



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Farcical Treaties

By Paul Scham

A popular Israeli song from the 1970s, *Machar* or “Tomorrow,” envisioned a future in which wars will cease and Israelis can sail from “Eilat to the Ivory Coast.” While the song’s premise that wars will end has not exactly been fulfilled, many Israelis apparently felt that they were almost there with the celebration of the “normalization” of Israel’s relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain in a ceremony in September in Washington, D.C. Sudan duly followed suit a few weeks later once the U.S. removed it from its list of state sponsors of terrorism, despite considerable internal opposition. The big prize, of course, is Saudi Arabia; perhaps when the current king dies and current Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) takes the throne? Or perhaps these bouts of “friendship” might be interrupted if Donald Trump isn’t reelected?

I was in Israel in March 1979 when the treaty with Egypt was signed, and saw first-hand Israelis’ joy and their expectations that the wall of hostility around them was crumbling, before the First Lebanese War inaugurated the “cold peace” that largely still prevails today. Fifteen years later, my wife and I visited Jordan a few months before the peace treaty with Israel was signed, and saw a Jordanian passport clerk literally jump in the air when he saw the Israeli stamps in our passport – before his boss told him to ignore them and let us in. I spent a lot of time in Jordan in the years after the peace treaty was signed in October 1994, and wrote a long article in 2000 warning that the process of “normalization” had already largely failed, published just before the Second Intifada made normalization the term of opprobrium in the Arab world that it still is today. Nevertheless, both treaties remain major achievements in the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict, despite the failure of so many of the hopes that accompanied them.

Contents

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- 1 Farcical Treaties
By Paul Scham

INSIGHTS

- 3 The Peace Camp’s Self-Interest Dilemma
By Ron Skolnik

SYMPOSIUM

- 6 Some Reflections on Israel Symposium 2020: “Beautiful Dream, Painful Reality”
By Claude Goldenberg

KOLOT

- 8 The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality:
Working for Justice for Arab-Bedouin Citizens in Southern Israel
By Elianne Kremer and Sabreen Abu Kaf

WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS

- 10 The 38th World Zionist Congress

BOOK REVIEW

- 12 Olive Branch Dreams:
A Review of Michael Rothman-Zecher’s *Sadness is a White Bird*
By Julie Arden Ficks

THE PROGRESSIVE ISRAEL NETWORK

- 13 PIN Condemns Trump Administration’s Smear of Human Rights Orgs

The UAE and Bahrain agreements

Are the treaties with the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan in any way comparable to these genuine milestones? Can we realistically see them as helping to lead the way to a brighter future, at least as far as Israel's conflicts with its neighbors are concerned?

The answer is almost certainly "not really." Both of the previous treaties represented culminations of genuine peace processes, involved painful compromises, brought about solid geopolitical changes in their own right, and seemed likely to herald paths toward wider peace in the future. That there has not been a full-scale war between Israel and an Arab state since 1973 is a direct result of the treaty with Egypt. The pact with Jordan was made possible by the Declaration of Principles signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization the year before and was part of a serious effort toward a comprehensive peace that, tragically, failed, despite the best efforts of numerous Israelis and Arabs.

The new treaties, by contrast, simply made official what everyone who cares about these matters knew had been going on for years, namely, extensive intelligence and military cooperation directed at the common enemy, Iran. Most important, Jordan and Egypt had both been at war, several times, with Israel – bloody wars, in which thousands had been killed. This is a major contrast with the UAE and Bahrain and Sudan, which had never fought Israel and had no bilateral issues with it at all.

Most important, of course, the recent treaties and their attendant festivities completely ignored the main adversary Israel still faces, whose issues with it were in no way addressed, namely, the Palestinians. While Israel has other enemies in the region – Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria are the most obvious – it is now clearly recognized by virtually the entire world that it is an Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and without full Palestinian participation, the international hostility to Israel – most obviously expressed by the widespread, though largely ineffectual, Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign – will not diminish. While Israel's technological achievements, combined with strong American support and its status as a democracy, mean it is a full participant in the international system (unlike South Africa in the 1980s, or pariah states like North Korea today), Israelis still feel themselves in a precarious position, based both on Jewish history and the fact that the conflict with the Palestinians colors so many aspects of their national life. The new treaties, with their complete and conspicuous omission of the Palestinian issue, plus the resounding irrelevance of Trump's "Deal of the Century," simply highlight the current stalemate and the lack of any expectation of progress.

As quickly became apparent, these were almost completely economic deals (plus permission for the UAE to buy advanced U.S. F-35 fighter-bombers), greased by the desire to provide President Trump a foreign policy "success" in his reelection campaign. For those who recognize that without Palestinian buy-in no peace can be meaningful, the treaties simply highlighted the bleak environment. For most Israelis, between the new pandemic lockdown, a prime minister on trial for corruption, and ongoing massive, unprecedented demonstrations against him all over the country, it is simply a distraction – a welcome one, but with little meaning. It will make little difference in their lives apart, perhaps, from eventual vacation possibilities and travel options.

