palestine?

1. For our purposes, diverse understandings of non-state Zionism—including those Zionists who saw a binational reality—will be gathered under the rubric “homeland Zionism.” For a current discussion of the diversity of Zionism, see Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). An example of non-state Zionism during the founding of the state of Israel can be found in Hannah Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland: There Is Still Time,” in *Hannah Arendt: The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken, 2008), 388–401.

Each people and community has a right to be at home. Home is part of the human quest. Peace, too, is a common aspiration, a necessary one. Our lives orient in the direction of home and peace. Despite great similarities with other cultures and communities, the Jewish journey features specific trajectories that set Jews apart. Jewish history claims an ancient origin and journey that begins with a world created by God and God's choice of the people Israel to be God's people.

In the biblical narrative, the main line of Israel's journey unfolds. Through Abraham, the people Israel are called into being to inhabit a certain terrain. Israel descends into slavery in Egypt, is liberated with a promise of land, enters the Promised Land, settles there, and becomes a kingdom. When, through abuse of political power, injustice reigns, the prophets appear. Israel is chastened by the prophets. Exile from the land is penalty for this abuse.

Through repentance, Israel returns to the land, is exiled again for backtracking on its promised repentance, returns, and is exiled once more. Israel then begins an almost two-thousand-year sojourn outside the land. Israel is dispersed among the nations, its anchor being the ancient formative events that inspired it.²

Jews are commanded to remember their narrative prehistory as a clarion call to a unique destiny. Jewish destiny combines religious, national, political and cultural aspects of peoplehood—in the land and outside of it. The Jewish dream is birthed, struggled for, found, lost, returned to, lost again, seemingly forever. During that loss home is prayed for, often without a realistic hope of retrieving the dream and with much anguish. Many questions arise during this journey. Jews are shadowed by the land of promise that is beyond their grasp.

Questions facing Jews multiply with the passage of time. Why do Jews exist as a people through history? Why is the promise of land important, especially when most Jews live outside the land? Is there a specific Jewish destiny and is that destiny intertwined with this specific "promised" land? How do Jews fulfill their destiny in the land? How do Jews fulfill their destiny outside the land? What are the ends of Jewish history? Is there a bridge between the dream of the land and the reality of dispersion?

We know that fate does not have the last word. Destiny, however interpreted, is open. Changes of direction are possible. All religions invoke transformation as achievable. Judaism is no exception. The challenge is to act

2. My rendition of the biblical narrative takes into account the scholarly literature critical of any overall historical sense of the biblical canon. Nonetheless, at the end of deconstructing the canon, the canon itself remains a force to be reckoned with, and not only in a critical way.

individually and in concert with others. Do I—do we—act as if transformation is possible?

In 2012, Jewish Voice for Peace, a dissident Jewish group and its Rabbinical Council, issued a Passover Haggadah that hopes for a collective effort by Jews to alter the direction of the state of Israel. Taking the tradition of breaking the middle matzah and hiding one half, to be found later as the afikomen, the Haggadah notes that once the matzah is broken it cannot be repaired completely—“irreparable damage has been done.”³

Nonetheless, the broken pieces can be reunited. The Jewish Voice for Peace Haggadah relates that reunification within past brokenness is possible in the present: “As we break the middle matzah we acknowledge the break that occurred in Palestinian life and culture with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 when hundreds of villages were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people displaced. This damage cannot be undone—but repair and return are possible.”

How does repair begin? First, Jews have to understand the history behind the present brokenness. There is no better season to explore this than Passover, when Jews relate their brokenness in slavery and delight in their liberation from bondage. The Jewish Voice for Peace Haggadah counterpoints Jewish liberation then with Palestinian dispossession now. Can Jewish liberation be celebrated today without the end of Palestinian enslavement?

Jews are commanded to place ourselves in the telling of Passover as if we *are* there—in slavery, in Egypt. But we are also supposed to be here, in the now. The subtitle of the Jewish Voice for Peace Haggadah is “Israeli and Palestinian: Two People, One Future.” The dating is 2012 and, with the long arc of Jewish history in mind, 5772.

