

## Introduction

### **Israelis and Palestinians Seeking, Building and Representing peace. A Historical Appraisal.**

by *Marcella Simoni*

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Issue n. 5 of *Quest* presents ten papers on the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rather than focusing on its dynamics through its well-known calendar of wars, retaliations and violent confrontations, or through the parallel history of diplomatic negotiations - failed at one point or another with the exception of Camp David (1979) and of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty (1994) – this issue offers a different perspective: it does not look at the so-called hundred years war of the Middle East through the lenses of opposed nationalisms, of questioned borders and of contested land, of ethnicity or of citizenship issues. Instead, it examines and discusses the theoretical standpoints and/or the practical experiments of coexistence devised at different historical moments by some Israeli and/or Palestinian individuals, groups, associations or later non-governmental organizations (NGO) from the 1930s to the present. The approach has been interdisciplinary, as the category of ‘conflict’ is not a purely historical and political one, but one that also pertains to the individual and the communities involved. In this respect we have tried to put Israeli-Palestinian conflict in perspective, taking into account also its representation, to help deconstruct the idea that the conflict is inevitable, permanent and all-pervasive. In brief, our focus has been on some of the alternatives that from below tried to transform the conditions of a “medium-intensity protracted conflict” (alternated by periods open warfare) that Palestinians and Zionists/Israelis experienced since the times of the British Mandate (1922-1948).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Israeli-Palestinian conflict falls into the definition of “medium- intensity protracted conflict” in the categorization of John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

## Civil Society

One of the most obvious keys to read the papers collected in this volume is that of civil society activism. Civil society is a much used and abused term. As it is central to this work, I would like to give here a concise theoretical framework. Definitions of civil society usually make reference to two common usages of the term. The first is a spatial one, broad and relatively value-free, intended to cover all those activities, associations, institutions and relations which neither belong primarily to the domestic sphere, nor to that of the state. The second is more narrowly normative, intending to distinguish between ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ society. Normative content has differed greatly over time, and that which distinguished Adam Ferguson’s ‘civil society’ in late 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland is not the same as that of the ‘Centre for Civil Society’ at the London School of Economics at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nonetheless, they have a common point of contact in their insistence that civil society usually consists in a network of associations organized by active citizens who take an interest in public affairs.<sup>2</sup> The strength or weakness of the two great institutions which lie on either side of civil society - the family and the state - obviously exercise a great influence upon it. Over-powerful families and kinship networks can suffocate the possibility of civil society, based as it is on the free meeting of individuals.<sup>3</sup> As for the state, it can either aid civil society, offering it meeting places, resources and encouraging its activities, or else it can work to undermine it, stunt its growth, or simply destroy it.<sup>4</sup> At the end of this introduction, we will encounter one such attempt. I would also like to stress that civil society cannot be understood without emphasizing the transient character of many of its manifestations, and the possible conflict between them.

This framework calls into the picture four factors that most literature on civil society - and on its history - has attributed to it: shared values, horizontal linkages of participation, boundary demarcation and interaction with the state.

- A. Shared values** These are usually progressive values of reform and/or construction, and lie at the heart of a community’s identity. They can reflect collective anxiety about possible disruption.<sup>5</sup> They can emerge

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<sup>2</sup> Helmut K. Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, “Introducing global civil society,” in *Global Civil Society 2001*, eds., Id, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 15.

<sup>3</sup> Marcella Simoni, “Israel and Palestine through Family, Civil Society and State. An Overview,” in *The Golden Chain. Family, Civil Society and the State*, eds. Jürgen Nautz, Paul Ginsborg and Tom Nijhuis, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2013): 219-239.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy, Society and Politics 1943-1988*, (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1990): 141-185.

<sup>5</sup> As in the case of the *yishuv*. See Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness, State, Society and the Military*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001): 91.

out of a process of political and/or armed resistance.<sup>6</sup> They can represent the needs of a group of individuals and/or private institutions engaged in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> There can also be a conservative model of civil society within which tradition is defended.<sup>8</sup> Among the values upheld by the civil society discussed in this issue, one finds nonviolence, at times conceived as a collective political strategy, at times seen as a personal lifestyle. One also finds, in varying degrees, a refusal of nationalism, of nationalist narratives and of its founding political myths, as well as an emphasis on the recovery and elaboration of individual and collective historical memory. Last but not least, one also finds the recognition of the suffering, history and of the rights of the Other, together with the acknowledgement of the conditions of asymmetry that have characterized the relations between Israelis and Palestinians at least since 1967. In all cases, the values of civil society are forged through horizontal linkages of participation.