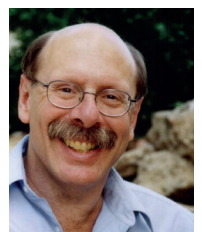
What does this mean for the Palestinians?

For Palestinians, however, whose bitter outcry was little heard or regarded, it should serve as a signal that history is passing them by. Their leadership is superannuated and ineffective and their ability to harm Israel has attenuated. They can prevent Israel from feeling at peace, but they have little power to change their bleak circumstances.

The one role they seem to be able to play is as a spoiler, usually dubbed "anti-normalization," to the delight of the Israeli and American Jewish right wing. Most Palestinian organizations at this point refuse to deal with groups that support Israel in any way, no matter how highly critical that support may be. In practice, of course, that means brushing off overtures by liberal peace groups, since those on the right have nothing to do with Palestinians, anyway. Joint actions or strategies are thus foreclosed – and the field left open for autocracies, like the UAE and Bahrain or certainly Saudi Arabia (Sudan is currently in transition from a longterm dictatorship and needs all the friends it can get).

In fact, no one of genuinely good will could think relations between Palestine and Israel might be in any way "normal" until the Occupation is ended. It is thus doubly unfortunate that the term "normalization" has been hijacked and applied to high political gestures with little meaning, while potentially significant joint non-governmental or people-to-people activities for peace are usually prevented by Palestinians themselves. We can hope that a new Administration in Washington may provide some fresh thinking, something that has been even in shorter supply than PPE for a long time. ■

Paul Scham is President of Partners for Progressive Israel and the director of the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland. A different version of this article was first published on the website of the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. October 2020



The Peace Camp's Self-Interest Dilemma

By Ron Skolnik



The willingness of a growing number of Arab League nations to normalize ties with Israel even in the absence of any movement along the path toward peace presents a fundamental challenge to Israel's anti-Occupation camp and its ability to sway the Israeli (particularly Jewish-Israeli) populace. Should this normalization trend continue and expand, it might compel the peace camp to discard one of the more powerful components in its PR "arsenal" – or, conversely, perhaps double down on it instead.

Over the decades, Israel's peace camp has made its case to the country's citizens by relying on a one-two "punch" of claims. Interestingly, the two approaches are widely dissimilar in nature. One category of arguments stresses the moral imperative of ending the military occupation; the other appeals to Israelis' self-interest, individual and collective. One summons prophetic Jewish values of justice and equality; the other taps into the Jewish people's learned sense of vulnerability in face of a historically hostile world.

Arguably the prophetic approach of the anti-Occupation forces is best symbolized by the veteran NGO, B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. Founded in 1989, B'Tselem's mission focuses on high ideals, on what Abraham Lincoln once

referred to as the "better angels of our nature": "To end Israel's occupation, recognizing that this is the only way to achieve a future that ensures human rights, democracy, liberty and equality [for] all people, Palestinian and Israeli alike." B'Tselem specifically references [Jewish tradition](#) as its point of departure: Noting Genesis 1:27, which states that, "In the image [B'Tselem] of God did He create [humankind]," the organization defines respect for universal human rights as a Jewish moral edict.

B'Tselem has done wonderful work for three decades, documenting the human rights abuses that inevitably arise in a situation of rule via military force, and campaigning to bring the Occupation to an end. But this approach, while vital, doesn't translate easily into the world of electoral politics, where high ideals and moral edicts are generally not the basis for voting choices. No different from individuals elsewhere in the world, Israeli voters, as evidenced by repeated polls, are [motivated](#) by issues that impact their perceived self-interest and day-to-day lives: Physical security, employment, the [cost of living](#), education. Abstract values tend to be luxuries that few voters feel they can afford to prioritize.

In this light, it seems clear why Israel's anti-Occupation forces have not limited themselves to the moral imperative,

and have sought to frame the Israel-Palestine conflict as an issue that puts Israeli voters' self-interest at risk. Early efforts drew on a "guns vs. butter" approach, and endeavored to win over rightwing, mostly Mizrahi, voters by demanding that government budgets be directed to "underprivileged neighborhoods, not the Settlements." But with the Likud and its allies framing the conflict as a zero-sum game in which only Jewish Israelis or the Palestinians would emerge victorious (or even survive), it appears that not many voters were persuaded by this slogan.

One of the risks of appealing to voter self-interest, of course, is that such appeals can easily veer into darker corners. One common anti-Occupation argument, for example, has depicted the Palestinians as a "demographic time-bomb" (or "demographic threat"). The core claim here is that, should Israel hold on to the Occupied Territories and fail to create a Palestinian state, Palestinians would soon outnumber Jews between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, and Israel would be forced to relinquish its Jewish majority if it wishes to remain a democracy (or waive any claims to being a democracy, should it refuse to accept the Palestinians as full citizens). While this core claim expresses a true dilemma, the menacing portrayal of the Palestinians has reinforced racist bias within Israel's center-left.