Distance always exists between dream and reality. This is true for every community and religion. However, the issue remains as to how Jews bridge this distance. We long for a time when the dream of liberation and the reality of liberation, for Jews and for others, will become one.

The covenant at Sinai is the culmination of the liberating actions of God in forming and promising to be with the people Israel. As well, the biblical narrative evolves after God and Israel embrace the covenant. Inherent in the covenant is a back and forth between God and Israel, which unfolds during the course of Jewish history. It is evident in the Bible. It is true today.

3. Passover Haggadah, 2012/5772, Jewish Voice for Peace, http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/sites/default/files/hagadah_jvp_final_2012.pdf. For the blog of the Rabbinical Council see <http://palestinianalmud.com/>

From the beginning, ancient Israel is faced with recurring possibilities and pitfalls. In turn, archetypes emerge in Jewish history that continues to define the Jewish journey today. Listing a bare outline of these archetypes speaks of a significant history of interpretation and contestation. The embrace of the covenant, the commandment of remembrance, and mining the ancient canon for meaning and purpose—all are ancient and ongoing. Also included is the ability of Jews to argue with God—in essence, to contest God’s will—as well as the quest for justice on earth.

These contemporary Jewish concerns are already present in the Bible. Most importantly, in the Bible, wherever injustice rears its head, but especially among the people Israel, the haunting shadow of the prophets appears. The prophetic haunting of Jewish life has renewed itself in our post-Holocaust world.⁴

The pursuit of justice in and outside of the land is present from the beginning in the biblical text. There we find a canonical reading of justice-seeking in the dynamic interplay of the Sabbath, Sabbatical year, and the Jubilee. As well, there is a cycle of settlement, exile, and return revolving around the land. These are primal markers for the Jewish people.

In the Bible, we discover that the prophetic is indigenous to the people Israel. We know that the prophetic sensibility comes before the land and has priority over it because injustice judges Israel’s sojourn there. Through God, the prophets judge Israel’s record of justice. When the prophet’s judgment is damning and Israel refuses to repent, Israel suffers grievously. The Bible records the constancy of the prophetic—when it is convenient for Israel and especially when it is inconvenient.

All of this is foreground to contemporary Jewish life and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Is it relevant today? Many think that religion simply mucks up what is already a complicated issue. The entire world cannot bring the crisis of Israel-Palestine to closure. One doubts the Bible can.

From the beginning of Jewish history there is promise of a homeland. The homeland is the Land of Israel. In the biblical story, the Land of Israel remains the Jewish homeland whether Jews are physically present in the land or not. When Jews are not in the land, they are dispersed. The Diaspora is defined over against the Land of Israel—dispersion as exile, (un)home.

Exile from the land is bitter. Yet the Diaspora is the birthplace of Judaism. Judaism is the religion of Jews that emerges primarily outside the land. During

4. For archetypes in Jewish history, see Efraim Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures: A Reinterpretation of Jewish History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For a post-Holocaust take on these archetypes, see David Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989).

the Roman occupation of Jerusalem in the first century of the Common Era, Jews revolted against Rome. They were defeated. The subsequent dispersion of the Jewish people from the land ends Israelite religion.

Israel's religious law and obligations revolved around the land and the Temple in Jerusalem. Without either, Jews needed a new religion that, though connected to the old, responded to the reality of dwelling outside the land without access to the now-destroyed Temple. A new religious system, what we know as Judaism, responded to the historical catastrophe that befell ancient Israel.⁵

Judaism forms in the Diaspora. Over the last two thousand years, for the most part Jewish history takes place in the Diaspora. In Judaism, the longing remains for the land. In 1948, that dream becomes reality. The state of Israel is born. Some Jews feel that the rebirth of a Jewish state is the fulfillment of the longing of a dispersed and suffering people. Then again, promise often loses luster when reality intrudes. The backdrop to this return is ominous—the Holocaust.

To sketch the “dream” backdrop to the reality of 1948 is to enter an uneven history. In Jewish history, dream follows nightmare, nightmare follows dream. Often in Jewish history dream and nightmare are intertwined. It is complicated to untangle them. Should we try?