**B. Horizontal linkages of participation:** Participation leads to the construction of a network that regulates the organization of the social structure. The network is more than an admixture of various forms of association.<sup>9</sup> It is founded on shared/homogenous values that perpetuate the identity of civil society. Networks can be ‘dense’ when they are structured in a territorially compact mode. They can be ‘loose’ when they are spread in society.<sup>10</sup> Looking at Israel alone, there never was a hierarchical relation between groups engaged in peace-building. In the 1980s, ‘Peace Now’ was possibly the best known group; since then, it was flanked by a myriad of other Israeli, Palestinian and joint organizations, in correspondence with the exponential growth of civil society activism in local and international politics since the end of that

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<sup>6</sup> As in the case of post-1945 Italy for example, or of post-1967 Palestine. Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); Dag H. Tuastad, *The social capital of Palestinian refugees*, Paper presented at the Third Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, EUI, RSC, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> R. D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). For civil society formation and the interests of donors see D. Williams and T. Young, “Governance, the World Bank and Liberal Theory” *Political Studies* 42 (1994): 84-100, 87. See also Peter R. Davis, J. Allister McGregor, “Civil society, international donors and poverty in Bangladesh” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 38/1 (2000): 47-64; Rob Jenkins, “Mistaking ‘governance’ for ‘politics’: foreign aid, democracy, and the construction of civil society,” in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, eds. Sudipta Kaviraj and Suni Khilnani, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001): 250-268.

<sup>8</sup> As, for just one example, the controversial case of Algeria in all its complexity. See Cathie Lloyd, *Multi-causal Conflict in Algeria: National Identity, Inequality and Political Islam*, Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper Series – QEHWPS104, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> *Civil Society in the Middle East*, ed. Augustus R. Norton, (Leiden New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995): 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Reti: L'analisi di network nelle scienze sociali*, ed. Federica Piselli, (Roma: Donzelli, 1995).

decade.<sup>11</sup> The acknowledgment of the post-1967 asymmetry in the relations between Israelis and Palestinians is in this case a precondition for the creation of those horizontal links that allow Israelis and Palestinians to take part to shared activities in a civil society framework.<sup>12</sup>

**C. Boundary demarcation:** Civil society does not represent the whole of society of a given historical or political context; it only includes that section which shares its values and which is perceived as culturally compatible. As Ernst Gellner has argued, this “modularity of men for each other” (or their “substitutability”) is what allows the growth of civil society.<sup>13</sup> Cultural homogeneity – or at least compatibility – demarcates the cultural, social and political space of civil society.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the values of an Israeli conscientious objector in the 1950s were not identical to those of a Palestinian embracing nonviolence in 1987 or in 2000. The message of dialogue and coexistence promoted in ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam’<sup>15</sup> is not exactly the same as the one promoted by the Sulha Peace Project.<sup>16</sup> The kind of education received in the NSWAS schools was – and still is – different from that promoted in the schools of ‘Yad b’Yad’ or in other educational peace programs. Consider, just for three examples, the cases of the NGO ‘Windows-Halonot,’ of the ‘Israeli Palestinian Center for Research and Information’ (IPCRI), or of ‘Peace, Research Institute in the Middle East,’ (PRIME), the collective author of the famous textbook translated as *The History of the Other* in dozens of other languages.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See at least, Benjamin Gidron, Michal Bar, Hagai Katz, *The Israeli Third Sector between Welfare State and Civil Society*, (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004); see also the webpage and the publications of the Ben Gurion University ‘Center for Third Sector Research’ and the publications therein presented, <http://web.bgu.ac.il/Eng/Centers/ICTR> accessed 13 June 2013. Shany Payes, *Palestinian NGOs in Israel. The Politics of Civil Society*, (New York: Taurus Academic Studies, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> See Marcella Simoni, “Sul confine. L’attivismo congiunto israelo-palestinese,” in *Quaranta anni dopo. Confini, barriere e limiti in Israele e Palestina (1967-2007)*, eds. Arturo Marzano and Marcella Simoni, (Bologna: Il Ponte, 2007): 72-88.

<sup>13</sup> Ernst Gellner, “The importance of being modular,” in *Civil Society, Theory, History, Comparison*, ed. John A. Hall, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995): 32-55 and 43-50.

<sup>14</sup> Cultural affinity within a community is also considered one of the main factors for the development of popular sovereignty within democracies. See Oren Yiftachel, “Homeland and Nationalism,” *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, Vol. I, (Boulder CO: Academic Press, 2001): 359-383, 366.

<sup>15</sup> As spelled on their website [www.nswas.org](http://www.nswas.org), accessed 10 June 2013

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.sulha.com>, accessed 10 June 2013.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.handinhandk12.org>; [www.win-peace.org](http://www.win-peace.org); [www.ipcri.org](http://www.ipcri.org); <http://vispo.com/PRIME/>, all accessed 10 June 2013. The first edition of the famous textbook *Learning Each Other's Historical Narrative* is now fully available online. See <http://vispo.com/PRIME/narrative.pdf>, accessed 10 June 2013. For a history of these and other joint Israeli-Palestinian NGOs, their motives behind their foundation, the funding they receive, their programs and their aims see Simoni, “Sul confine.”

Some of these cases are analyzed in the papers presented in this issue. There could be hundreds of examples. Even if the values of each of these (and other) organizations do not exactly coincide, they are all compatible in a broader cultural and political framework informed by the values mentioned above. Internal cultural compatibility is essential for civil society, for its internal functioning, for determining its boundaries and to render effective its transformative potential.