But even this scare tactic has been rather successfully parried by the Israeli right, which has devised plans to maintain control of "Greater Israel" while granting Palestinians "limited self-government" – code for local autonomy in disjointed cantons instead of either true Palestinian statehood or full Israeli citizenship. By and large, Jewish Israelis have been unfazed by their government's anti-democratic program to eternalize the Palestinians' separate and inferior legal status and keep them under Israeli control while excluding them from Israel's citizen body.

Since the years of the Second Intifada, a newer warning from the peace camp has become central to the message of self-interest – that the international community was poised to turn against Occupier Israel and punish it. In 2011, former Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered the most iconic expression of this claim, famously [submitting](#) that, should Israel fail to present a comprehensive diplomatic initiative vis a vis the Palestinians, "a diplomatic 'tsunami'" would rise against Israel and undermine its very legitimacy.

Contrary to Barak's prophesy, the Obama Administration was more bark than bite when it came to Occupation and Settlements, and so Israelis gained a growing trust for

Binyamin Netanyahu's [assurances](#) that he understood the United States better than any other Israeli politician and knew how to manipulate its leaders. Netanyahu's star shone even brighter after he [hitched his wagon](#) to the Republican Party during Obama's second term, bet on its electoral success in November 2016, and then cashed in when its President warmly embraced his expansionist and anti-Palestinian agenda.

With the peace camp already struggling to convince Israelis that they might pay a steep price if they didn't give up their hawkish ways, news broke over the summer of Israel's normalization deals with the United Arab Emirates and, subsequently, Bahrain. These deals made it even more difficult to make the case that Israel was facing international isolation. Reports now [indicate](#) that Sudan will be next in line to normalize, with the grand prize of [Saudi Arabia](#) slowly preparing for a similar step. Despite the routine grumbling that still emanates from Europe, Israelis are getting the clear message that while formal annexation of the West Bank might still be a bridge too far, the world is untroubled by unending Occupation and the act of de facto annexation via Settlement.

What is the Israeli anti-Occupation camp to do, then? What arguments can its activists now summon that could effectively convince the Israeli public to seriously reengage with the Palestinians and reach a solution based on the generally accepted [international parameters](#)?

Much depends on the result of the 2020 U.S. Presidential elections. Should Donald Trump be reinstalled by the Electoral College, all bets are off. As the chance to pursue a two-state peace via traditional diplomatic channels remains in the deepest of freezes, possibly never to re-emerge, Israel's peace camp would likely splinter. Portions of Israel's center-left would probably ditch the issue altogether and take after one-time Labor chair Shelly Yachimovich, who reasoned before the 2013 elections that a dovish agenda brought her party no electoral benefit and that the Occupation was an issue best left unmentioned.

Others are likely to trend in the opposite direction, focusing on the need to create a re-imagined Israeli left. Such a long-term project would be rooted in a high degree of Arab-Jewish political cooperation and pose the demand for equal rights for all who live within Israeli-controlled territory, sovereign or occupied.

While a Biden victory would theoretically re-open the option of a two-state solution, it would be far from a cure-all for the anti-Occupation camp. Whereas during the First Intifada in the late 1980s, many Jewish Israelis felt guilt and

The Peace Camp's Self-Interest Dilemma

discomfort over their role as military occupier, and sought a moral high ground for the country, this sentiment is now held by only a small “bleeding-heart” minority. Due to the ongoing psychological impact of Palestinian terrorism and an unrelenting campaign by Netanyahu and the right to demonize the Palestinians and depict them as eternal, implacable, existential enemies, few Jewish Israelis are today inclined to invoke their “better angels” when it comes to the Occupation and human rights.

If a moral appeal seems DOA, can Israelis yet be convinced that a just and comprehensive peace deal is in their best interest? Perhaps – but only if a Biden Administration is more than a redo of the Obama presidency. While many Israelis chafed at Obama’s mildly critical language towards their government, they also took notice that his administration was willing to provide them with unprecedented levels of aid, even in the absence of progress to end the Occupation. A policy of carrots without sticks, therefore, is unlikely to move the needle.

But Biden can actually rely on the precedent of several Republican administrations to chart a different course. Drawing on Eisenhower in 1956, Ford in 1975, and Bush Sr. in 1991, a president Biden could stress that, notwithstanding the U.S.’s strong ties to Israel, American support cannot be a blank check – that the United States has strategic interests which Israel, as an ally and beneficiary, is required to take into account.

Biden is unlikely to take this path, of course. But should he somehow be persuaded to do so, it would be the thankless job of Israel’s anti-Occupation forces to provide support and cover – and endure the inevitable repercussions at home, including certain accusations of disloyalty. While it would certainly be difficult for peace camp activists to openly defend steps that would be interpreted in Israel as an American diktat that undermines the country’s security, it could be the last chance they have before the two-state solution finally and fully implodes and the world moves on to an updated paradigm for the region. ■

Ron Skolnik is an American-Israeli political columnist and public speaker, whose articles have appeared in a variety of publications, including *Haaretz*, *Al-Monitor*, *Tikkun*, and the *Palestine-Israel Journal*.



