The Tree of Knowledge still bears fruit

Rajmil Fischman

Abstract

This article discusses a contemporary interpretation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, considering knowledge as a multi-staged process that affects individuals, societies, and their history. Deepening of knowledge often questions the consensus on rights and wrongs, influences our perception and interpretation of reality, and results in new narratives. This discussion is the result of a cross-fertilization of artistic and political concerns in the setting of the poem and musical composition Ets HaDa’at (the Tree of Knowledge), created for the Meitar Ensemble and premiered during the festival commemorating the centenary of Tel-Aviv. The proposed interpretation of Adam and Eve’s expulsion implies a recognition that knowledge remains incomplete and that, in pursuing and understanding it, we will be “expelled” many times from Eden. Expulsion may not only happen in a conceptual manner (i.e., having to rebuild our worldview) but also in other contexts: for instance, being socially ostracized, or politically and physically persecuted by those who are in positions of power. By the same measure, it may lead to mutual empathy, to understanding of the aspirations, hopes, frustrations and pain of everyone involved, and, crucially, to an understanding of our own (and others’) wrongdoings so that we initiate the long process of healing.

Keywords: Middle East, Palestine, Zionism, identity, antisemitism, art

... men think themselves free inasmuch as they are conscious of their volitions and desires, and never even dream, in their ignorance, of the causes which have disposed them to wish and desire.

Baruch Spinoza

This article discusses a contemporary interpretation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, considering knowledge as a multi-staged process that affects individuals, societies, and their history. Deepening of knowledge often questions the consensus on rights and wrongs, influences our perception and interpretation of reality, and results in new narratives. This discussion is the result of a cross-fertilization of artistic and political concerns in the setting of the poem and musical composition, sonic arts theory and music software development.

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composition *Ets HaDa’at* (the Tree of Knowledge),\(^2\) created for the *Meitar Ensemble*\(^3\) and premiered during the festival commemorating the centenary of Tel-Aviv.\(^4\)

*Ets HaDa’at* aims to encapsulate the Garden of Eden tale as an embodiment of *presentational* and *practical* knowledge\(^5\) (Heron & Reason, 1997: 280–281), integrating traditional musical materials with contemporary music and electronics within the amalgamation of the biblical subject and present reality. It emerged as part of a life-long ongoing learning processes on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that attempts to transcend the narratives within which we were originally raised and educated.\(^6\) In this context, it is only a microscopic constituent of a vast body of knowledge in the form of reports, political analysis, legal commentaries, academic contributions, archives, etc., many of which are the fruit of committed activism by individuals and organizations;\(^7\) and, of course, other artistic production.

The proposed interpretation of Adam and Eve’s expulsion implies a recognition that knowledge remains incomplete and that, in pursuing and understanding it, we will be “expelled” many times from Eden. Expulsion may not only happen in a conceptual manner (i.e., having to rebuild our worldview) but also in other contexts: for instance, being socially ostracized, or politically and physically persecuted by those who are in positions of power. By the same measure, it may lead to mutual empathy, to understanding of the aspirations, hopes, frustrations and pain of everyone involved, and, crucially, to an understanding of our own (and others’) wrongdoings so that we initiate the long process of healing.

**Knowledge and the Biblical tale**

Genesis 2.8–3.24 depicts the chain of events that led to Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden after following the snake’s advice and disobeying God’s only prohibition: “but the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (2.17). Their punishment for disobedience also implies that reaching a state of knowledge carries with it dramatic implications: in their “transgression”, Adam and Eve attempted to resemble God who knows all and, for this, lost their idyllic life.

We may consider knowledge as a four-staged process consisting of 1. *Acquisition* of information, whereby Adam and Eve realize that their bodies are uncovered. 2. *Comprehension* of the significance and implications of nakedness. 3. *Action* in response to the ethical mechanisms triggered by comprehension; e.g., covering nakedness with garments. 4. *Alienation* from their previous conception of life and the world, which will never be the same; i.e., they are expelled from paradise. This process applies to individuals and societies in a variety of contexts throughout human history. For instance, scientific discovery also progresses from the acquisition of information, to comprehension, to action which has ethical implications – e.g., findings and technologies for the benefit or affliction of humankind – and, finally, to changing human societies. Likewise, it is particularly relevant to human conflagrations, as discussed in the following section.

**“Eden” in political conflict**

When considering the idea of knowledge as an unsettling and live-changing influence within the sphere of political conflict, the Garden of Eden paradigm proposed here refers to the premises, beliefs, myths and narratives that constitute the ethos of each party involved, to their practical experiences, to the hopes and fears these generate, and to the power to challenge all the former in order to construct bridges toward conflict resolution. The knowledge process defies the sense of righteousness within which individuals and societies involved in the conflict have been brought up and nurtured. It concerns each party’s certainty of the justice of their own cause, and the knowledge and rationale that support this certainty.
The condition of bliss preceding the allegoric consumption of the fruit of knowledge is rooted in clear-cut conceptual and experiential “truths” that may be conceptualized within a process of ideological squaring used to underpin the claim: “we are right – they are wrong” (Van Dijk, 1998). In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this is exemplified in studies carried out by Daniel Bar-Tal and Rafi Nets-Zehngut at Tel-Aviv University, who found that “most of the [Israel’s Jewish] nation retains a simplistic collective memory of the conflict, a black-and-white memory that portrays us in a very positive light and the Arabs in a very negative one”. They recognize that “Israeli awareness of reality was also forged in the context of Palestinian violence against Israeli citizens [i.e., their practical experiences], but relies primarily on prolonged indoctrination that is based on ignorance and even nurtures it”. Bar-Tal also stresses that “Palestinian collective memory suffers from similar ills, and that it is also in need of a profound change”. Their findings demonstrate the importance of changing the collective memory of conflicts, making it less biased and more objective – on condition, of course, that there is a factual basis for such a change ... when the country’s education system and media are willing to deal with distorted narratives, even a collective memory that has been etched into people’s minds for years can be changed. (Eldar, 2009)

In other words, it is possible to “be nourished” by the tree of knowledge with a true potential to transform reality, and to metaphorically round the ideological square, eroding the delimitation of “our” and “their” rights, wrongs, entitlements, duties and accountability.

But how does a musical work fit within this framework of transformative knowledge? Can artistic expression contribute to political and social debate, let alone being a factor of change?

Ways of knowing

The reader would be right in questioning the time and effort invested in creating a poem or a musical work, rather than adopting a scholarly approach that generates knowledge through the establishment of causal links that are based on logical arguments, supported by referenced evidence. Of course, propositional knowing “expressed in statements and theories that come with the mastery of concepts and classes that language bestows” is essential in understanding the world. However, it is incomplete when considered as part of a wider epistemology that emerges from a participative worldview. In this epistemology, propositional knowing interacts and is interdependent with other ways of knowing and this process is ultimately manifested in “action [that] not only consummates the prior forms of knowing but is grounded in them”: knowledge of our worlds is more profound “when we are more interested in enhancing them with excellence of action than in learning about them” (Heron & Reason, 1997: 281). This learning process develops critical subjectivity, “an awareness of the four ways of knowing, of how they are currently interacting, and of ways of changing the relations between them so that they articulate a reality that is unclouded by a restrictive and ill-disciplined subjectivity” (ibid.: 280): what we know is richer and deeper when “descriptive knowledge is incidental to a primary intention to develop practical skills to change the world” (ibid.: 281). In this context, Ets HaDa’at is predominantly presentational knowing grounded on experiential knowing, by virtue of my experience of the daily reality in the Middle East conflict. But it is also founded on acquired propositional knowledge.