**D. Interaction with the state:** Civil society creates its own representative institutions and ultimately represents itself. It however needs a dialectical (and political) counterpart with which it can negotiate its political advancement and its attempt to transform the political reality. As in the Gramscian model - where civil society represents a space of conflict and negotiation where hegemony is contested<sup>18</sup> - the dialectical and political counterpart of civil society is generally embodied by the state.<sup>19</sup>

Shared values, an extended network, cultural homogeneity/compatibility, boundary delimitation and a dialectical counterpart are by no means the only elements which make a society civil. Nor are they the only elements that can turn civil society into a political process, and often into a transformative one. However, they represent the necessary and sufficient conditions for it to be considered as such. The individuals, groups and associations analyzed in the following pages are part of this framework.

## Historiography

The second interpretative key for this volume is historiographical. Most of the large historical production on the Arab-Israeli conflict has focused on the various aspects that have made it a Gordian knot, by definition impossible to untie. The focus has thus been on the limitation of land and resources, on the clash between two opposed nationalisms and the long-term influence of their founding myths, the widespread militarization of society, the claims of ethnicity and religion, the history of failed diplomacy, the role of terrorism, the

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<sup>18</sup> Norberto Bobbio, *Saggi su Gramsci*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> For an approach which sees the relationship between civil society and state as reciprocal and therefore overall balanced, see Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a view which sees the growth of civil society as a result of the weakness of the state see Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe and Post-Communist Europe*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996). Here civil society is presented as the space where cooperation is at work and where opposition to the state is built. In this sense the model of Linz and Stepan represents a simplified version of that of de Tocqueville where civil society is considered, among other things, also as the antechamber of political society.

ongoing occupation, the pouring of foreign funding as an instrument of conflict perpetuation; all these are just a few examples of a vast academic and cultural production framed in the terms of the inevitability of conflict and of its transmission. This extensive literature did capture how the conflict originated and developed, but it has not been able to escape – in its analysis and proposed narrative – from the paradigm of conflict that the conflict itself has perpetuated and continues to spread.

This issue of *Quest* intends to advance the perspective proposed by Zachary Lockman in *Contending Visions of the Middle East*<sup>20</sup> which raised some of the questions that feature in this volume too: how have different theories, models or modes of interpretation shaped the kind of questions scholars have asked about the Arab-Israeli conflict? (And therefore, what answers they have come up with?) What methods and sources have they used, and what meaning have they given to the results of their inquiries? One of the starting points of this issue is therefore the concept of ‘politics of knowledge,’ i.e., the idea that the way we acquire and transmit knowledge is essentially political. This issue also connects to a previous work by Zachary Lockman, his seminal *Comrade and Enemies*,<sup>21</sup> when he pointed to the need for a ‘relational history,’ i.e. a history that by acknowledging how the identity of the parties in conflict is shaped by their interaction, is also able to avoid the paradigm of conflict in its analysis. Thus, this issue looks at some intellectual production, at some theoretical debates and at some case studies that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aimed peace-building between Israelis and Palestinians. The Authors who have contributed to this volume evaluated these efforts not only for their actual success or failure, but also for their effectiveness in changing the overall narrative from one of conflict to one of dialogue. At least two other collections of essays, edited by Sandy Sufian and Mark LeVine, and by Elisabeth Marteu, preceded this issue on this very same route.<sup>22</sup>

The existing historiography on peace-building in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be divided into three broad categories: first, historical studies on the Israeli peace camp, with a special (and limiting) focus on ‘Peace Now’; these also include a large body of autobiographical writings by peace activists.<sup>23</sup> Second, a

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<sup>20</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East. The History and Politics of Orientalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Id., *Comrades and Enemies. Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine 1906-1948*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> *Reapproaching Borders. New Perspectives on the Study of Israel-Palestine*, eds. Sandy Sufian, Mark LeVine, (Lanham, Bourled, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); *Civil Organizations and Protest Movements in Israel. Mobilization around the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Elisabeth Marteu, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> David Hall- Cathala, *The Peace Movement in Israel 1967-1987* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990); Mordechai Bar-On, *In Pursuit of Peace: a History of the Israeli Peace Movement* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), Tzaly Reshef, *Peace Now: from the Officers’ Letter to Peace Now* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1996), (Hebrew); Norell Magnus, *Democracy and Dissent: the*

vast production of studies on the post-1993 situation, when civil society was entrusted with the task of conflict transformation, an effort at peace-building from below meant to integrate the peace-making from above which governments had signed in Oslo. This kind of literature is very often based on theoretical models drawn from the political sciences, as in the works of John P. Lederach and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, just to quote two examples.<sup>24</sup> An important influence is that of Johan Galtung who established peace studies as a discipline and as a method and whose bibliography is extensive.<sup>25</sup> Third, a number of studies which, by using a comparative perspective with other contexts where ethnic and/or religious conflict has been/is rife, aimed at deconstructing the uniqueness often attributed to the Israeli-Palestinian case.<sup>26</sup>