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Some Reflections on Israel Symposium 2020: “Beautiful Dream, Painful Reality”

SYMPOSIUM

By Claude Goldenberg



The Arab-Israeli conflict has been called the world’s most intractable, its underpinnings stretching back millennia. Its modern roots, however, are in 19th century Jewish and Arab national movements, which were already on a collision course when fueled further by British duplicity in World War I – the McMahon – Hussein Correspondence promising to recognize Arab independence after the war, and the Balfour Declaration promising a national homeland for Jews in Palestine. Over the next century, the issues and grievances grew exponentially, through uprisings, reprisals, dispossessions, terrorist attacks from both sides, and more reprisals. The Holocaust was the final precipitating event leading to Partition in 1947, whereupon wars, more dispossessions, blockades, terrorist attacks, more reprisals, more wars, lands changing hands violently, and of course, promised, sometimes hopeful, but at best piecemeal and ultimately failed, political solutions ensued.

While this was happening, Jews from all over the world came to Palestine, then Israel, and built an economic, scientific, technological, cultural, and military powerhouse. Moreover, Israel has become famous for its international relief work, from search and rescue efforts to airlifting tons of food and supplies following natural and human-caused disasters. The country of

course has its share of challenges, but its success as a nation-state is undeniable, notwithstanding reservations some have about how it got there. Palestinians, in contrast, are divided, embittered, many are impoverished, and virtually all suffer indignities people should not have to suffer. Palestinians blame Israel for the occupation and their second-class status within Israel. Israelis say the Palestinians only have themselves to blame for passing up opportunity after opportunity to normalize their political status and their lives.

And so it goes, the 2020 Symposium’s title, “Beautiful Dream, Painful Reality,” all too true.

Today, “intractable” is hardly sufficient to describe the situation. On the one hand, [Hamas still has not accepted Israel’s right to exist](#). On the other, a virulent right-wing government is openly dismissive of attempts to reach any sort of peaceful solution short of total Palestinian capitulation.

On the first day of the symposium, I asked MK Uzi Dayan of the ruling Likud whether the absence of a partner for peace was a serious obstacle to reaching a political settlement with the Palestinians. Coolly, he waved away the question. “You worry too much about the Palestinians,” and explained

that there will be normalization of relations with Arab governments (this was a month before announcements of the UAE and Bahrain treaties), and whatever Palestinians don’t accept will be imposed.

The following week we heard from members of the Palestinian Authority leadership that “Palestinians are the key” to a political solution. “Not one of the keys. The key.” Hardly surprising, but the stark and bitter contrast with Dayan’s casual dismissal nearly took my breath away.

I have no idea whether Dayan speaks for Likud. Regardless, the party’s behavior aligns perfectly. Likud, and much of the Israeli political class and citizenry, obviously doesn’t care, much less worry, about the Palestinians – unless thoughts turn to security. Likud currently has a lock on the political process, despite its leader being in legal difficulties and despite the presumed “power-sharing” with Kahol Lavan, which has been described as the most “[chaotic and miserable government](#)” Israel has ever had. This “[government of the damned](#)” is aided and abetted by extreme orthodox parties whose primary concerns have nothing to do with finding a resolution to the conflict and everything to do with moving Israel closer to a theocracy and making sure members of their communities are exempt from helping shoulder the military and economic burdens the rest of the populace bears.

On the other side of the ideological divide, discussions among the Jewish left now openly include abandoning the idea of a two-state solution. As readers of this publication know, [Peter Beinart](#) has proposed thinking along the lines of a one-state Jewish home, rather than Jewish state, with Jews and Palestinians living with equal rights and protections in a single country. Another alternative, described on these pages and championed by [One Land for All/Eretz l’Kulam](#), one of the symposium participants, is a confederation or a “democratic binational state,” neither a one- or two-state solution. Maybe more like a half-state solution.

I’m not a political scientist nor student of diplomacy, but these solutions – one-, two-, or half-state – seem fanciful in the extreme at the moment, each for different reasons. What we have now is an enforced stalemate, an inherently unstable and dangerous non-equilibrium where the agenda is controlled by extremists on either side. And, at least for now, the stasis seems to satisfy their political aims.

But in this morass, I saw glimmers of light. I wouldn’t say glimmers of hope, if that signals hope for a political way out of this hyper-intractable conflict. I saw no evidence for that.

What I saw was a number of good, decent, and idealistic people and organizations, mostly non-political players, reaching out and trying to establish some semblance of normal, human, caring relations between Jews and Arabs. If hope is to be found, that’s where we’ll find it.

For example, there is [Roots](#), aka [Roots/Shorashim/Judur](#), which brings together Orthodox Jews and devout Muslims living in the same West Bank neighborhoods. As reported by the Jerusalem Post, the scene of young men from a nearby yeshiva drinking coffee with young Palestinians, led in discussion by Jewish religious settlers and devout Muslim Palestinians “[seemed nearly surrealistic](#).” There is also [Gisha](#), an Israeli non-profit working in Gaza to protect the rights of Palestinians, which are guaranteed by international and Israeli law but frequently violated.