There are two aspects of poetic and musical expression that contribute to their potency that differentiates them from the propositional: concision and affective power. Like poetry, music is concise in the way it can encapsulate messages with relatively few materials and shorter time frames. Both affect us emotionally, in a visceral manner that, while not impossible in a propositional context, is not inherent in the latter. As a straightforward illustration of these mechanisms, consider the following lines:
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Purpose is but the slave to memory, Of violent birth, but poor validity; Which now,
like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree; But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be. Most
necessary 'tis that we forget To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt: What to
ourselves in passion we propose, The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.14

Arguably, 17th-century knowledge of memory, willpower and affects, and their influence on
human behavior would occupy several pages if they were to be expressed as propositional
“statements and theories” in a formal scientific compendium. However, while not competing
with the rationality of scientific methodology, Shakespeare’s eight lines embody and convey
the most prominent attributes of such knowledge succinctly. At the same time, the lines
embody a poignancy which affects our feelings; engraving these concepts within us by means
of metaphor and simile, in a manner that would be very difficult to achieve in a scientific
discussion of human psychology.

Similarly, music articulates the symbolism of particular combinations of sounds and
tropes that have acquired meaning through the historic formation of cultural conventions
and technological development (acoustic instruments and electronic devices). For instance,
the turbulent acquisition of information that leads to a climatic realization at the beginning
of Ets HaDa’at15 is instantiated as follows:

1. High-pitched short “stabs” (flute, clarinet, piano) over a sustained trill in the
violincello.
2. Violoncello is joined by sustained notes (flute, clarinet and violin) forming a chord.
3. The chord becomes louder (crescendo).
4. Resolution into a descending figure leading to ...
5. ... low pitched stabs in the piano and bassoon against sustained notes (flute, clari-
et) and fast repeated (tremolo) notes (piano, violin, and violoncello).
7. New increase in loudness (crescendo).
8. Resolution into a loud short chord encompassing a wide pitch range.
10. Singer unaccompanied vocalizing the word Yode’a (I know).16

Clearly, while this describes the technical means used to create this passage, it cannot articu-
late its emotional content. Therefore, the reader is strongly encouraged to listen to the music
so that propositional knowing in this article is completed by means of other ways of knowing
embrodied in Ets HaDa’at.17

Poem and music

The structure of the poem and music reflect the four-staged knowledge process, symbolically
enacting it in time. The first two stages – acquisition and comprehension – begin with the
utterance of a single Hebrew verb as a descriptor of action: Yode’a, described in the previous
section, and Mevin (I understand).18 The third stage – mechanisms that demand action – is
refined into substages that also begin with single words which, with one exception, are also
verbs: Mitvade (I confess),19 Mishpat (judgment, jurisprudence),20 Maazin (I listen).21 The
fourth stage – new conception of the world – makes use of cultural and ethical symbols,
which are transformed and transfigured.

Ets HaDa’at ends in an epilogue that addresses the listener directly. After having
been “tempted” by the piece to taste from the tree of knowledge, the latter is now ensnared
in the process leading to the expulsion from Eden, as part of a new iteration of the knowl-
edge cycle. The unforgiving and ruthless nature of the Tree of Knowledge does not even
allow for inadvertent behavior: once we know something new, we are set to follow the con-
sequences of acquiring that knowledge to its ultimate conclusion.
Yode’a (acquisition of information)

As discussed above, acquisition of new information begins the knowledge process leading to the reconfiguration of the worldview upheld thus far. This is illustrated here in the case of three short case studies, representative of the numerous narratives that have developed throughout the last 140 years since the origins of the conflict.

The barren land

Deepening our historical knowledge challenges the myth that Palestine was unpopulated in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This often-invoked argument was unequivocally espoused by Golda Meir: “Israel has brought to fruition the labour [sic] of Jewish pioneers who, since the turn of the century, gave their lives to transform a barren and denuded land into fertile fields, flourishing settlements and new patterns of society” (Meir, 1973: 447; Dana & Jarbawi, 2017: 199). Her position stands in stark contrast with historical population figures: according to the British Mandate administration 1922 census, the 83,694 constituents of the Jewish Yishuv accounted for 11% of the 757,182 inhabitants of Palestine, of which (84%) were Muslims and Christians (Barron, 1922: 5). Meir’s statement is also inconsistent with Ahad Ha’am’s much earlier recognition that Palestine in the 1890s was populated (Rodinson, 1973: 37).

However, the barren land mythology is rather more convoluted, as we can learn from David Ben Gurion’s 1918 reference to “the inhabitants already existing in the country” while, at the same time, calling Palestine a “semi-desolate land” that is capable of supporting 6 million inhabitants. Ben Gurion also makes a distinction between the “conservative non-Jewish interests … designed to preserve that which exists” and the “revolutionary Jewish interests” that aim “to create something new, to change values, to reform and to build” (Gilbert, 1998: 38). In light of such statements, it may still be possible to argue that Meir refers to empty swathes of land that could be colonized despite the existence of a population who, in addition, would benefit from Ben Gurion’s promised technological advancement and progressive approach. Furthermore, such an approach would not harm them since it enables the existence of a much larger population. But would this be acceptable if it happened anywhere else? To illustrate the point, imagine a state or ethnic group deciding to establish a new or separate national entity in Finland or Sweden because these are so sparsely populated. Clearly, this would be unacceptable because taking such action would infringe on Finish and Swedish people’s sovereignty and right to self-determination, regardless of any potential material benefits … unless sovereignty and self-determination were denied on the basis that the inhabitants of Finland and Sweden do not have a national identity. Hence a complementary aspect to Meir’s position consisting of her repeated denials of a Palestinian identity (Wikipedia, 2024a).

Palestinian nationality

Narratives denying a Palestinian identity have persisted to this day in political statements, academic debates and, as a result, in the consciousness of some sectors of the general public: for example, in the argument that Palestinian identity was constructed as a reaction to Jewish national aspirations or the identification of Palestinians as Arabs who happen to live in a particular territory. Information acquisition challenges these narratives. For instance, the activity of Jamal ad-din al-Afghani’s around Theodor Herzl’s time. Al-Afghani’s recognition as the “father” of Muslim nationalism (Rodinson, 1973: 41) places him in a leadership role parallel to that of Herzl’s position of founder of modern Zionism. Also, Palestinian self-determination movements, both local and pan-Arabic, developed in parallel to political
Zionism’s emergence as the leading tendency that aimed to the creation of a national state. Manifestations of these movements include public calls by the Nashashibi family notables for an independent Palestine as early as 1909 (Pappé, 2022: 77), the 1918 establishment of Palestine’s first-ever political party, the Christian-Muslim Association (ibid.: 75) and the seven Palestinian congresses in the 1920s (ibid.: 80). The Ottomans were well aware of Palestinian political activity: in 1914, the Turkish military commander Jemal Pasha “struck out at all manifestations of nationalist feeling, Jewish and Arab. Several Arab leaders were hanged in Beirut and Jerusalem” (Gilbert, 1998: 30).

It is true that effective Palestinian national movements and organizations developed at a slower pace than their Zionist counterparts, and were therefore less prepared than the latter to defend Palestinian interests when the British Mandate ended. But this does not necessarily indicate that Palestinian consciousness did not exist, that it just emerged as a reaction or that Palestinians viewed their national interests and self-determination with less urgency than the Jewish Yishuv (Pappé, 2022: 68–114). On the contrary, it points to the difficulties they had to overcome due to the fact that there was already a Palestinian socio-political formation, with a traditional economy and class structure – in contrast to the opportunities available to the Zionist Yishuv to create all these from scratch. Ironically, the “conservative non-Jewish interests designed to preserve that which exists” identified by Ben Gurion, obstructed the development of modern Palestinian entities that could stand up to those formed in order to crystallize the “revolutionary Jewish interests”.