Even though the Hebrew calendar extends the time of the birth of Jewish history back to creation, in modern historical terms the time of ancient Israel to 1948 spans roughly three thousand years. This history is uneven. In the last two thousand years, for example, Jews have been accepted by and lived in harmony with their neighbors. Jews have been assaulted and forced to flee their native lands. At times, Jews who were forcefully expelled from lands are later welcomed back. Centuries later the heirs of Jews welcomed back were slaughtered. In Jewish history, hope and anguish encircle each other.

The Holocaust years arrive. For many Jews, the Holocaust is a *novum* in Jewish history. It is true that Jews suffered before. But after every disaster that befell the Jewish people, hope returned. Now the numbers—and geographical reach—multiply. The Holocaust is a global assault. Every living Jew is targeted. After the Holocaust, the prospect of hope is shadowed by the specter of mass death. Hope after the Holocaust is almost unbearable.

5. Sholmo Sand disputes these historical renderings in his, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2010) and again in *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland* (London: Verso, 2012).

What should Jews do after the Holocaust? If there is hope, does hope need to be redefined? “Hope” after the Holocaust. “Liberation” of the death camps. The meanings of words change.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL

What does liberation mean—*after*? The “liberation” of the death camps seems an odd, if almost blasphemous, bonding. What is hope in light of the millions murdered and in the face of the starving survivors? Our vision has to readjust. What can the survivors of the Holocaust hope for? Jews had faced this dilemma before but not at this level. Systematic mass death is different than pogroms and expulsions. Exile is preferable to Auschwitz.

Because of this transposition of meanings, placing the Jewish journey in perspective is demanding. It is becoming more difficult for Jews with each passing day. On the international scene because of its policies toward Palestinians and the government’s bellicose pronouncements on world affairs, it is almost impossible to speak in positive tones about the state of Israel. But, even more alarming, it is increasingly challenging to speak in affirmative ways about Jews and Jewishness.

This awkwardness has to do with how Jews and Jewish history are interpreted in light of the creation and expansion of the state of Israel. What happened to Palestinians during the creation of Israel and, as much, what is happening to Palestinians today, colors the discussion of Jews and Jewishness. Because of the injustice done to Palestinians by Israel, for increasing numbers of Jews and non-Jews alike, the ancient promise of the Jewish people, as well as the dislocation and destruction of European Jewry, is consigned as a fading and irrelevant history.

Far worse, though, is when the defense of Israel becomes a slogan to mobilize Jews against others. Mobilizing Jews for Israel’s defense further denigrates Palestinians. It also denigrates the Jewish ethical tradition. Movements spring up to “rebrand” Israel, “defending” Israel and Jews against the “propaganda” of its enemies. Yet the rebranding of Israel as a positive force in the world is strongly contested by the facts on the ground that Israel is creating in its continuing occupation of Palestinians.⁶

6. One example of the rebranding is the publicity campaign arguing Israel’s liberality on gay and lesbian issues over against the more conservative Arab world. Even here, seemingly on safe ground, the claims are increasingly contested by Jewish gay and lesbian activists who do not want to trade one injustice for another. On “Pinkwashing,” see Sarah Schulman, “Israel and ‘Pinkwashing,’” *New York*

Mostly because of the plight of the Palestinian people, the world is becoming less and less interested in Jews and Jewish discourse about itself and the state of Israel. Mobilizing Jews deflects from the confrontation needed within Jewish history. Rather than addressing the issues at hand, mobilizations for Israel in the Jewish community deepens the abyss that many Jews seem unwilling to confront.

In the contemporary discussion of the Middle East, Jews and non-Jews who oppose Israel's policies toward the Palestinians are disparaged in public. To silence dissenters, the Holocaust is invoked. Jewish leaders especially warn that the Holocaust is part of the Jewish future rather than confined to history. In their view, weakening Israel inevitably leads to another Holocaust. In many quarters, the defense of Israel is akin to a religious commandment. The commandment has to be obeyed by Jews even if criticism of Israel is justified.