There’s more: [Combatants for Peace](#), [Standing Together](#), [Israel’s Women Network](#), [WEDO – Water and Environmental Development Organization](#), [Physicians for Human Rights Israel](#). There are also individuals and organizations dedicated to peacemaking through the arts: [Joshua Sobol](#), [Together Beyond Words](#), and [Umm al-Fahm Art Gallery](#).

These individuals and organizations reminded me that goodness and decency exist even when all around there is darkness and fear. Maybe, maybe, some of this goodness and decency will percolate up and infect, in a good way, those who determine the political direction this conflict takes.

One of the symposium panelists (from [Combatants for Peace](#)) was deeply skeptical: “There is no hope for a political solution,” he said. “Solutions will only come from people to people contact, understanding, and acceptance.” Maybe we can hope that the political leadership on both sides will see the light shone by him and his fellow non-combatants before we see additional rounds of uprisings, reprisals, dispossessions, terrorist attacks, wars, blockades, and senseless, fruitless violence. ■

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The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality: Working for Justice for Arab-Bedouin Citizens in Southern Israel

By Elianne Kremer and Sabreen Abu Kaf



Khašim Zannih, 17.3.2017 | Photo: Israa Abu-Khuti

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF) is a grassroots organization established in 1997 by a group of Arab and Jewish residents of the Negev/Naqab (Israel's southern desert region) who were alarmed by the government's discriminatory policies and practices towards its Arab-Bedouin citizens. To understand why NCF was formed and why its work is so important, a proper grasp of the region's recent history is necessary.

Israel's Arab-Bedouin citizens are indigenous to the Negev/Naqab, where they have lived for centuries as a semi-nomadic people, long before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Supporting themselves through dryland farming and herding, they settled mostly in villages linked by kinship systems, which have largely determined land ownership. Prior to 1948, some 65,000-100,000 Bedouin lived in the Negev/Naqab, but after Israel declared independence, most were expelled or fled to Egypt and Jordan, with only around 11,000 remaining in the area.

Starting in the early 1950s and until 1966, Israel concentrated the Bedouin in a restricted area, known by the name of "al-Siyāj" (Arabic for "the fence,") which comprises only about 10 percent of their original ancestral land; the Bedouin, like other Arab citizens, were also placed under a military administration. During this period, entire villages were displaced from their locations in the western and northern Negev and their people were transferred to the Siyāj area.

Most of the Bedouin population lost their lands when Israel adopted the Ottoman and British legal definition of Mawat ("dead," uncultivated lands) and claimed them as State lands. In addition, Israel's Land Acquisition Law of 1953 determined that any land not found in its owners' full possession in April 1952 would be declared State land; this resulted in more Bedouin losing all rights to their original lands. No exception was made for the Negev Bedouin, who were being forcefully evicted from their ancestral lands by the very same Israeli government that went on to become the "rightful" guardian of those homesteads.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, Israel has been conducting an ongoing non-consensual and non-participatory process of forced urbanization of Bedouin communities. Any homestead that is not within those urban frameworks is considered illegal or nonexistent. This is how the Arab-Bedouins in the Naqab suddenly became illegal dwellers on their own lands. In addition, the State's negligence towards these communities has come with a price: Many lack basic services like clinics, education centers, and infrastructure for transportation. There is also a scarcity of running water, and an absence of sewage and hygiene systems which leads to disease and a state of vulnerability that is extremely hazardous – especially now, during the COVID-19 crisis.

Approximately 258,500 Bedouin citizens of Israel presently live in the Negev/Naqab in three types of localities: government-planned townships, recognized villages, and villages that Israel refuses to recognize (unrecognized villages). There are 35 unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab that Israel refers to either as the "dispersion" or as "illegal villages," while calling their inhabitants "trespassers" on State land.

From a more symbolic perspective, a policy of evictions and home demolitions, like the one Israel's government carries out, is a blatant way of conveying to the residents that neither they nor their culture, history, or traditions are welcome or recognized. This policy is illegal under several international conventions such as the [UN's International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(CESCR\)](#), which Israel has signed; the convention affirms the "Right to adequate housing" and includes protection from forced eviction and the arbitrary demolition of homes. For housing to be defined as "adequate," it must be appropriate in relation to the cultural identity of its residents.



as-Sirrah 26.12.2011 | Photo: Abd-al-Gader Nasasreh

NCF is the only joint Arab-Jewish organization that focuses specifically on the Negev/Naqab, calling for justice for its Arab-Bedouin residents, citizens of the State of Israel. Our vision is that all residents of the Negev/Naqab will live in dignity and in a shared society, where everyone enjoys their human rights, equality, and justice.