The nature of Zionism

Zionism, a collective designation of diverse groups that had as a common element the plan to create a center for all Jews of the world – generally (but not always the case) in Palestine (Rodinson, 1983: 137), has generated many alternative narratives and mythologies. One particular narrative is that of a monolithic project acting in cahoots with European imperialism (Awad & Levine, 2020).

While it is true that eventually political Zionism’s became hegemonic in the movement, the latter also consisted of different groups which engaged in serious debates concerning the Palestinian population and the type of state Zionism they aspired to establish. In order to advance its cause, Zionism’s leadership engaged in diplomatic negotiations with the imperial powers of the day in the same way as Palestinian and other Arab leaders did.

It is also the case that Israeli laws, policies and practices have become increasingly consistent with that of ethnic nationalist projects (Davis, 2003; Amnesty International, 2022); particularly after 1967 and especially since the 1977 election of the right-wing Likud party. On the other hand, internal opposition and debate have followed this process at all levels. For example, in the 1950s Moshe Sharett prevented the mass expulsion of internally displaced Palestinians: he was also “a key figure in the movement for the abolition of the [1948–1966] military regime” (Pappé, 2022: 148). Three months after the six-day war, the Socialist organization in Israel (Mazpen) published the following newspaper ad:

Our right to defend ourselves from extermination does not give us the right to oppress others. Occupation entails Foreign Rule. Foreign Rule entails Resistance. Resistance entails Repression. Repression entails Terror and Counter-Terror. The victims of terror are mostly innocent people. Holding on to the Occupied Territories will turn us into a nation of murderers and murder victims. Let us get out of the Occupied Territories immediately. (Matzpen, 1967)

And in 1972, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the outspoken Israeli critic, denounced the “semblance of a Greater Israel as a new Rhodesia, that sustains itself on Arabic work and Jewish domination – with all its inevitable consequences”. He believed that this was already taking place in the early 1970s, “in the labour market and the economy, in the increasing
corruption of Jewish society and in the transformation of national consciousness into predatory nationalism ... of a colonial kind” as manifested “in the governance of the Occupied Territories” (Leibowitz, 1972).40

The debate is still open as to whether this systematic intentionality still applies to 1948 and before; i.e., “the claims that the notion of forcible ‘transfer’ is inherent in Zionism, and that in 1948 the Zionists simply seized the opportunity to displace and dispossess the Arab inhabitants of the country” (Shlaim, 1995). Historians researching first-hand oral accounts of the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe) and/or studying declassified Israeli documents initially found no evidence that Palestinians left their homes voluntarily in the belief that they would soon be back after invading Arab armies completed their mission.41 They neither found conclusive evidence that Israel forcibly expelled en masse the Palestinians who left: Benny Morris’ work in the 1980s yielded “no blanket orders handed down from above for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians” (ibid.: 295) and concluded that Palestinian displacement was a result of war. However, over three decades of abundant research since Morris’ conclusions, Pappé recognizes that, while the “absence of a master plan has led Benny Morris to conclude that the expulsion of the Palestinians was not premeditated or planned and that what occurred in 1948 was merely a matter of à la guerre, comme à la guerre”, history shows that there is rarely a master document that lays out a careful and systematic plan for the mass murder or expulsion of a certain ethnic or religious group, although Walid Khalidi has demonstrated ... how close Plan D(alet) came to being just such a document ... The evidence is in the deed itself, not the documents behind it. But contextualizing the evidence both historically and (ideo)logically helps historians to assess the perpetrators’ level of preparation and to expose the role of ideology in the execution of brutal policies of dispossession and destruction. (Pappé, 2020: 26).42

Pappé provides documentary and oral evidence of organized plans to depopulate Palestinian urban centers such as Lydda and Ramla, villages in Western Galilee in the case of operations “Ben Ami”, “Ehud” and, of particular significance, to the displacement of Palestinians to Gaza from neighboring towns (ibid.: 28–32, 35–37). Still, it is quite possible that these plans were the result of the local and global contexts that developed throughout the duration of the British Mandate, rather than the materialization of an intrinsic element of Zionism. This perspective is also valid when viewing Israel’s post-1948 position toward Palestinians in and outside its territory, and the legal framework and practices that supported it (Davis, 2003).43

As we delve further back in time, the view of Zionism as an imperial monolithic project becomes less credible when we examine the details of the historical events and material conditions during the end of the 19th century and the first four decades of the 20th. Antisemitism and the oppressive socio-economic conditions of Jewish people in Europe that led to massive Jewish migrations to escape violence and poverty, the mixed results of assimilationist tendencies and the strong effect of European nationalist ideologies (which also influenced Palestinian and pan-Arab national movements at the time), had a seminal role in the emergence of political Zionism. As conditions in Europe deteriorated after the Nazi’s ascension to power, emigration accelerated and was met with quotas by target countries, creating a refugee crisis, catalyzing the Yishuv’s efforts into the creation of a national state and prompting the world powers to support these efforts. Therefore, while we can argue that political Zionism led to inevitable colonial consequences, this is not the same as demonstrating that such consequences were premeditated from the very beginning or part of a covert original plan. Rather, it is important to recognize that the process leading to these consequences emerged at a time of desperation and that it involved serious internal strife. For instance, Zeev Jabotinsky’s aggressive position became sidelined when he had to leave the mainstream Zionist movement in 1923 (Pappé, 2022: 78), and in 1948, the tensions
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between the Israeli provisional government and dissidents from the Irgun resulted in the loss of many lives when the newly formed Israel Defence Forces (IDF) attacked and destroyed the ship Altalena (Gilbert, 1998: 211–214).

As for Zionism’s focus on Palestine, it is the case that the biblical argument linking it with present Jews is tenuous, and that the connection between the latter and those who lived there until the Roman expulsion remains unverified. On the other hand, Jewish people’s “shared consciousness of identity and regular interchange among local groups” (Rodinson, 1983: 139) engendered numerous projects intent on re-establishing a significant community in Palestine: albeit limited and generally unsuccessful, these projects stretched throughout the Diaspora’s history (Rodinson, 1983: 141).

Over 50 years ago, Rodinson concluded that Israel is the culmination of a process that fits perfectly into the great European–American movement of expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries whose aim was to settle new inhabitants among other peoples or to dominate them politically ... The Jews attracted by Zionism emigrated to Palestine, and then dominated it. They occupied it in deed and then adopted legislation to justify this occupation by law. (Rodinson, 1973: 89–90)

The brutal socio-political conditions that evolved since Rodinson’s pronouncement can make us forget that there were credible efforts to create a different reality. Although historians may dismiss negotiations and agreements between King Faisal and Chaim Weizmann (Rodinson, 1973: 53), or doubt the honesty of the debates on binational coexistence during the Zionist Congress’ meetings during the 1920s, we must admit that these facts happened. Rodinson himself admits that many Jewish immigrants to Palestine “went there because it was the live preserver thrown to them”. But he is also fully aware that “many are those who have suffered much but have looked with indifference upon the sufferings and rights of others” (ibid.: 92).

Why is this important or even relevant? Because a refusal to recognize that conflicting positions are the result of long historical processes that depend on an interconnected web of causes beyond the control of its actors, essentializes and entrenches such positions, leading to dehumanization, impeding dialog and obstructing possible solutions in the present. In the midst of the pain and suffering caused by conflict, individuals and societies may overlook information that disturbs the often-meager consolation brought by the illusion that they are right and the others are wrong. Like Adam and Eve, who were told not to taste from the fruit, “the public censors itself and accepts the version supplied by the establishment, out of a lack of will to open itself to alternative information” (Eldar, 2009). When alternative information becomes “visible”, it can cause initial shock and disorientation but, as it is comprehended and we transition through the stages of knowledge, it may also enable deeper and more open engagement with the reality of conflict; revealing paths toward understanding the other’s motivations and enabling mutual comprehension: we are right and wrong – they are wrong and right. This is a first step toward dialog and compromise.