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*Case of the Israeli Peace Movement Peace Now* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); for the numerous publications of Tamar Hermann on 'Peace Now' and the Israel peace movement see [http://www.openu.ac.il/Personal\\_sites/tamar-hermannE.html#a05](http://www.openu.ac.il/Personal_sites/tamar-hermannE.html#a05), accessed 15 June 2013. At the end of the decade into the following one Michael Feige broadened the perspective, contextualizing the rise of left- and right- wing civil society grassroots activism in a more complex political picture, with two well-known articles and a monograph. Michael Feige, "Peace Now and the Legitimation Crisis of 'Civil Militarism'" *Israel Studies* 3/1 (1998): 85-111; Id., "Rescuing the Person from the Symbol: 'Peace Now' and the Ironies of Modern Myth," *History and Memory* 11/1 (1999): 141-168; Id., *One Space, Two Places. Gush Emunim, Peace Now and the Construction of Israeli Space*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), (Hebrew). For some examples of texts written by activists who responded to the urge of making sense of their involvement in the peace camp by writing about their experiences see Bassam Abu-Sharif and Uzi Mahnaimi, *Best of Enemies: the Memoirs of Bassam Abu-Sharif and Uzi Mahnaimi* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995). Michel Warschawski, *A contre-choeur: les voix dissidentes en Israël*, (Paris: Textuel, 2003); *Creating a Culture of Peace*, eds. Gershon Baskin and Zakaria al-Qaq, (Jerusalem: IPCRI, Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, 1999). *Live from Palestine: International and Palestinian Direct Action against the Israeli Occupation*, eds. Nancy Stohlman and Laurieann Aladin (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2003); *Tears in the Holy Land. Voices from Israel and Palestine*, eds. Deanna Armbruster and Michael Emery, (Portland: Arnica Publishing, 2004). We find the same need to offer a testimony among politicians and diplomats, for instance Shlomo Ben-Ami and Menachem Klein, Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Quel avenir pour Israël?* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001). See Menachem Klein, *A Possible Peace between Israel and Palestine: an Insiders' Account of the Geneva Initiative*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> *Building peace* and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process, 1977-1982: in Search of Legitimacy for Peace* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> See *Johan Galtung: Bibliography, 1951-90*, ed. Magne Barth, (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1990). See also Johan Galtung, *Essays in Peace Research*, (Copenhagen : Ejlers, 1975); Id., *Peace and World Structure*, (Copenhagen : Ejlers, 1980); Id., *There are Alternatives! Four Roads to Peace and Security*, (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1984); Id., *Choose Peace. A Dialogue between Johan Galtung and Daisaku Ikeda*, (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1995); Id., *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996); Id., *Transcend and Transform : an Introduction to Conflict Work*, (Bolder, CO, Paradigm, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> The most frequent comparisons are with Northern Ireland and South Africa. While up to 2000, the comparative perspective emphasized factors of conflict, the new century delivered a number of works on comparative peace-building. Roy Uprichard, *The Cycle of Conflict in Israel and Northern Ireland*, (Belfast: Dept. of Politics, Queen's University of Belfast, 1990); Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples. Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Thomas G. Mitchell, *Native vs. Settler. Ethnic Conflict in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, and South Africa*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), belong to the first group. Among the second, Colin Knox, *Peace Building in Northern Ireland, Israel and South Africa*.

As mentioned above, the aim of this issue is different; we intend to show the existence of another narrative, a ‘minority report,’ so to speak, which challenges the generally accepted discourse on the Middle East in terms of conflict alone. As we shall see below, in the past twenty years, such a representation has been one of the cornerstones of a mainstream narrative that turned the political and historiographical discourse on the Middle East *in loco* and abroad into a “single thought” or, according to the definition of Michel Foucault, into a “regime of truth.” It is to this last point that I now turn.

### The single thought

The aim of this issue is thus not only to look at the history of peace-building in Israel and in the oPt through the prism of civil society, or to re-insert bottom up activism into the historiography on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is also a critical aim, which is ultimately political. In particular, the case-studies seen here – that together cover a long-term period, from the 1930s to the present – attest to the existence of pieces of history that seem to have vanished from the standard (hegemonic) narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While in the 1990s the notion of hegemony, its implications and the ways in which it was displayed, were extensively debated in the academia,<sup>27</sup> this question appeared in a different guise in 1995, when journalist Ignatio Ramonet published an article on *Le Monde Diplomatique* entitled *La pensée unique*. He opened his piece with very strong words:

Stuck. In contemporary democracies, more and more free citizens feel stuck, blocked by a sort of vicious doctrine that, imperceptibly envelopes, inhibits, paralyzes, and eventually suffocates all rebel