NCF conducts three main programs. The first is the Documentation and Bedouin Human Rights Defenders Network. In this program, Bedouin children, youth, women, and men document their everyday life as well as home demolitions, arrests, demonstrations, and the daily impact of State neglect and discrimination. The program consists of three sub-projects: “Yusawiruna – Photographing for Human Rights,” a photography project for Bedouin women; “Through a Child’s Lens,” in which Bedouin children learn to use photography to document their lives and tell their story; and “Recognized,” a project that teaches women, activists, and teenagers to use video documentation to tell their story for advocacy purposes. (Note: The photos appearing here were taken by children in NCF’s photography workshops.) All participants of this program take part in building our Bedouin Human Rights Defenders Network.

The second program is our Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Advocacy, through which we aim to generate political pressure on the State of Israel to change its policies towards its Arab-Bedouin citizens. We do so by conducting research and delivering expert analysis on violations of human rights in the context of national and international law. We also work with Bedouin communities and ensure audio-visual documentation support for these efforts. In doing so, NCF gives exposure, within Israel and abroad, to the plight of Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab and brings the subject into public dialogue and political debate.

Our Shared Society Program is our third framework. Through our Arab-Jewish Multaka-Mifgash Cultural Center and other activities, this program aims at promoting a socially cohesive society that is stable and safe and where all those living in the Negev/Naqab feel at home. We promote a tolerant society that

respects diversity, and everyone’s dignity and human rights while providing every individual with equal opportunities.

In this spirit, all the programs that we run reinforce one another: All research, documentation, and audio-visual materials derived from the Documentation and Bedouin Human Rights Defenders Network program are used for advocacy purposes through our HRC framework. All advocacy efforts are informed by our work on the ground and our close partnership with Bedouin communities. Based on the ‘Do No Harm’ principle, NCF carries out its work to promote and protect the rights of residents in the Negev/Naqab in close coordination with residents’ groups, who are our strongest partners and allies. We also work closely with other civil society organizations, including Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel and the Human Rights Defenders Fund on international advocacy; and Shatil, Bimkom, the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages, Zazim, Sikkuy, and Sidreh on local activism and advocacy.

It must be noted that the COVID-19 crisis has magnified and deepened the structural inequalities faced by the Bedouin community in Israel. Paradoxically, despite the state of emergency and the government’s orders for quarantine, the issuance of house demolition orders has not stopped, and hundreds of acres of cultivated fields are still being destroyed. In response, together with 22 NGOs in the region, we initiated an urgent appeal to the Israeli Attorney-General to immediately halt home demolitions; unfortunately, as of this writing, it has met with very little success.

We will continue to support the Arab-Bedouin struggle in the Naqab until the Israeli government comes to regard this community as first-class citizens, and recognizes their land claims, culture, and lifestyle as valid and real. Nothing less will suffice. ■

Learn more about the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality on their [website](#). Keep up-to-date with their activities and analysis on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and by subscribing to their monthly [newsletter](#). And you can learn even more about the Arab-Bedouin villages by using their interactive [online map](#).

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The 38th World Zionist Congress



Partners for Progressive Israel is proud to have played a key role in the World Zionist Congress last week, leading the Hatikvah Slate's 4 delegates and 8 alternates who attended as members of the World Union of Meretz (WUM) delegation. Other Hatikvah slate representatives caucused with the World Labor Zionist Movement. **Our slate helped repeal the right wing takeover of the Zionist national institutions.** Our WUM representatives were joined by delegations from 14 countries in 4 continents. Also, Yesh Atid factioned with WUM and we are pleased that they received key positions in the World Zionist Organization (including WZO President). Below is a report from the Hatikvah Slate on the Congress. We thank each of our partners for their collaboration, activism and commitment to this endeavor.

Hatikvah Slate Statement on the World Zionist Congress

The Hatikvah Slate was established by Ameinu, Partners for Progressive Israel, Habonim Dror North America and Hashomer Hatzair, creating a strong progressive Zionist voice. Joined by Aleph, Americans for Peace Now, Jewish Labor Committee, J Street, National Council of Jewish Women, New Israel Fund and T'ruah, this coalition earned 10 delegates in the U.S. Zionist elections and attended the 38th World Zionist Congress that took place virtually last week.

Largely due to emergence of the ultra-orthodox Eretz Hakodesh list in the U.S. and the increase in right wing Members of Knesset, the right wing-orthodox bloc had a narrow advantage over the center-left bloc in the delegate count at the Congress. Defying historic custom of evenly distributing the leadership portfolios and governance positions in the national institutions among all ideological groups and religious streams to create a wall-to-wall coalition, they instead chose to sign an agreement only among their allies, creating an imbalance with the almost equal minority groups. The political left, center and liberal religious movements rejected this anti-democratic move and

planned a strategy to block this power grab.

There is a group of international Zionist organizations, including Hadassah, WIZO, Na'amat, Bnai Brith and World Maccabi, that generally remain neutral in these negotiations and accept the results when finalized. The Hatikvah Slate, together with our colleagues in the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements, reached out to our friends and colleagues in these organizations and they answered our call for fairness, sending a warning to the right wing-orthodox bloc.