In the case of the narratives discussed above, acceptance of the fact that there was a Palestinian society before the arrival of Jewish immigrants provides a new perspective on the rights and aspirations of present-day Palestinians and also suggests the sensibilities required when seeking a compromise. Likewise, a better understanding of Jewish history in the context of the 19th and 20th centuries propitiates comprehension of the aspirations toward a Jewish homeland. Albeit official rhetoric does not appear to support these sensibilities, sections of Israeli and Palestinian societies show signs of comprehending these issues, even if they become submerged by the noise during crises such as the events on and following the 7 October 2023.
Comprehension constructs meaning out of information. From a semiotics perspective, it is an active process, distinct from perception and knowledge acquisition: we aim to comprehend new information by trying to make sense of it within what we knew before, thus reconfiguring our view of the world. As an illustration of this process, we will attempt to comprehend historical evidence to form a view of Israel’s declared commitment to the total destruction of Hamas as an act of self-defense.54

Before we proceed, it is essential to state unequivocally that all forms of violence are deplorable. We must not only end violence but also avoid it, and this is crucial when considering self-defense. Violence takes many forms beyond physical force. For instance, but not exclusively, economic sanctions, blockades, denial of basic necessities like food, water and shelter, denial of basic rights such as freedom of movement, and social, economic and political participation, communications blackouts and occupation.55 Some of these forms are slow and persistent, often unlikely to impact public consciousness in the same way as physical force does. But they are no less brutal, precisely because of their constancy and long duration: the pressure they build inevitably leads to more overt forms of violence. It is therefore necessary to view the paramilitary attacks on 7 October as a manifestation of these extreme episodes in a much longer process of mutual violence traced to the events of 1947–1948 and escalated since the second Intifada in 2000. The nature of the October attacks and possible atrocities committed as they unfolded56 does not change the causal chain of events or the geopolitical reasons that motivated it.57

The right to self-defense

A legal, philosophical, or ethical examination of the right to self-defense is beyond the scope of this article.58 Instead, the ensuing discussion will take a pragmatic approach to self-defense based on two basic premises: 1) the prevention and/or eradication of harm and 2) the use of reasonable measures to achieve this aim. We will respond to the following corresponding questions: 1) will the destruction of Hamas make Israelis more secure? 2) Are the massive killings and total destruction of infrastructure in Gaza reasonable measures?

Clearly, Israel had the right to defend itself by expelling the forces that crossed its southern border. The unleashing of unprecedented force on Gaza, deemed by the International Court of Justice to constitute prima facie for investigating charges of genocide brought up by South Africa, is another matter (Sagoo & Bar-Yaacov, 2024).59 However, for the purpose of this case study we will focus on the logic of the argument that Hamas’ destruction is likely to prevent future harm to Israel, and the 1982 invasion of Lebanon provides particularly relevant insights.

Israel’s invasion of Lebanon succeeded in exiling the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), expelling its combatants and destroying their infrastructure (Gilbert, 1998: 508–512). However, the vacuum left in Southern Lebanon was quickly filled by Shi’a fighters, leading to the formation of Hezbollah in 1985, which became much better armed and trained than the PLO. The leadership vacuum in the West Bank and Gaza was filled by a young generation of leaders such as Marwan Barghouti, Jibril Rajoub, Mohammad Dahlan and Mustafa Barghouti. It fostered the strengthening of the grassroots leading to the 1987 first Intifada and, significantly, to the formation of Hamas in 1987. Also, the prolonged presence of the IDF in Lebanon enabled the conditions for a then new mode of armed resistance: suicide bombers (Harel & Isacharoff, 2004: 139), and it precipitated the Sabra and Shatila massacres (Gilbert, 1998: 509–512). Israel had to wait until 1985 to withdraw from Northern Lebanon after 654 soldier deaths, and a further 14 years and 562 deaths to leave the South (Wikipedia, 2024d). Today, more powerful rockets are launched from Lebanon and Israel
faces a much fiercer organization than it did in 1982: harm has not been eradicated at all; it has become worse. Leibowitz put this bluntly: “as to the Lebanon war, there is no argument. A wide cross-section amongst us [Israel] recognise that it was a combination of daft authorities and evil folly” (Weiss, 1989: 37:17–37:36). These arguments are also evidenced in other modern conflicts, such as the US-led invasions of Afghanistan, 2001, and Iraq, 2003. The former failed to remove the Taliban and the latter resulted in the vacuum that propitiated the emergence of Islamic State of Iraq in 2003, which became ISIL in 2013 (Britannica, 2024).

Comprehension of these facts, together with previous unfulfilled promises to finish Hamas, point to the following responses to the questions above:

1. the destruction of Hamas will not make Israelis more secure. Even if Israel achieved this aim, the vacuum would be filled by more ruthless forces; fueled by the resentment caused to those who, after a 17-year blockade, lost their families, homes and belongings, endured hunger and lacked basic necessities for so long, and to thousands of traumatized orphaned children and youngsters who contemplate a bleak future.

2. The answer to the previous questions renders the killings and total destruction of infrastructure in Gaza unjustifiable, both from a pragmatic and an ethical perspective.

Therefore, Israel’s actions after the expulsion of the Palestinian Paramilitary forces cannot be an act of self-defense.

Dialogue

An obvious self-defense alternative to the violence in Gaza and the West Bank is peaceful resolution through dialogue. In this context, objections have been raised that groups like Hamas do not seek resolution by peaceful means, that they are intent on expelling the Jewish population from Palestine and that their demands are irreconcilable with any reasonable concessions. The last of these arguments generally gravitates around two issues: a one-state solution and the return of refugees. The former refers to a single binational state with equal rights for all its citizens. It figured in the Palestinian National Charter (PNC, 1968) – a much harsher document than Hamas’ Document of General Principles and Policies – which “adheres to, managing its Palestinian relations on the basis of pluralism, democracy, national partnership, acceptance of the other and the adoption of dialogue” (Hamas, 2017: Article 28). A one-state as the most reasonable solution was also debated in Zionist Congresses and espoused by Magnes and Bubber before 1948 and has been proposed by Jews and Palestinians multiple times (Said, 1999; Davis, 2003; Chomsky & Pappé, 2015; PNI, 2024): Israel’s West Bank settlement project may have already made it the only viable solution (Rattansi, 2024: 22:39–25:36). Nevertheless, the PLO, Hamas and others have declared their will to achieve compromise: the 1968 PLO Charter was modified by the Palestine National Council in 1998 to enable a two-state solution (Arafat, 1998), debunking the previous narrative of irreconcilability that surrounded the movement until the 1990s. Hamas’ document already offers such compromise: Article 20 “considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4 June 1967, with the return of the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, to be a formula of national consensus.”

Is it possible to achieve a viable two-state solution today without igniting new confrontations? Despite proclamations by politicians – whether due to a lack of knowledge or out of cynicism – a two-state solution might prove extremely difficult to implement, since it “would mean ... immediate removal of all settlers from the West Bank”, as Mustafa Barghouti, leader of the progressive Palestinian National Initiative Movement (PNI, 2024) has recently pointed out (Labour & Palestine, 2024: 1:03:09–1:03:37). A relatively recent two-state alternative in the form of a confederation proposes a possible arrangement to avoid forced
removal of settlers, but it also poses significant risks (Wilson Center, 2015). The refugee’s right of return, on the other hand, is fundamental and requires resolution in both the one-state and two-state scenarios. It would be unrealistic to expect regional peace without a just solution to their long predicament.