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*Transition, Transformation and Reconciliation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); *Mobilizing for Peace: Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and South Africa*, eds. Benjamin Gidron *et al.*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Guy Ben-Porat, *The Failure of the Middle East Peace Process? A Comparative Analysis of Peace Implementation in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland and South Africa*, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> The notion of hegemony, its relation with power on the one hand, and with subalternity on the other, as well as the idea of a hegemonic narrative, have been discussed at length both in the theory and through numerous case studies. Here is a very brief list of titles dealing with the subject; Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998); Benedetto Fontana, “The democratic philosopher: Rhetoric as Hegemony in Gramsci” *Italian Culture* 23 (2005): 97-123; Alberto Moreiras, “A Thinking Relationship: The End of Subalternity. Notes on Hegemony, Contingency, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101/1 (2002): 97-131; *Challenging Hegemony: Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Nigel Gibson, (Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2006).



reasoning. This doctrine is the single thought, the only authorized by an invisible and omnipresent opinion police.<sup>28</sup>

Ramonet described the single thought as a catechism of neoliberal economic principles supported by major economic and financial institutions, legitimized by mainstream economic press, and propagated by university and research centers. This article referred to Europe's post-1989 transformation into a continent with a single currency, whose leading institutions gave scarce, if any, attention to social and labor policies in support of unification, in part as a result of the recent collapse of socialist ideals.

Is this framework of any relevance to the Israeli-Palestinian context? Is there any connection between the development of such a single thought in Europe in the mid-1990s, as Ramonet describes it, and the post-Oslo context in Israel and the oPt?

Discussing the post-Oslo years, contemporary historiography described the mid-1990s in optimistic and hopeful terms.<sup>29</sup> However, as it is well known, this period generated one of the most violent phases that the conflict had known until then; the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000 brought suicide bombers to Israel on the one hand, and led to the reoccupation of entire Palestinian areas previously evacuated by the IDF. "Rebel reasoning" is maybe too much to ask for in the midst of such violent, traumatic and threatening times for both Israelis and Palestinians. Still, the essays presented in this volume (and, as mentioned above, elsewhere too), show a thread – a continuity - of alternative thought and action – theoretical, practical and political - that kept running even during the bleakest times of the conflict, indeed the times that helped the emergence of the 'single thought'.

This consolidated around the themes of fear and security, control and technology, military threats and military reactions, strength and training, closure and separation. Indeed, these are some of the keywords that historiography has also used to describe this period, mainly in reference Israeli society and state.<sup>30</sup> As for Palestinian society and politics, the dominant

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<sup>28</sup> Ignacio Ramonet, "La pensée unique" *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Archives, Janvier 1995, <http://archive.wikiwix.com/cache/?url=http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1995/01/RAMONET/1144&title=%C2%A0La%20pens%C3%A9e%20unique%C2%A0>, accessed 16 June 2013. See also Ignacio Ramonet, *The Geopolitics of Chaos. Internationalization, Cyberculture & Political Chaos*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Nathan Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords. Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) and Ben-Porat, *The Failure of the Middle East Peace Process?*

<sup>30</sup> Just for four examples among the many possible, see Sylvain Cypel, *Walled. Israeli Society at an Impasse* (New York: Other Press, 2006) esp. from ch. 10; Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land. Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, (London, New York: Verso, 2007); *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion. Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, eds. Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi (New York: Zone Books, 2009); Juliana Ochs, *Security and Suspicion. An Ethnography of Everyday Life in Israel*, (Philadelphia, Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

thought at the times precluded any open condemnation of violence against the Other, with some exceptions, as discussed in the following pages. One of the ways the single thought finds an expression in the oPt today is the consistent refusal of research centers, departments and even individuals to participate to any initiative that sees the presence/participation of an Israeli counterpart.

Other factors might have helped the gradual consolidation of the single thought in Israel in the mid-1990s. In 1996 Benjamin Netanyahu won the country's first direct election for prime minister on a 'Likud'-'Gesher'-'Tzomet' ticket. The 'National Religious Party,' 'Yisrael B'Alyiah,' 'United Torah Judaism' and 'The Third Way' supported his government. As it is well known, under this leadership, Israel embraced a neoliberal socio-economic and political stand, a foreign policy and a security doctrine that, at the turn of the century, developed within a neo-conservative political framework.<sup>31</sup> In part for economic reasons, in part for the ways in which security concerns were addressed in Israel, the feeling of general insecurity and precariousness that Ramonet had seen developing in Europe started to spread in Israel too.<sup>32</sup> In turn, these generated a widespread demand for more military or strategic security, the construction of the separation barrier being a case in point. The outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000 - and the dramatic four years that followed - helped nurture and fulfill some of the assumptions of that approach.