This successful mobilization of support resulted in an unprecedented postponement of the initial election and renewed negotiations resulting in a much improved coalition agreement.

Specific accomplishments include:

- Governance balance within the Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael-Jewish National Fund (KK"L-JNF) and the World Zionist Organization (WZO).

- Yesh Atid will chair the KK”L-JNF Finance Committee and the chair of the Environmental Committee will rotate between Labor and the liberal religious streams.
- Kachol Lavan will appoint the Chair of the Keren Hayesod, the Zionist fundraising arm for countries outside of North America.
- The selection of a WZO President from Yesh Atid, designated for a female candidate.
- Meretz designee Dror Morag will establish a new Department for Social Engagement (Tikkun Olam) while Labor designee Silvio Joskovitz will head the Zionist Enterprises Department which will include a new unit for Humanistic Judaism.

In addition, at the Congress we succeeded in passing two key resolutions in the face of fierce opposition from the ZOA, and Eretz Hakodesh:

- a Hatikvah sponsored resolution that will empower Zionist youth movements and Jewish Student Unions around the world to lead the effort to combat anti-Zionism on campus and
- a resolution that assures mutual respect for the diversity of voices within the Zionist Movement that calls for the suspension or dismissal from the WZO and the local Zionist organization for personal attacks against the leaders of other Zionist organizations.

With the end of the Congress, we turn our attention to the work of the national institutions going forward. If conditions allow, an extraordinary World Zionist Congress will take place next year and deal with ideological and programmatic issues. We also congratulate our Slate members who were chosen for the following positions.

Zionist General Council

Members

David Dormont (Partners for Progressive Israel)
Leah Schwartz (Habonim Dror North America)

Alternates

Karen Shapiro (Partners for Progressive Israel)
Yonatan Shargian (Hashomer Hatzair)
Shaina Wasserman (J Street)

WZO Expanded Executive

Nomi Colton-Max (Ameinu)

Jewish Agency Executive

Kenneth Bob (Ameinu)

Hatikvah Delegation to the 38th Zionist Congress

Delegates (alphabetical order)

Stuart Applebaum
Kenneth Bob
Jared Jackson
Sheila Katz
Nancy Kaufman
SooJi Min-Miranda
Leah Schwartz

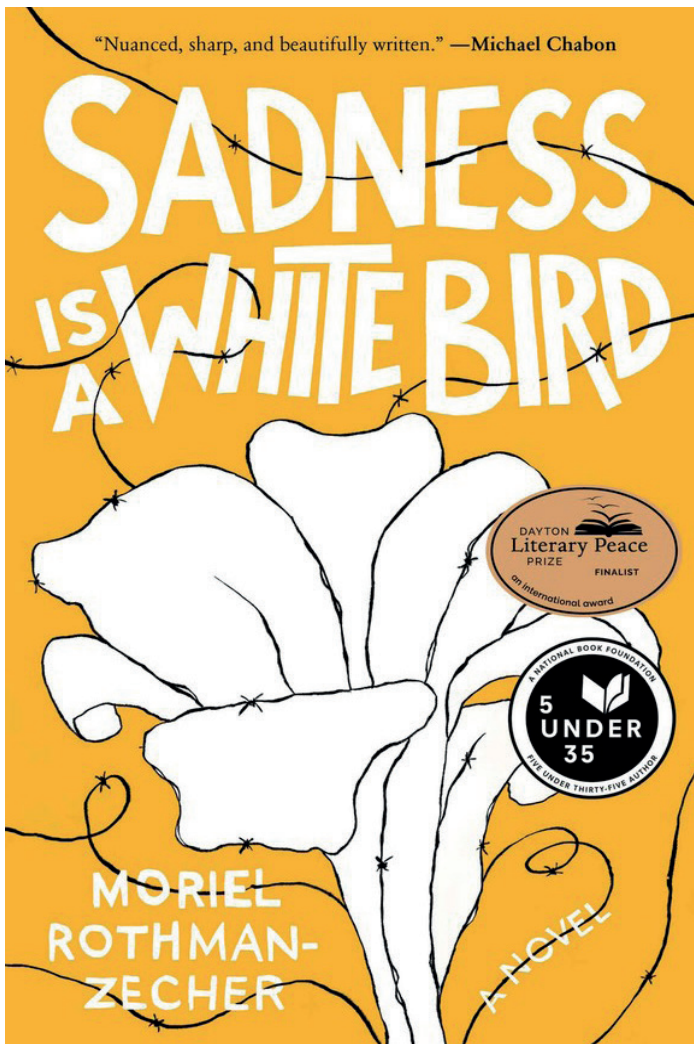
Karen Shapiro
Yonatan Shargian
David Weiss

Deputy Delegates (alphabetical order)

Alisa Belinkoff Katz
Nomi Colton-Max
Bekah Diamond-Bier
David Dormont
Yael Dormont
Minna Elias
Gili Getz
Janee Graver
Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie
Arieh Lebowitz
Libby Lenkinski
Aviva Meyer
Sam Norich
Zach Shartiag
Naomi Tamura
Shaina Wasserman
Steve Weinberg
Molly Wernick
Joel Winograd
Michael Young

Olive Branch Dreams: A Review of Michael Rothman-Zecher's *Sadness is a White Bird* - Atria Books, 2019

By Julie Arden Ficks



What kinds of relationships are possible, lasting – between Israeli Jews and Palestinians? What kinds of circumstances will break these relationships apart; what is needed to make them last? These are the questions that Michael Rothman-Zecher in his debut coming-of-age novel, *Sadness is a White Bird*, seeks to answer.