The objection that some Palestinian groups do not seek peaceful resolution is typical of most conflict narratives. This is not only naïve but also circular: “Israelis and Palestinians use violence because they believe that dialogue is not possible and dialogue is not possible because they use violence” – a perfect ideological square. Regarding statements of intent to expel the Jewish population from Palestine, these are now absent in both the PLO and Hamas official covenants. The latter states the belief that “Palestine has always been and will always be a model of coexistence, tolerance and civilizational innovation” (Hamas, 2017: Article 8) and “that its conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion” (ibid.: Article 16).

Finally, there is the problem of trust in the other. Again, this is typical of conflict situations and there is no assurance that mutual trust can bring resolution. However, historical evidence shows that overcoming distrust can work; for example, in the case of South Africa and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, distrust guarantees non-resolution.

**Mitvade (action)**

In the aftermath of comprehension, there are two courses of action: denial or acceptance. We can ignore the information we have acquired and comprehended, but ignoring is still taking action. On the other hand, acceptance is not simple admission, because the new worldview is not external to us: we construct it within the process of comprehension and we are part of it. It demands further action because we must live in such a world and have to bear its moral implications. We may choose not to follow the implications, which is an action. Or we may follow them and acceptance becomes an all-embracing confession:

Mitvade
Sorrow is sorrow,  
Grief is grief.

Confessing the universality of sorrow and grief initiates a process of mutual re-humanization: we feel pain as much as they do – and we have caused some of the pain.

**Mishpat – law of the land**

*Ets HaDa’at* names four towns emblematic of suffering from different modes of devastation: *Kishinev,* on the southwestern border of imperial Russia was the setting of a 1903 pogrom mythologized in Haim Nahman Bialik’s poem *In the City of Slaughter* (Harvard, 2009); *Lubya* was one of the Palestinian villages that ceased to exist in 1948 (Issa, 2020; Davis, 2003: 53–59); *Jenin* endured vast destruction in 2002 during operation *Defensive Shield* (Lowenstein, 2002). *Sderot* has been the main recipient of rocket attacks launched from Gaza since 2001. While physical violence is present in all cases – towns “smitten with fires” – some of these towns were also “hit by laws”. Specifically, the frequency and violence of pogroms such as Kishinev depended on the legal protections afforded to Jews by the Tzar. Also, prevention of the return of refugees, and the rebuilding of destroyed towns such as Lubya was enforced by the legal system instituted in Israel in the 1950s; particularly the mandatory emergency regulations imposed on Palestinians living in Israel, the law of return, the citizenship law, the law of Keren Kayemet Le-Israel (the Jewish National Fund, JNF), and the Absentees’ Property Law. The enforcement of these laws resulted in almost all Palestinian owned land [being] taken by the government and turned into state land, to be sold or leased only to Jews... Palestinian land, which on the eve of the
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war amounted to about 4.6 million dunams within the territory that became Israel, was reduced by 1950 to half a million dunams. By 2000, even though the Palestinian population had grown tenfold, the amount of land available to them remained almost unchanged. (Pappé, 2022: 150)

Jewish National Fund estimates indicate that purchases of land until 1948 only amounted to 10% of the area of Israel (ca. 400,000 dunam) and that an additional 2% was transferred directly by the British Mandate. The remaining 88% mainly belonged to the category of Absentees’ Property (Lehn & Davis, 1988: 132; Gilbert, 1998: 256). All these figures challenge the narrative that most of Israel’s land was purchased by consensual agreement between the Zionist organizations and the original owners, and provide a stark picture of Palestinian suffering caused by dispossession.

After 1967, the emergency regulations served as a basis for the legal framework imposed in the West Bank and, before it was enclosed, in Gaza. In tandem with the construction of settlements, corresponding infrastructure and economic domination it gradually established a de-facto version of Greater Israel. At the time of writing, this Greater Israel version includes a multi-tiered system of Palestinian control described by Amnesty International (2022) as an Apartheid system. Regardless of whether one agrees or not with Amnesty’s terminology, an ending of the conflict will demand action to redress the consequences of the current system of inequality:

Mishpat,
laid down by law:
lands and laws, covenants,
aliens in their own land,
present absentees.
Evident justice.
But justice that splits
those who were born here
from those who were here born.
For they are not quite the same.78

Maazin

Re-humanizing the other tears the mufflers that sustain an ideological square. We cease letting the other’s narratives passively pass us by. We actively listen and aim to engage in dialogue. Simultaneously, listening provides information that enriches comprehension: action prompts reflection – reflection prompts action and dialogue takes place as an encounter between human beings, “mediated by the world”. But dialogue cannot take place “between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them”, between those who do not listen (Freire, 1970: 88). Because dialogue belongs to everyone. “No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is a commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation” (ibid.: 80). And love begins with empathy that bridges the ideological square’s divide:

Maazin ...
I listen to cries,
sighs, screams,
mourning calls.79

It is here that the affective power of music can amplify the message. We have already established that words describing it cannot act as substitute; however, in this case, the potential listener may benefit from some background. This passage embodies the idea of fragments made of syllables from the poem, that gradually congeal into the word shchol80 (mourning). The singer performs these as exclamations (cries, sighs, screams) which become louder and
more agitated. Her voice is processed digitally, chopped into further tiny fragments that are remixed into “clouds”. Complementing it, the acoustic instruments perform musical textures that increase gradually in density and loudness. A succession of chords is shared between the acoustic instruments and the electronics, the latter acting as an extension of the instruments’ timbre. The last instance of shchol reaches the loudest part of the passage, which is then dissolved into a fading electronic cloud and thinning instrumental texture. The singer then reveals her new discoveries, which attest – in a multitude of clones of her voice in the electronics – to the re-humanization of everyone’s grief:

I used to hear
only Yiddish, Hebrew.
Today,
the fruit of knowledge
has gaped my ears:
an Arabic stillness
of Palestinian tinge,
emerges from towns in the deep.
A subterranean voice
flowing unseen.
And it fuses with old Hebrew grief.81
All this pain reveals horrific forms of violence:
choirs of ghostly wails:
presence of found absentees;
shrill emanations of pain
uttered by mouths that are
alloys of steel, concrete and flesh;
victims of hellish belts,82
hellish cars,
helicopters and planes,
missiles’ hell
tanks’ hell.83

Life is not the same

The path to knowledge transforms our lives. We are forced to re-evaluate our beliefs and values and how to adhere to these within a reconfigured worldview that demands new strategies for action; especially in the case of conflict. The process is personal, but not in the hyper-individualistic sense promoted by neoliberalism. It is rather about our interrelation with the communities we are part of. Communities, in plural, that intersect throughout our personal histories, combining to form our belongingness to humanity, and beyond, to the ecosystem of living beings.

Where have all the values gone? Long time passing

Ets HaDa’at embodies personal ways of knowing as a Jew84 who is also an Israeli citizen. Not surprisingly, it shares much in common with the position of other Jewish groups such as Na’amod (2024), Jewish Voice for Peace (2024), and Jewish Voice for Labour (2024), voicing concern for the fate of fundamental values long held in the Jewish ethos, within the asymmetric evolution of the players in the Middle East conflict.85 Non-adherence to such values has implications for the preservation of existential premises. As a result, an increasing number of Jewish people are questioning the survival of Jewish humanitarian values in light of “occupation and apartheid [that] are not just immoral and illegal, but are an affront to
fundamental Jewish values of equality and human dignity” (Na’amod, 2024: Our Message). Leibowitz was much more explicit:

... the essence of an occupying regime ... this essence cannot be softened, “humanized” or “liberalized”. We can already witness these effects on our own regime in the Occupied Territories – from the imposition of collective punishment, expulsion of the inhabitants from their homeland, demolition of houses, land grabs, sealings of water wells serving the desert nomads, etc., to the abuse of human dignity, including the spilling of Arab inhabitants’ blood while pardoning the Jewish murderers ... I am convinced that not one bit of Jewishness will remain beyond the green line86 ... the question is what will be the price – concerning our inner [spiritual] destruction – we will have to pay before we return to the green line. (Leibowitz, 1980)87