By gradually asserting itself as dominant, the single thought turned into a single narrative that excluded other narratives - some of which are examined in the pages that follow - and obscured their political potential, to the extent of marginalizing, if not erasing, them from the public debate, cultural or otherwise. The single thought functions both as events unfold, and retroactively, causing the fall of segments of history that could still carry some transformative potential and relevance even decades after.<sup>33</sup> According to Michel Foucault, this is the process that ultimately leads to the construction of a "regime of truth," i.e. a historically specific mechanism producing discourses which function as true in particular times and places. Zachary Lockman

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<sup>31</sup> See Uri Ram, *The Globalization of Israel: McWorld in Tel-Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008). Guy Ben-Porat, "Netanyahu's Second Coming: A Neoconservative Policy Paradigm?" *Israel Studies* 10/3 (2005): 225-245 and Dani Flic, *Political Right in Israel: Different Faces of Jewish Populism*, (Florence KY: Routledge, 2009). See also Myron Joel Aronoff, "The Americanization of Israeli Politics and Realignment of the Party System" *Israel Studies* 5/1 (2000): 92-127.

<sup>32</sup> This is also connected to the lack of political claims and contents of the protest movement that occupied the squares and the parks of Tel Aviv in the Summer of 2011. See Yoel Marcus, "The comatose state: why Israel needs a Tahrir Square," *Haaretz*, 4 July 2013 and Daniel Monterescu and Noa Shaindlinger, "Situational Radicalism: The Israeli "Arab Spring" and the (Un)Making of the Rebel City" *Constellations* 20/2 (2013): 1-25

<sup>33</sup> Consider Yeshayahu Leibowitz; for a recent view on his thought, politics and life see the documentary by Uri Rosenwaks and Rinat Klein, *Leibowitz: Faith, Country and Man*, 2013.

addressed the complexities of such constructions by looking at how the convergence of certain social, economic and political interests at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century helped the emergence of a single thought – and indeed of a “regime of truth” - in reference to Middle Eastern studies in the US.<sup>34</sup>

The ten essays presented here show that, historically, there never was a single thought among Israelis and Palestinians; on the contrary, they tell of the liveliness, endurance and constant presence of civil society initiatives, bottom-up experiments and attempts to build dialogue and coexistence far away from the spotlight of media and of the failed attempts of diplomacy.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, they also confirm that there exists a single thought today, that tries to thwart the efforts of civil society in various ways: through legislation, funding cuts, individual expulsion and through cultural policies choices.

This could be in itself the subject of research; for reasons of space and opportunity, I will just mention a few examples: on a political level, passing the bill (still under discussion) proposed by MKs Ofir Akunis and Faina Kirshenbaum during the 18<sup>th</sup> Knesset, and recently revived by MKs Ayelet Shaked and Robert Ilatov, would imply the dismantling of that network of NGOs – local and international - that represent the most vibrant part of the civil society that operates today between Israel and the oPt.<sup>36</sup> More practically, Israeli and Palestinian activists are more and more frequently detained/harassed/hindered; consider what happened to Israeli activists of NGO ‘Zochrot’ for distributing - on Israel’s independence day - leaflets listing

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<sup>34</sup> Zachary Lockman, “Critique from the Right. The Neo-conservative Assault on Middle East Studies” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 5/1 (2005): 63-110.

<sup>35</sup> Many such attempts have been documented in movies and documentaries. See for example Ronit Avni, *Encounter Point*, 2006; Julia Bacha, *Budrus*, 2009; Julia Baha and Rebekah Wingert-Jabi, *My neighbourhood*, 2012; Rebekah Wingert-Jabi, *Homefront. Portraits from Sheikh Jarrah*, 2012; see also [http://www.ted.com/talks/julia\\_bacha.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/julia_bacha.html) and the website of ‘Just Vision’ for portraits of Israeli and Palestinian leaders in the peace camp, [www.justvision.org](http://www.justvision.org), accessed 12 June 2013. See also the numerous films and documentaries featured on the Ruth Diskin Films catalogue, <http://www.ruthfilms.com/films/docs/politics-and-conflict.html> accessed 12 June 2013.

<sup>36</sup> This second version of the bill would forbid an NGO from receiving more than NIS 20,000 from “foreign entities” if that organization, its members, employees or anyone related to it does one of the following explicitly or implicitly: calls on Israeli soldiers to stand trial in international courts, calls for a boycott of Israel or its citizens, denies Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state, or incites racism (illegal) or calls for an armed struggle against Israel (illegal). Furthermore, the “softened” bill includes the clause that makes an NGO liable for the “sins” of its members and employees. The bill’s previous version treated each NGO as a corporation, while this time an NGO would be in violation if just one member, manager or employee were found doing something that explicitly or implicitly contradicted the thought police’s rules. See Jonathan Lis, “Knesset revives attempt to restrict foreign funding of left-wing NGOs,” *Haaretz*, 10 July 2013; [n.a.], “Ignorant of democracy, extreme right is after NGOs once again,” *Haaretz*, 15 July 2013; Amir Fuchs, “The return of McCarthyism - in Israel,” *Haaretz*, 15 July 2013.

the names of Palestinian villages evacuated and/or destroyed in 1948;<sup>37</sup> or to those protesting settlement in Sheikh Jarrah.<sup>38</sup> On a different plain, NGOs like 'Machsom Watch,' 'Zochrot,' 'Breaking the Silence' and others face increased logistical and political hindrances when they organize tours in the West Bank, in Hebron, along the Separation Barrier, or on former Palestinian villages.<sup>39</sup> As a final example, consider the recent restrictions imposed on European aid agencies in response to the EU's new guidelines blocking scientific and financial cooperation with Israeli institutions linked to the settlements.<sup>40</sup> Dismissing the history of those who, apparently, always remained on the wrong side, is yet another means to make the single thought advance.