Dissenters against Israeli policies are lumped together. It hardly matters whether dissenters are Jewish or non-Jewish, American or European, Israelis who dissent within their own country or Palestinians who resist their dispossession. At one time, the Jewish establishment saw the threat to Israel as mainly coming from the Palestinians and Arab nations. At another time, the threat emanated from Lebanon and then Iraq. Then it was the Arab Spring. Now it is Iran. Separately or together, they are part of a second, seemingly eternal, another-Holocaust chorus.⁷

In turn, vilified Jews and non-Jews sometimes denigrate the promise and hope of ancient Israel. These critics single out for particular attention the use of violence in pursuit of that dream, at least as narrated in the Bible. The state of Israel is perceived as repeating the biblical pattern of ancient Israel cleansing the land of its indigenous inhabitants. Forgotten is that other ancient and contemporary histories are similarly filled with violence. A few scholars who think that the history of ancient Israel is connected to the present-day violence of Israel demand that the parts of the biblical scriptural narration be condemned. Israel's narrative of its origins is transposed into modern history and judged from a contemporary vantage point.⁸

Times, November 22, 2011. Also see her *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

7. Events such as September 11th also set off this discussion of antisemitism. For an interesting example of this genre see Gabriel Schoenfeld, *The Return of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Encounter Books, 2004).

8. Unfortunately, some of these works veer into historically antisemitic areas, in this case defined as vilifying Jewish texts as Jewish though historically used by Christians in their violence against others. The late Michael Prior is an example. See his *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

Disentangling the ancient and the modern, weaving and unweaving the tapestry of Jewish history and hope that can be embraced and acted upon in solidarity with others, is clearly a challenge. After the Holocaust, and after what Israel has done and is doing to the Palestinians, this task is even more challenging. Yet the challenge must be met forthrightly. Otherwise, the ethical history of the Jewish people will be consigned to the unspeakable. Antisemitism will also have its say.

As the situation in Israel and Palestine continues its downward spiral, mythic claims about Jews and Jewish history return. Once again, Christian antisemitism and Enlightenment suspicions about Jewish particularity fill the air. While the Jewish establishment exaggerates and exploits these fears for its own advantage, denying negative feelings about Jews is hardly the right response. Rather, sorting out truth and fiction is important.

Ancient conspiracy theories about Jews are being modernized. Jews are accused of controlling the media and the global economic system. The U. S. Congress is felt to be beholden to Jews. Some believe American Jews and Jewish Israelis orchestrated the tragedy of September 11th, 2001, to further Jewish interests. The list goes on.⁹

The debate about ancient Israel and its application to the modern world is also spiraling downward. Jewish history represents an important trajectory in world history. The attempt to demean and denigrate this history is misplaced. Instead, it is important to follow ancient Israel and the Jewish people through the complex maze of history. We glean positive lessons of a destiny Jews internally embrace and project in the world. Instead of demeaning, we should struggle to encounter Jews and Jewish history in a constructive way. In this encounter we are neither passive bystanders nor superficial critics. As Jews and non-Jews we come into a critical solidarity with the unfolding of Jewish life.

Solidarity means that all sides refrain from romanticizing embraces or demonizing cheap shots. The challenge is to enter into a people's journey while maintaining a certain distance from it. Being with and outside of a people's journey, as an insider or outsider, provides a vantage point to learn about the struggles of other peoples as well. Over the course of any history, no community, religion, or nation is innocent. Nor should any community be demonized. Entering into relation with others, a critical solidarity is necessary. Can it be any different with Jews?

The increasing inability to reason about contemporary Jewish life is worrisome. Jews are culpable in this difficulty precisely because the narrative of

9. For a more measured analysis on the history of antisemitism to contemporary times, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013).

Jewish history is often presented as one of innocence. This innocence is then coupled with the right to aggress against others, as if aggression is also innocent. Aggression is redefined. Aggression isn't aggression.