Ets HaDa’at encapsulates these processes. In the setting of the initial words of Hatikvah (The Hope),88 Israel’s national anthem, the words are set as an imaginary melody evoking Arabic traditional music, which evolves into a paraphrase of the ritual melody of El Male Rachamim,89 a Jewish prayer for the soul of the dead: a eulogy to forlorn values.90

Kol od balevav p’nimah (As long as deep in the heart, Nefesh Yehudi homiyah91 the soul of a Jew yearns)

The cultural dislocation of the words and the Middle Easter mimic is underpinned by electronics fragmenting the voice of the singer when she utters the word homiya (yearns).92 A quote of the actual melody of the Anthem by the instruments is symbolically dislocated in time.93 Thus, the same words that became a symbol for Jewish people’s yearnings for a homeland are identified empathetically with national Palestinian aspirations. They do not negate the original Jewish desiderata, but rather emphasize the understanding of people who themselves have been victims in the past. They acknowledge the legitimacy of the Palestinian desire for self-determination as well as both people’s common roots.

The text follows on to query the current state of universal Jewish values: love and tolerance, as formulated in the Old Testament and interpreted by Rabbi Hilel during the Roman era. It questions the iconic daily prayer Hear O Israel,94 paraphrasing the prophet Amos on justice and asking if law will ever become real justice.

Will the soul remember its legacy?
Thou shalt love thy neighbour
as thyself95
Whatever is hateful to you
do not do...96
Will you hear O Israel?
Will judgement run down as waters,
and righteousness as a mighty stream?97
Will you turn law into justice?98

Not in my name

The incongruence between universal Jewish values and Israel’s actions has had a significant influence on Jews around the world. A 2021 poll of the US Jewish electorate found that 87% thought “it is compatible to be both ‘pro-Israel’ and critical of Israeli government policies”. On solutions to the conflict, 61% “want a Jewish State of Israel alongside an independent Palestinian State”, 20% support a one-state solution and only 19% support annexation of the Occupied Territories (JEI, 2021).

Additional tensions have resulted from the tactic adopted by successive Israeli governments in recent decades identifying criticism of their policies with antisemitism. This has been compounded further by the IHRA working definition of antisemitism (2016) which, apart from being legally vague, includes a list of 11 “contemporary examples of antisemitism
in public life”, seven of which make direct reference to Israel. The adoption of the IHRA definition by Western governments has “posed a danger to free speech” and is becoming “harmful for Jews over the long term” (Gould, 2022: 162), as predicted by David Feldman (2016), Director of the Pears Institute for Antisemitism at Birkbeck University.99 Crucially, if Israeli governments intended to censor criticism of their policies as antisemitic, the tactic seems to have done serious damage: 1) by opening the door to antisemites who can disguise themselves as Israel’s critics and 2) by legitimizing undemocratic repression of public expressions against Israel’s policies in the countries that adopt their conflation with antisemitism (Downstream, 2024 36:45–42:10) and 3) by causing publics who are critical of Israel’s actions to identify the latter as consequences of issues pertaining to the Jewish people. The attempt to identify criticism of Israel with antisemitism thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.100

A recent letter to the UN General Secretary signed by over 100 human rights and Civil Society Groups worldwide – many of which are Israeli – has “strongly urge[d] the UN not to endorse the IHRA definition of antisemitism” (Morantinos, 2023). Also, alternative definitions of antisemitism have been put forward, such as The Jerusalem Declaration (JDA, 2021) and The Nexus Document (Nexus, 2021).

A significant Jewish sector is willing to disentangle antisemitism and criticism of Israel’s actions. For instance, while two-thirds in the 2021 Jewish Electorate Institute poll associated the denial of Israel’s right to exist with antisemitism, only 31% link the latter with stating that “Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians” and 28% with stating that “Israel is an apartheid state” (JEI, 2021): in light of Israel’s reaction to the 7 October attacks and South Africa’s case against Israel at the International Court, it is reasonable to assume that the percentages might be lower in 2024. Finally, Jewish protestors in recent years have adopted variants of the slogan not in my name (Downstream, 2023: 36:45–42:10).

Epilogue – Ets HaDa’at is incapable of forgiving

As I write these lines, the latest episode in the tragic history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict unfolds more brutally than ever. Fires still rage through the land and laws still devastate the lives of so many human beings. The trauma caused to Israelis on 7 October101 is comparable to that of the 1973 surprise attack by Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur War.102 During the period separating these events, Palestinians have continued to endure long-lasting trauma resulting from occupation and, in the last 25 years, the enclosure of Gaza by Israel and Egypt, the destruction of its airport in 2001 (ICAO, 2002), the non-recognition of the 2006 Palestinian elections results,103 the 17-year ongoing blockade,104 the settler encroachment in the West Bank, and the increasingly devastating military confrontations that have killed thousands and extensively destroyed infrastructure105 (Pappé, 2022: 274–277).

Yet, less than six years after the Yom Kippur War, “archenemies” Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty. Despite the skepticism voiced at the time and the objections to returning Occupied Territories in Sinai, the 1979 treaty has withstood the test of many eruptions of war and violence. Ironically, the treaty was signed by President Anwar Sa’adat, denounced as a supporter of Hitler during World War II, (JTA, 1971) and Prime Minister Menachem Begin, whose visit to the US in 1948 prompted a letter of protest signed by Albert Einstein, Hannah Arend, Stephan Wolpe, and other prominent Jewish figures, denouncing him as leader of “a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization in Palestine” (Abramowitz et al., 1948).106 At the same time, this provides encouragement: if such extreme figures could agree on peace, there is good reason to hope that the extremes in the present ideological square can find a peaceful resolution.

There are around 7 million Jews and 7 million Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza (World Population Review, 2024; World Bank, 2022). There are also about
3.5 million refugees outside historical Palestine (UNRWA, 2024). The original agents that ignited this conflict may not be alive but their legacy was left to the generations who were born into the conflict but did not cause it. The suffering caused to all parties remains while current reality bears little resemblance to the conditions in which the conflict originally developed.

Resolution must favor the welfare of all these human beings if it is going to be just and lasting. No group can be denied its right to security of person and protection by the state against violence or bodily harm, to equal treatment before organs administering justice, to vote, to stand for election and to take part in the government, to freedom of movement and residence, to leave any country, including one’s own, and to return to one’s country, to nationality, to marriage and choice of spouse, to own property alone as well as in association with others, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to freedom of opinion and expression, to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, to just and favorable remuneration, to form and join trade unions, to housing, to public health, medical care, social security and social services, to education and training, to equal participation in cultural activities, and to access any place or service intended for use by the general public, such as transport hotels, restaurants, cafes, theaters and parks (United Nations, 1965, ICERD: Article 5).

We live in a world besieged by existential global problems, notably extreme inequality, social and mental crises brought by 50 years of neoliberal ideology (Davies, 2022), ecological catastrophe and nuclear Armageddon, while we witness prolonged violent conflicts such as those in Sudan (OCHA, 2024c) and Ukraine (Gurwitz, 2024). Knowledge of these binds us to action: we need to end these conflicts peacefully, without consideration for narrow interests or imagined mythologies, re-humanizing ourselves and others. If we do not know, we must nourish from the fruit of knowledge, because the Eden of ignorance bliss can quickly become hell on earth for all. And while doing this, we can use our imagination to find solutions that overcome the flaws and limitations of our current so-called democratic systems, instituting true participation in the decisions that shape our lives socially, politically, and economically. We are collectively responsible for our global problems and cannot choose to ignore them!