The book's title comes from the English translation of Mahmoud Darwish's 1967 poem "A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies." It is a poem that the main characters of the novel – Israeli and Palestinian – share with one another. The poem tells a story of compassion for the "other" through a dialogue between the speaker, a Palestinian, and an Israeli soldier. The soldier described by the Palestinian in the

poem does not dream of death or destruction: "he dreams of white lilies / of an olive branch... sadness is a white bird that does not come / near a battlefield." Embedded with Palestinian symbols of peace, the poem explores sympathy and common ground between both peoples who become adversaries not because they want to, but because they are forced to by external circumstances.

The novel begins in "the florescent glow" of an Israeli army jail cell with nineteen-year-old Jonathan. In first-person, he tenderly narrates to a boy named Laith while the reader is left to wonder how he got there. It is unclear whether Jonathan is speaking to Laith in real time, imagining this epistle in his head, perhaps writing him a letter or speaking to the dead.

Jonathan recounts the events leading up to his imprisonment and moments in his past that define his identity. Israeli-born but raised in Pennsylvania, his family moves back to Israel due to his grandfather's cancer diagnosis. While awaiting his Israel Defense Forces draft date, Jonathan unexpectedly meets Palestinian twins Nimreen and Laith, students at Haifa University – and their lives are forever changed.

The three grow incredibly close, traveling together, hitchhiking from Ein Tzvi, wandering along Masada Street in Haifa and sharing their most personal thoughts. The yearning with which Jonathan talks about Laith and Nimreen eventually unfolds as a romance. His male gaze that initially comes across as grating turns into a queer one: his sexual and emotional relationship with Nimreen becomes intertwined with his equally deep but largely unconsummated love for Laith. Although Jonathan's queerness is, at times, undeveloped, his fluidity symbolizes that love is a way to repair the conflict – love for all people regardless of gender, faith, race, or history.

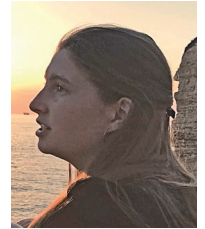
Trying to help one another understand, Jonathan, Nimreen and Laith reveal intergenerational traumas related to their heritage and land and religion. Jonathan assures his friends that for his grandfather, a Salonian Jew who escaped the Nazis and

arrived at the port of Haifa in the early 1930s, “zionism wasn’t about greed or getting rich. It was about survival. Without Zionism, I probably wouldn’t be alive.” Jonathan meets the twins’ grandmother who tells him about her tragic experience being at the Qfar Qasim massacre.

Through storytelling, friendship and romance, Jonathan begins seeing the realities of the occupation from the perspective of his friends. As someone who morally rejects the occupation yet strongly believes in the existence of the Jewish state, his decision to join the IDF becomes increasingly complicated.

Lyrical and honest, *Sadness is a White Bird* offers hope for the reshaping of Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian relations; a heartbreaking story of radical love, friendship, politics, and the barriers between them. ■

Julie Arden Ficks is the Program Coordinator at Partners for Progressive Israel. She is also a recent M.A. English graduate with specializations in Contemporary Literature, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Literacy.



Progressive Israel Network



PIN CONDEMNS TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S SMEAR OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGS

In response to reports that the State Department may baselessly label prominent human rights organizations 'antisemitic,' nine organizations from the Progressive Israel Network, including Partners for Progressive Israel, released the following statement:

The Progressive Israel Network (PIN) strongly condemns the Trump administration's reported intentions to declare Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, and potentially other human rights organizations as antisemitic and to urge other governments not to support them. As leading Jewish progressive organizations committed to pursuing democracy, equality, and peace in Israel, we oppose any attempt to smear or silence human rights organizations because they criticize Israeli government policies.

Standing up for human rights is a core Jewish value.

Human rights organizations document abuses to hold governments accountable. This role is essential to ensuring the transparency necessary for democracies to function. Attempting to delegitimize human rights groups is a characteristic of authoritarian regimes.

This attack is part of a broader trend to silence Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders and their allies. Likewise, the Trump administration's actions undermine these organizations' ability to report on human rights abuses everywhere—including those perpetrated by the United States. Furthermore, the Trump administration's baseless smearing of human rights organizations as antisemitic makes it harder to counter actual acts of antisemitism.

We refuse to stand by while organizations that shed light on human rights violations—by Israelis, Palestinians, and countries all over the world, including the United States—are falsely maligned by the Trump administration.

Israel *Horizons*

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