This “Jewish aggression in Israel against the Palestinians that isn't aggression, thus Jews as innocent” bundle is presented as essential to secure Jewish survival in light of an ill-defined Jewish destiny. By constantly referring to suffering in the Holocaust—as if only Jews have suffered in history – *and* pretending to innocence in Jewish empowerment in Israel, Jews, most especially Jewish leadership, appropriate a narrative justification to use power over against the Palestinian people without accountability.

The Jewish establishment enables violence in the name of destiny, all the while claiming innocence. Others have used destiny as their *raison d'etre* to demean and slaughter Jews. They, too, claimed innocence in their pursuit of Jews, a claim that since has been convicted within the communities that once claimed it. Can Jews escape that very same judgment by others and even by Jews themselves? One day will Jews indict themselves in regard to the violence done to the Palestinian people?¹⁰

To get behind this narrative of innocence is important. Parsing Jewish culpability and the different choices that could have been taken is important. We can do this by paying attention to history. In this regard, a brief survey of the origins of the Zionist movement is fruitful. In the Zionist movement, we find innocence as well as an intense realism. We discover patterns of Jewish history as well as a people in need.

As the twentieth century dawned, the religious and secular wings of the Zionist movement began to settle Jews in Palestine. For Zionists, Palestine was the Land of Israel. In their settlements in the land, Zionists found fulfillment of their dream of return. The exile that seemed indeterminate and was increasingly dangerous might be coming to an end.

A minority of the Jewish settlers were religious. They sought an “ingathering” of Jews as a harbinger of messianic times. Most of the Jewish settlers were secular. They sought a safe haven that augured a “normalization” of the Jewish condition wherein Jews would be safe, secure, and self-governing. Dwelling among others had been dangerous. In the land of their own, Jews would determine their own fate.¹¹

10. See one of my early books that references this theme: *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).

11. On a history of Zionism, see David Vital's multivolume work, *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); *Zionism: The Formative Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and *Zionism: The Crucial Phase* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

A small majority of religious Zionists were Orthodox Jews. They looked askance at the prospect of normalizing the Jewish condition. The Orthodox believed Jews were singled out for a specific destiny that would be fulfilled when Jews returned to the biblical land God promised to Jews. Settling in the Land of Israel was a commandment. The rest was left to God. Orthodox Jews believed that only God could initiate the messianic era. Religious Zionists had little desire to change the social, economic, or political conditions of Palestine itself.

Secular Zionists had a different vision. For secular Jews, normalization of the Jewish condition was the hope. Secular Zionists did not want to be set apart any longer. Their idea was to change the concrete material and political conditions of European Jews. In their Palestine, Jews would breathe free and develop their own way of life.

Secular Jews wanted to be free of Christian power and religion. They also wanted to be free of Jewish religion and the authority of the rabbis. To become free, Jews needed a state. Secular Zionists wanted a Jewish state for Jews like France was for the French and England was for the English. Since a Jewish state did not exist, it would have to be built—by Jewish hands.

Although Zionism was a minority position in the Jewish world, the energy surrounding the movement grew as the twentieth century unfolded. During these years, the pros and cons of Zionism were debated. Zionism became an organizing principle for Jewish uplift and self-sufficiency.

There was significant opposition to Zionism. Many Jews sought peace, freedom, and security in the lands where they lived. They viewed Zionism as a retrograde movement that sought a return to an outdated nationalism. It might even be dangerous for Jews. Jews were scattered all over the world and, at that, were a small minority of the world's populations. Would the world tolerate a Jewish state and, in the end, what benefit would a Jewish state accrue to Jews who remained minorities in other nations?¹²

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Zionism's ultimate direction and success was in doubt. There were contentious disputes within Zionism as to what Zionism should hope to attain. What would a successful return to the land mean in relation to Jewish identity for Jews who lived in the land and for those who continued to live elsewhere? If there was a return, how should Jews govern themselves? Should Jews live in the land with others or should there be a Jewish state? Should Jews go it alone in the land or Jews need a colonial sponsor?