And now,
you have tasted knowledge’s fruit:
we cannot ignore,
deny whatever we know.

Ets HaDa’at,
the ancient tree,
does not tolerate obliviousness;
does not permit to err by mistake;
Ets HaDa’at cannot forgive.\textsuperscript{108}

Notes
\textsuperscript{1}Spinoza, 2018: 27.
\textsuperscript{2}עֵץ הַדַּעַת.
The timings of passages in the piece cited in this paper refer to this particular recording. Score, parts and recording are also available directly from the composer.

1 Presentational and practical knowledge are explained below in Section 3.

2 In my case, as a Jewish person who grew up in a diaspora community, emigrated to Israel and currently lives in the UK.


4 Van Dijk (1998) proposes a theory of ideological squaring within which the “discursive construction of the us and them dichotomy often combines the depiction of others with us … especially in the discourses of ‘group conflict or competition’ (Zhao, 2021). “A socio-cognitive ideological square is created when certain conceptual notions are juxtaposed simultaneously … The four linguistically-communicated ‘corners’ completing the conceptual square are … a) emphasize positive things about US, b) emphasize negative things about THEM, c) de-emphasize negative things about US, d) de-emphasize positive things about THEM. This creates opposing classes of concepts around evaluated cognitive agents, communicating to the reader how the speaker does (and how the listener is expected to) feel towards the targeted social actor in an explicit way” (Yates, 2021: 22). “Us vs them” is an acknowledged and widely discussed issue in international relations and politics (Zhao, 2021), and when power relations are extreme, e.g., in the European colonization of Africa, these often tend to be manifested in the dehumanization of the other (Fanon, 1963).

5 My emphasis in italics.

6 In hindsight, it is possible that some success in dealing with distorted narratives in the case of Northern Ireland has contributed to the stability and resilience of its peace process, especially post-Brexit.

7 In addition to propositional knowing Heron and Reason (2017: 280–281) identify three other ways: 1) experiential knowing through “participative, empathic resonance with a being, so … [the knower feels] both attuned with it and distinct from it”. 2) Presentational knowing that “emerges from and is grounded in experiential knowing … evident in an intuitive grasp of the significance of our resonance with and imaging of our world … [and] symbolized in graphic, plastic, musical, vocal, and verbal art forms”. 3) Practical knowing or ‘knowing how’ to do something, demonstrated in a skill or competence … [that] fulfills the three prior forms of knowing, [and] brings them to fruition in purposive deeds. These modes of knowing have come to prominence in recent years following the increasing popularity of participatory approaches to research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Bell & Pahl, 2017), particularly those based on artistic activities, such as cultural animation (Kelemen et al., 2017).

8 My emphasis in italics.

9 There is a vast array of writings about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, of which, inevitably, only a small number will be cited in this text. The reader is referred to: Rodinson (1973), for a concise historical discussion of Israel and colonialism – I am grateful to Paul Smith for introducing me to Rodinson’s works. Pappé (2020), for an account of the Nakba (catastrophe – كتّبة). Pappé (2022), for a comprehensive up-to-date historical account of the conflict. Chomsky (2010: 251–258), for a brief description of the position of the Obama administration, which is widely representative of US American policy on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since the late 1960s. Chomsky and Pappé (2015), for a debate on the one-state/two-state solutions. Shlaim (2009), on the catastrophic events in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank, which is as relevant now as when it first appeared 15 years ago.

10 Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.2.186–193.
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Bars 1–17, 0:00–0:42. Bar numbers are provided for readers who are interested in following the score (see note 5 and References).

See note 5/References.

My emphasis in italics. Golda Meir was Israel's 4th prime minister (1969–1974).

Yishuv (ישוב, literally “settlement”) denotes “the body of Jewish residents in Palestine prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948” (Wikipedia, 2024e).

60,890 Muslims, 73,024 Christians, 7,028 Druze, and other minorities (2,846).

Asher Ginsberg, who adopted the pseudonym Ahad Ha'am, was a proposer of “spiritual Zionism”. Rather than a nation state, Ginsberg advocated for a cultural and spiritual centre of Judaism in Palestine.

David Ben Gurion became Israel's first prime minister. Readers might recognize in his statement well-rehearsed tropes on bringing progress to undeveloped lands, which have been used by world powers as a rationale for colonialism and expansionism under the guise of improving the human condition.

The population densities of Finland and Sweden are 19 and 24 inhabitants/km² respectively; some of the lowest in the world. Compare this with the United Kingdom (277/km²), Palestine (892 inhabitants/km²), Israel (416 inhabitants/km²) (Wikipedia, 2024b). The density in Gaza is 6,507 inhabitants/km² (Wikipedia, 2024c).

This is very relevant to recent events: the perception of a similar threat from Russia, regardless of whether it is imaginary or real, motivated Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership.

For instance, Bezalel Smotrich, the far-right Israeli finance minister, recently stated that the Palestinians “are regional Arabs who arrived in the Land of Israel at the same time as the first major waves of immigration at the end of the 19th century ... They created a fictional nation and then worked for their fictitious rights to the Land of Israel just to battle against the Zionist movement” (Lazaroff, 2023).

Statements such as “the single most important factor leading to the idea and development of a Palestinian national identity was the creation of Israel and the Arab defeat by Israel in 1948–1949. One might say it was even an imitation of the Zionist movement. Palestinian national identity was formally asserted only with the formation of the PLO in 1964.” (Curtis, 2011).

Such narratives overlap with Eurocentric conceptions of single, undifferentiated, African and Arab identities. “We have seen that the whites were used to putting all Negroes in the same bag ... The Negroes of Chicago only resemble the Nigerians or the Tanganyikans in so far as they were all defined in relation to the whites” (Fanon, 1963: 215–216). “In the African world, as in the Arab, we see that the claims of the man of culture in a colonized country are all-embracing, continental, and in the case of the Arabs, worldwide” (ibid.: 214).

For example, the chasm and lack of trust between a’iyon (urban notables) and rural communities (Pappé, 2002: 73, 74, 81).

For a more thorough discussion of the historical causes, origins, development and consequences of Zionism the reader is referred to the full text of Maxime Rodinson's article What is Zionism? (Rodinson, 1983).

For example, Hayim Weizmann's position during his negotiations with King Faisal (leader of Arab independence) after the end of the first world war (Rodinson, 1973: 50–52), the ideal of a binational Jewish-Palestinian state advocated by tendencies that “emerged among left Zionists and idealists like Judah Leon Magnes and Martin Buber” (Rodinson, 1973: 146), and Arthur Ruppin's account of the discussions carried out during the Zionist Congresses of 1921, 1925, and 1929, which “expressed a desire to cooperate with the Arabs and recognised the principle that neither nationality in Palestine must dominate the other or be dominated by it; it must be a state in which Jews and Arabs can live side by side as two nationalities with equal rights ...” (ibid.: 57).

The Likud Party has dominated Israeli politics and led towards increasingly radicalized governments.

Sharett was Israel's second prime minister (1954–1955).

"Present absentees", see note 77.

I am grateful to Torr Fischman for this source.

A philosopher, chemist and prolific writer, Leibowitz was identified with his namesake (Isaiah) as a modern day “prophet” who appealed to the Jewish people's conscience.

My translation. For the concept of Greater Israel, see note 63.
In the case of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, contradictory positions stem from the nationalist Palestinian notables and Zionist leaders who “had one thing in common: they made and wrote their own history. They constructed a narrative of the people of Palestine that fitted the agendas of their respective elites. The power of these two contradictory views became increasingly evident between 1882 and the 1948 war, and they still dominate historiographical narratives in Israel and the Palestinian communities. On the political level, each day brought political drama, which mostly affected a small number of people but were written into history as collective calamities or victories” (Pappé, 2022: 84).