### Organization of the volume – From the call for papers to the issue

This volume presents ten essays that the board of *Quest* and the editor have selected among the many received following an international call for papers entitled *Israelis and Palestinians seeking, building and acting peace*. This was first circulated in January 2012 and it found an echo in the Italian daily newspaper «Corriere della Sera» a few months later.<sup>41</sup>

The ten essays included here discuss different aspects of the history of peace-building in Israel and among Palestinians, and all relate one to the other. They certainly do not exhaust the many, manifold and quite exciting research possibilities that exist in this field. The volume is organized as follows: the first three essays (Daniele, Rioli, Pouzol) take a long-term perspective: they start their examination in, or before, 1948 and carry it on to the present through various historical turning points. The five essays that follow (Simoni, Calabrese, Simons, Norman, Dyer) focus on more specific case studies on the history or the experience of either Israelis or Palestinians. The last two essays (Michel, Nets) have been grouped together at the end of the volume for three reasons: because they once again return to a perspective that includes Israelis and Palestinians; because they both deal with issues of representation; and because both essays maintain a twofold frame of reference, national/local and international.

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<sup>37</sup> Jack Khoury, "Israeli left-wing activists held indoors by police during Independence Day event," *Haaretz*, 26 April 2012. See <http://zochrot.org/en>, accessed 15 June 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Nir Hasson, "15 arrested protesting Jewish takeover of East Jerusalem," *Haaretz*, 22 January 2010; Orly Noy, "Beware of mayors with 'new policies,'" *Haaretz*, 22 January 2010; Nir Hasson, "Author David Grossman: Settlers abuse Palestinians," *Haaretz*, 29 January 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Anat Rosenberg, "Tourist tip #72 / Alternative tours," *Haaretz*, 22 October 2012.

<sup>40</sup> [n.a.], "A childish retort to the Europeans," *Haaretz*, 29 July 2013.

<sup>41</sup> The call is available at <https://www.facebook.com/notes/quest-issues-in-contemporary-jewish-history/call-for-papers-israelis-and-palestinians-seeking-building-and-acting-peace/247345022001210>, accessed 14 June 2013; Stefano Jesurum, "Israeliani e palestinesi visti da "Quest." Un nuovo modo di capire l'altro," *Corriere della Sera*, 6 Aprile 2012.

## Part I

Giulia Daniele examines from a critical point of view some prominent intellectual debates and historic examples that challenged a reality of conflict with the Other. In the first part of her essay, she analyses some aspects of the thought of Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Hannah Arendt and of Edward Said. Daniele presents their ideas on nationalism, binationalism and coexistence as fertile ground that generated in time an overall political perspective that allowed various political initiatives in later years. These could be joint strikes or demonstrations, the foundation of joint NGOs or more lasting experiences like ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam’ (‘oasis of peace’) established by Father Bruno Hussar in 1969. Indeed, the second essay, by Maria Chiara Rioli, focuses specifically on ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam’. This essay starts with an analysis of the personal, religious and political biography of Bruno Hussar and then analyzes the transformations of his creature, the ‘oasis of peace,’ the place where Hussar and his group experimented a direct form of coexistence between Jews, Christians and Muslims in Israel; the history of ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam’ *per se* is not unknown, but Rioli based her work on new and hitherto unpublished primary sources. The final parts of her work consider the political strives that marked the more recent history of that community. The third essay by Valérie Pouzol analyzes women’s involvement in peace activism from 1948 to the present. The article shows how Israeli and Palestinian women played a vital role in building, and often in restoring, dialogue, often organizing away from the spotlight. This essay discusses one of the most durable legacies from women’s peace activism: the formulation of new political discourses which defined peace in terms of a global concept that links gender and national oppression, and thus creates an alternative discourse strongly opposed to violent and militarist options.

## Part II

The essays that follow are ordered chronologically and all deal with peace-building from below from various perspectives on the background of the region’s main turning points. The fourth essay by Marcella Simoni focuses on the 1950s, one of Israel’s most militaristic decades, to draw a social and political portrait of the first group of war resisters and of their association, ‘War Resisters International – Israel Section’ (est. 1947 as an affiliate of War Resisters’ International, WRI, est. 1921). The essay examines the implications of being a conscientious objection in Israel in the 1950s in terms of world-view, political stand, international contacts, as well as in terms of the military and social consequences of this choice. From the fifth essay onwards, the historical turning points specifically referred to are 1967, the first (1987) and the second Intifada (2000). Essay n. 5 by Cristiana Calabrese and essay n. 6 by Jon Simons should be mentioned together, at least considering the well known

