

The liberation of Palestine and the fate of the Israelis

The title of this conference, The Liberation of Palestine from the River to the Sea, might not be comfortable for some, even among sympathizers with the Palestinian struggle. For me this title raise the question "liberation from what?". The answer is simple: liberation from Zionism. Liberation from the racist and colonial notion and reality, that emerged with the national Jewish movement, born in the 19th century in Europe, and fulfilled its political project: a Jewish state in the Middle East.

At its beginning there were different Zionist views. For example the idea to have a Jewish community and culture in "Zion", Eretz Israel in Hebrew, without establishing a Jewish sovereignty. But eventually, it turns to a political entity of a Jewish exclusivity, both in the state of Israel and on all the land of historic Palestine. The indigenous Palestinian population was mostly expelled at the Nakba and today their stay, both as citizens and occupied subjects, is always conditioned.

From this(!) Palestine should be liberated as soon as possible. Obviously, mainly the Palestinians should be free from zionism as they are constant victims of it, but also the Israelis are paying a price for being colonizers, mostly on the mental level. In addition, the Jews in the world are paying a price for the Israeli violent and racist policy, as it increases hatred and antisemitism against them.

I know that some my interprets the title above as "liberation from Jews in Palestine", to have a Jewish free zone. It's difficult to blame Palestinians under occupation who expresses such wishes, due to their daily suffer. But actually, the idea to get rid from the Jews in Palestine reflects the success of Israel to be perceived as the real and authentic representative of all the Jews in the world.

I'm an Israeli and I'm speaking here as an Israeli, though I'm not living there since three years ago. So it's not obvious that for such a conference I'm invited to speak. I'm an Israeli not only in the formal and legal sense and not only because I'm a Jew who lived

in Israel for 55 years, but because Israel is my home. I carry with me its language and culture, all my political activity is done in and towards Israel, and my kids and grandkids are living there. In Europe I'm a foreigner. I also feel for the Israelis, I care for them, that's why I'm doing what I can for them to be free from being occupiers since 1948.

So, to return to title of the event today, we should think what will happen to the Israelis in Palestine when liberation comes, when justice and equality will prevail. In that situation there won't be a compromise with Zionism, not only because it's not a moral ideology, but simply because there's no way to compromise on power and land with those who see them as exclusively their own.

But Israelis as humans can change and chose not to be Zionists, as happened to many of us, including myself. How could this ideological transformation take place? Our book, "Nakba, the struggle to decolonize Israel", that was just published in English (after Hebrew and French versions), can be read as a manual to decolonization of Israelis. Basically, decolonizing the self is an educational process. In Israel it should involve unlearning the history of the country, studying Arabic, refusing serving in the army, imaging the return of Palestinian refugees and more.

But from history we learn that no colonial power gave up its rule just by acknowledging that it's not a wonderful idea to be colonizers. Colonizers should be defeated and this is what I hope will happen soon to Israel. Hopefully the defeat will be a result of economic, political and cultural boycott, as in the case of South African apartheid, but maybe the world will have to exercise physical violence, or at least to prevent Israel from its massive lethal weapon.

And when the day of liberation in Palestine will come, Israelis will face a similar choice as that of the French "pied-noirs" in Algeria, in 1962, when the peace agreement with France was signed: to stay and live as equals with the muslims or to leave and "go back" to the metropole in France. Algeria was their home, as it was colonized 132 years earlier so most of "Europeans settlers" were there for several generations, close

to double number of years of the Israeli colonization in Palestine. Many of the Jews in Algeria lived there more than 1000 years.

Most of them chose to leave Algeria. They ran away in panique, out of fear of the day their domination will be over. But in fact, there was no real existential threat to them and they left because they were captive in their own colonial identity. In other words, they could not imagine a situation in which they live in equality with the Algerians. They payed a huge price of been uprooted from their home due to their own occupier mentality.

Close to 1,000,000 French left within few months but 200,000 French decided to stay and live in the liberated Algeria. From their testimonies we learn that they saw Algeria as their home and they had no reason to leave. The colonial identity didn't take over them. Hopefully this will be the case with the Israelis, that many of them will decide to stay and live in equality and justice with the Palestinians in one state, trying to restore the relations between Jews, Muslims and Christians in the Arab world.

To end, I wish to raise an actual speculative hypothesis that also draws from the French colonialism in Algeria. Maybe the actual extreme right wing government in Israel is the herald of its end? In 1961, towards the end of French colonialism, a violent terrorist organization named OAS (Secret Army Organization) emerged and caused many casualties, mainly Algerians but also anti colonial French, in attempt to prevent the liberation of Algeria. So maybe now, the highly violent Israeli government, that some of its members are criminals even under the Israeli law, is the sign of the end of zionism? Let's hope so.

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