Following the paramilitary attacks launched from Gaza on 7 October 2023 by a coalition formed by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Resistance Committees, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Israel’s government and many Western politicians have used this claim to justify the killing of thousands of men, women and children in Gaza.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Israel made many claims of atrocities which were echoed without robust verification in mainstream Western media. This included rape, beheading of babies, and torture. Subsequently, fact-check sites have appeared, not all of which are rigorous enough. A site that appears to be reliable, and to provide credible information is October 7 Fact Check (2024). For instance, it found that the allegation of beheaded babies is untrue, and backed it with accurate details: in total, one baby was killed by gunfire in kibbutz Be’eri and one toddler in Nir Oz; they were not beheaded. Likewise, Blumenthal (2023) reports that some of the deaths and destruction inside Israel was caused by Israel Defence Forces missile ad tank shelling. See also Humans Right Watch (2024).

For instance, the threat that the Palestinian problem will become neglected long term as a result of the Abramsaccords, the September announcement of normalization with Saudi Arabia (UN News, 2023) and the legitimization of occupied territories as belonging Israel by the US – e.g., Golan Heights, West Bank, and East Jerusalem (Farrell, 2018).

Shlaim provides a clear argument based on international law (Rattansi, 2024: 9:07–11:00).

As of 26 February, OCHA (2024b) reports: 1,162 Israeli fatalities – of which at least 33 are children – and 5,400 reported injuries – these figures include combatants killed; 29,782 Palestinian fatalities – of which Al Jazeera (AJLabs, 2024) reports 12,300 are children – and 70,043 reported injuries. Sinmaz (2023) reports that 126,000 displaced people in Israel from the area surrounding Gaza and the North are now living in hotels and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024) reports that 80,000 Israelis were displaced between 23 October and 19 November. OCHA also reports 1.7 million (75%) internally displaced people, 2.2 million people at imminent risk of famine, with half a million “facing Catastrophe levels of food insecurity”. Some of these figures were obtained from the Gaza Ministry of Health (MoH): Israel has argued that they are inflated, but a study by Huyn, Chin, and Spiegel (2024) indicate that the MoH has been accurate in the past and there is no evidence to indicate that it is any different in the present. OCHA also contains data of the vast damage to infrastructure.

My translation, which I believe is more accurate than the subtitles provided in the clip.

In 2014 Netanyahu announced that “Israel will not stop its operation in Gaza until the tunnels constructed by Hamas militants have been destroyed” (BBC, 2014).

Ehud Barak, Israel’s 10th prime minister (1999–2001), popularized the statement “there is no partner for peace” (Shedmi & Bar Geffen, 2000). He said this after the 2000 Camp David Summit with Bill Clinton and Yasser Arafat, where the latter had no option but to reject a two-state proposal that offered a Palestinian state consisting roughly of Gaza, and three West Bank cantons that were encroached by Israeli annexations and pepper-spread with Jewish settlements (Arieli, 2020: 52–55). Barak’s statement was later exploited by Binyamin Netanyahu, current Israeli prime minister (1996–1999, 2009–2021, 2022–) and is now strongly ingrained in Israeli popular consciousness.

There is an alternative one-state version promoted by Israel’s right known as Greater Israel, integrating a “vastly expanded Greater Jerusalem”, the area within the West Bank separation wall, “corridors cutting through the regions to the east”, the Jordan valley and the Golan heights. “West Bank Palestinians [would] be contained in unviable cantons”. Palestinians in the cantons and Gaza would not have Israeli citizen or resident rights (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015: 191). Donald Trump’s 2020 peace plan map constitutes a significant step in the direction of such vision (Arieli, 2020: 74–77).

See note 35.

Hamas has offered negotiations based on similar premises recently as early as 2004 (Harel & Isacharoff, 2004: 365). Also, in 1988, one year after it was founded, “Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar met the late top Israeli officials Yitzhak Rabin (Israel’s 5th prime minister, 1974–1977, 1992–1995) and Shimon Peres (Israel’s 8th prime minister, 1984–1986, 1995–1996), and proposed that Israel withdraw from the 1967-occupied territories in exchange for a truce” followed by over a dozen offers of long-term truce to this day (Al Tahhan, 2024).

Proposals for a more viable Palestinian state were presented in the 2000s, including: the Taba Conference (Arieli, 2020: 56–59), the Geneva Initiative (ibid.: 60–62; Geneva Initiative, 2003), the Quartet Roadmap and the Arab Peace Initiative and the 2007–2008 Annapolis Conference map (ibid.: 66–72). These preserve Palestinian territorial continuity, integrity, size and include workable proposals for Jerusalem (Geneva Initiative, 2003). But they would still involve a massive dismantling of West Bank settlements.

Postponement of a solution to the refugee problem was a significant shortcoming of the Oslo process, albeit not the only one, as former negotiator Daniel Levy explains during an insightful discussion of the
Oslo Accords, their failure and their ramifications (Downstream, 2024) – I am grateful to Stas Glazewski for directing me to this source.

The land where Lubya use to be is now the Lavi forest, planted by the Jewish National Fund and the cultivated fields of kibbutz Lavi. Lubya’s survivors and their descendants are legally present absenteees: see note 77.

“Nowhere in the world is there a country that is constituted according to the principle of its equal citizens”, declares John Rothman, a member of Meitar Ensemble’s recording of Et’s HaDa’at. Kiryat Shmona has endured over 40 years of rockets attacks from Lebanon.

HaDa’at. Kiryat Shmona has endured over 40 years of rockets attacks from Lebanon.

Inherited from the British Mandate and held in place until 1966, these instituted military governors with extended authority over the people in Palestinian areas (Pappé, 2022: 145) and “included policies such as curfews, administrative detention, military trial, banning of political activity, and imposing of security closure on these areas” (Dana & Jarbawi, 2017: 9).

This law founded the Israeli branch of the Jewish Agency and gave it “the same status as a local authority” (Adalah, 2024b). The constitution of the Jewish Agency stipulates that “Land is to be acquired as Jewish property and … the title of the lands acquired is to be taken in the name of the JNF to the end that the same land be held inalienable property of the Jewish people” (Davis, 2003: 40). This way, it was “used to legalize retrospectively the expropriation of land and the prohibition of selling to Palestinians state land (still most of the land available in Israel)” (Pappé, 2022: 150).

Israel’s establishment changed the status of Jews from being a dispossessed people yearning to return to a homeland to belonging to a small nation, which later became a regional power engaged in a struggle with a weakened and divided Palestinian people. In contrast, Palestinians underwent a process in which they had present absentees: see note 44.

Suicide-bomber vests, which translate to Hebrew as “belts”.

Jew belonging to social and cultural entity (Chomsky, 2023), despite being agnostic.

“Green line” refers to the 1967 borders.

My translation.
The Tree of Knowledge still bears fruit

Rajmil Fischman

The intended symbolism of the passage is twofold: 1) empathy through the equal recognition of both the Palestinian and Jewish rights to self-determination, and peaceful coexistence based on justice and full equal-rights; 2) A metaphor for the plausible "death" of the universal values invoked later in the piece.

넷
התקווה
אל מלא רחמים

The passage goes on to say that the Tree of Wisdom, which was central to the early texts, has not been abandoned, but is metaphorically transplanted to another location, symbolizing the continuation of the struggle for knowledge and understanding.

Let but judgement run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream (Amos 5: 24).

This verse illustrates the concept of justice, emphasizing the need for the right to be upheld and for the wrong to be corrected, much like water flowing and spreading, symbolizing the flow of justice and righteousness throughout the land.

Proposals for fresh and progressive social, political and economic organization have been put forward by DiEM25 (2019), Hickel (2021), Hinton (2021), and Raworth (2017), amongst many others.

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The Tree of Knowledge still bears fruit
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