conceptual framework elaborated by Michael Feige that discusses how the Israeli political space of the 1970s was contended by two actors, ‘Gush Emunim’ and ‘Peace Now.’<sup>42</sup> While the essay by Jon Simons deals with ‘Peace Now,’ that of Cristiana Calabrese inserts a new actor in the field, i.e. the Jewish orthodox peace movements that were established to monitor and oppose ‘Gush Emunim.’ Among them, ‘Oz Ve Shalom,’ ‘Netivot Shalom,’ ‘Meimad,’ ‘Shomrei Mishpat/Rabbis for Human Rights’ and ‘Eretz Shalom,’ all founded between 1975 and 1988. They did not have the same political relevance of ‘Peace Now’ and ‘Gush Emunim;’ still, they are examined here in a cohesive way that presents them as a possible third presence in Israeli public space at the time. The sixth essay by Jon Simons focuses on the activism of ‘Peace Now’ in the period 1987-1993. In particular, Simons conceptualized the advocacy by ‘Peace Now’ as public relations activity that promotes images of peace, communicating its ideas by means of slogans in the form of material signs which were figured graphically in print media, on posters, flyers, placards and stickers. Relying on these and other sources, the essay discusses some of the contradictions and ambiguities of the messages that ‘Peace Now’ transmitted through images. Maintaining a historical perspective through its emphasis on memory, essay n. 7 brings us closer to the present. Relying on field work and on a vast array of interviews conducted during the second Intifada, Julie Norman discusses to what extent did first Intifada memories and experiences influence nonviolent activism in the second Intifada. As it is well known, historiography has conceptualized the first Intifada largely as a non violent resistance movement,<sup>43</sup> but this essay discusses the limitations of using memory for mobilization in the face of new challenges, arguing that nostalgia for past eras can be a double-edged sword in motivating participation in later attempts at nonviolent struggle. Essay n. 8 by Erin Dyer analyses the specific case study of the ‘Holy Land Trust’ (est. 1998) an NGO that serves to empower the Palestinian community in Bethlehem through a commitment to the principles of nonviolence, and to mobilize the local community, regardless of religion, gender, or political affiliation, to resist oppression in all forms, so as to build a model for the future based on justice, equality, and respect. Both the essays by Norman and by Dyer make extensive reference to the existing literature of nonviolent action, in particular to the works of Gene Sharp.

### Part III

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<sup>42</sup> Feige, *One Space, Two Places*. See also Ehud Sprinzak, *Fundamentalism, Terrorism and Democracy: the case of Gush Emunim Underground*, see [http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://www.geocities.com/alabasters\\_archive/gush\\_underground.html&date=2009-10-25+12:14:47](http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://www.geocities.com/alabasters_archive/gush_underground.html&date=2009-10-25+12:14:47), accessed 16 June 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Elizabeth King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance*, (New York: Nation Books, 2007) and Souad Dajani, “Nonviolent Resistance in the Occupied Territories: A Critical Reevaluation,” in *Nonviolent Social Movements*, eds. Stephen Zunes, Lester R. Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 52-74, 58. See also Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada*, (London: Zed, 1991) and Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

The two final essays discuss the potential of peace building through issues of representation, looking at both local and international influence, although in very different ways: essay n. 9 by Chantal Catherine Michel looks at artistic and creative representation through a small, but constantly expanding sub-genre: comics and graphic novels about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Michel discusses the value of comics as educational and peace-building tools, analyzing the works on the conflict by both local and international authors; she focuses more in depth on the comics by Israeli and Palestinian authors Uri Fink, Galit and Gilad Seliktar, and Samir Harb. This essay shows how comics can, under the condition that the concerned groups can access them, contribute to peace building. Rafi Nets-Zehngut, the author of the tenth and final essay, also deals with issues of representation, although of a different kind. His essay discusses the apparent contradiction between the rough times on both the political and military levels of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the summer of 2000 and the flourishing of one type of collaboration between the two parties, i.e. addressing the historical narratives of the conflict. Nets-Zehngut examines for the first time nine such collaborations of Palestinians and Israeli-Jews, conducted both *in loco* and abroad, amongst themselves and with international partners. This essay on narratives has been placed at the end of this issue for two reasons: first, because it explicitly remarks the importance of bottom-up initiatives, which are by their very nature less conservative than institutional projects, a theme which runs through the whole volume. Second, because one of the keys for a more hopeful future lays indeed in the deconstruction of national narratives, and of the political myths that support them. Their filtering down from academia into public opinion and consciousness represents one of the true antidotes to the spreading of the single thought.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Federico for his support, love and sense of humor, always there when needed; and Arturo, for his always good advice, for his friendship and for the many productive discussions. Many thanks also to the other Editors of Quest, for their compact support when necessary. A very special thanks to Dr. Laura Brazzo, the Editorial Assistant of Quest, whose patience and dedication made this publication possible.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of my father, Luca Simoni.

Firenze, 20 July 2013.

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