12. One case study of dissent against Zionism is found in Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942–1948* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

Homeland Zionism was a dissenting form of Zionism. Unlike Zionists that wanted a Jewish state, homeland Zionists saw their mission as the development of an educational, spiritual, cultural, and linguistic center in the land for Jewish people everywhere. In their vision, some Jews would live in the Jewish homeland. Many Jews would continue to live in the Diaspora. Although homeland Zionists favored a homeland for Jews, the Land of Israel would be shared with the Palestinians. Palestinians would also have their own homeland there.

Homeland Zionists were against the creation of a Jewish state for a variety of reasons. They feared a state would corrode the ideals of Judaism and Jewish destiny. A Jewish state would create enmity with Arabs already living in Palestine. A Jewish state would need protection against outside forces, including the Palestinian Arabs, who would suffer from its establishment. A Jewish state would, of necessity, be militarized.

A Jewish state would become like any other state. In numerous ways, Jews would be recreating the states they lived within. Would such a state be an advance for Jews? Would Jewish energies outside the state also have to be devoted to the state for no other reason than its survival?

For state Zionists, homeland Zionists were idealists. Their ideals would recreate the instability of the Diaspora they were trying to escape. Homeland Zionists would exist within another alien environment, surrounded now by Arabs rather than Europeans. Since most Jewish settlers were European, the animosity of the Arabs might be even greater than the non-Jewish Europeans from which the Zionists were trying to remove themselves. Besides, as Europeans, state Zionists were trying to recreate the Europe they were escaping, this time under protected Jewish auspices.

State Zionists were interested in the Land of Palestine because of its Jewish roots. As Westerners, they had a colonial sense of the backwardness of the East and of Arab culture. State Zionists wanted Europe in the Middle East. The thought of being Arabized filled them with foreboding.¹³

Enthusiasm within the various forms of Zionism increased as the Ottoman and British Empires diminished in power and authority. Enthusiasm increased further in the 1920s and 1930s as the world plunged into economic depression. With the ascension of the Nazis to power, and then the ensuing world war that culminated in the Holocaust, the Zionist movement coalesced. In 1948, just three years after the end of World War II, the state of Israel was born. State Zionism became the state of Israel. Homeland Zionism faded from history.

13. For a view of non-European Jews on the state of Israel, see Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 201–232, 320–58.

THE BIRTH OF ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN CATASTROPHE

The disjunction of the Jewish dream and the reality is central to the state of Israel's birth. It is impossible to approach this chasm of Jewish distinctiveness and normalization and the reality of Jewish life in Europe and Palestine without the perspective of Jewish history. Likewise, it is impossible to approach it without the prior history of those already in the land, the Palestinians.

With the creation of Israel, the Jewish dream of a state and the reality of Palestinian existence clashed. The collisions of two histories began. Each anniversary of the state of Israel also marks an anniversary of the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe. The creation of the state of Israel and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs from their land go hand in hand. Historically, they cannot be separated.¹⁴

Zionism predated the Holocaust, the Jewish catastrophe. Nonetheless, the Holocaust provided the last push that brought fledgling Jewish settlements into a state formation. From the beginning, the clash of Jews and Palestinians was a catastrophe in motion. One catastrophe led to the other. Now they exist side by side.

The Holocaust, the creation of Israel, and the Nakba are beside one another. They cannot be separated. Nor is there an end in sight for their joint journey. We do not yet know whether Jewish Israelis or Palestinian Arabs will be the ultimate victims of this joining of catastrophes and state building—or even if there will be an ultimate victim.

Perhaps the original Jewish and Palestinians catastrophes will be transformed into a mutual justice that transcends the suffering of both peoples. Jews and Palestinians may one day develop a mutual solidarity that diminishes the catastrophes that befell both peoples. Absent a Palestinian state, though, another larger catastrophe might be in the offing. Both peoples may go down together.

As Jewish forces fought for a state in the wake of the Holocaust, the demise of the British Empire left the Middle East segmented and weak. The international community took note of Jewish suffering and supported the creation of Jewish state. There was also an awareness of the Palestinian question. This is evidenced in the United Nations Partition Plan and the subsequent involvement of the United Nations in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁵

14. For a recent perspective on the Palestinian Nakba, see Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London: Zed Books, 2012)